Introduction

These guidelines are designed to address the basic questions which exporters of asparagus, aubergine, babycorn, capsicum, cherry tomato, chillies, christophene, courgette, mangetout and okra need answered before they try to venture into the UK market: WHAT, HOW, WHERE and WHEN?

Entrepreneurs should have the answers to these four questions before they invest time and money in an enterprise which relies on selling in an export market. It is essential that they have detailed information and are sure that conditions on all aspects of market requirements are satisfied prior to despatching any exports.

This booklet is the second in a series aiming to provide practical information in an easy-reference format to help anyone in the business, or wishing to enter it, research the market and make contacts before developing or investing in an export-oriented enterprise. The changing nature of the UK market has made it even more vital for the exporter to have the hard facts. The increasing importance of the larger supermarkets (often referred to as multiples), with their strict specifications for all fresh produce, means that exporters have to be prepared to meet these requirements if they are to succeed in the market.

The Export Market Development Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat decided to prepare this series of guidelines in view of the many requests received from potential exporters or existing exporting countries for information on the fresh produce market. The first in the series, on exotic fruits, is reported to have proved useful to a number of Commonwealth exporters, and the information in this booklet should similarly help exporters of vegetables to reach the stage where they are ready to ship produce to the market.

The choice of vegetables to be included was made on the basis of a number of criteria. Obviously important is that they are or could be grown in a number of Commonwealth countries with an interest in exporting them. Certain vegetables which could not readily be grown all year round in Europe were selected, as developing countries may have the chance of gaining a niche in the market with off-seasonal vegetables.

Demand is being influenced by the more cosmopolitan tastes of the British consumer, the healthier and more adventurous eating habits being adopted, and the improved access to the market for foreign produce, both logistically and in terms of the gain of the supermarket share of fresh produce sales, and their interest in promoting more "exotic" vegetables. Also being promoted with some success are mini or bite-sized vegetables, again a response to consumer tastes seeking the unusual. Thus two further categories have been included in the analysis: mini-vegetables and exotic vegetables.

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Categorisation is always problematic, since growing techniques can be adapted in such a way that it may no longer be correct to term a vegetable off-seasonal, and there is a point at which exotic vegetables become sufficiently well known in the market to be considered as regular vegetables. Using these broad categorisations, however, the following vegetables are included:

off-seasonal vegetables:	asparagus, aubergine, capsicum, courgette, mangetout;
mini-vegetables:	babycorn, cherry tomatoes;
exotic vegetables:	chillies, christophene, okra.

A separate chapter is devoted to each of these vegetables, and within each chapter there are three sections on **Market Requirements**, **Getting to Market** and **When to Sell**. A final chapter details where to send vegetables, since the market channels for all the vegetables are the same.

Market Requirements details what the market wants and describes the type and condition of vegetables demanded by the buyers in the market. These guideline specifications, which change over time, are those required at receipt by importer, unless otherwise stated. It is essential that prospective exporters agree precise specifications before shipping, since each buyer can have slightly different requirements.

Getting to Market describes how the exporter gets vegetables to the UK market, beginning at the picking stage, the first active phase of the marketing chain. The intention is to concentrate on the marketing of vegetables and not with production details, but the grower, as well as the exporter, should be able to profit from the information in this publication. The market should guide the grower in terms of what crop to grow, in what quantities, and what production techniques to use. Some major buyers are realising this and are working directly with growers to ensure their produce supply matches requirements exactly, rather than relying on intermediaries, such as export agents. In some cases the multiples are also using their UK grower/supplier as an adviser and intermediarary working with potential developing country suppliers. The latter then benefit from technical advice in addition to having a more secure market arrangement, since the UK supplier can deal with any difficulties on receipt of produce at the UK port of arrival and with pre-packing and labelling.

When to Sell details any market seasonality which can affect prices, so that the exporter can time the arrival of the vegetables on to the market when prices are highest. It also gives a brief synopsis of market trends.