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The return of the bendy cucumber: 'wonky' fruit and vegetables back on sale from 1st July

European Union rules governing the size and shape of many fruit and vegetables will cease to exist tomorrow when specific marketing standards for 26 types of fruit and vegetables are repealed. The Commission's initiative to get rid of these standards is a major element in its ongoing efforts to streamline and simplify EU rules and cut red tape. For 10 types of fruit and vegetables, including apples, strawberries and tomatoes, marketing standards will remain in place. But even for these 10, Member States could for the first time allow shops to sell products that don't respect the standards, as long as they are labelled to distinguish them from 'extra', 'class I' and 'class II' fruit. In other words, the new rules will allow national authorities to permit the sale of all fruit and vegetables, regardless of their size and shape.

"July 1st marks the return to our shelves of the curved cucumber and the knobbly carrot," said Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. "More seriously, this is a concrete example of our drive to cut unnecessary red tape. We don't need to regulate this sort of thing at EU level. It is far better to leave it to market operators. The changes also mean that consumers will be able to choose from the widest range of products possible. It makes no sense to throw perfectly good products away, just because they are the 'wrong' size and shape."

During negotiations in 2007 on the reform of the Common Market Organisation for fruit and vegetables, the Commission committed itself to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy by getting rid of a number of marketing standards for fruit and vegetables. Tomorrow's change means that these standards will be repealed for 26 products: apricots, artichokes, asparagus, aubergines, avocados, beans, Brussels sprouts, carrots, cauliflowers, cherries, courgettes, cucumbers, cultivated mushrooms, garlic, hazelnuts in shell, headed cabbage, leeks, melons, onions, peas, plums, ribbed celery, spinach, walnuts in shell, water melons, and witloof/chicory.

Specific marketing standards will remain for 10 products which account for 75 percent of the value of EU trade: apples, citrus fruit, kiwi fruit, lettuces, peaches and nectarines, pears, strawberries, sweet peppers, table grapes and tomatoes. However, Member States may also exempt these from the standards if they are sold in the shops with an appropriate label. In practical terms, this means that an apple which does not meet the standard may still be sold in the shop, as long as it is labelled "product intended for processing" or equivalent wording.