



# **RPC LABEL STANDARDIZATION: GUIDELINES & BEST PRACTICES**

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# RPC Label Standardization: Guidelines & Best Practices

## Introduction

As reusable plastic containers (RPCs) steadily increase market share in the fresh produce packaging industry, standard practices become increasingly important. Currently, growers use their own label to identify produce (and other required information) inside an RPC shipped to retailers. These labels vary in content and layout, making it difficult to quickly identify critical information. Quality of material varies as well, and thinner labels often do not withstand the rigors of transportation. Initially to address these issues, RPC poolers worked independently with retailers to begin establishing RPC labeling standards. However, with food safety issues a significant and growing concern among supply chain partners, poolers came together under the RPCC umbrella to create label standards that could be used for all retailers and growers. These voluntary standards are consistent with the Produce Marketing Association's own labeling recommendations. Moreover, the label standards as presented in these guidelines can be easily modified and updated as regulations change and applications other than produce are addressed.

**Contents of this document include:** \* Purpose \* Sample Template and Description \* Organic Produce \* Future Uses \* RPC Label Template Instructions: Content, Materials, Production

## Purpose

The RPC Label Standardization Guidelines were developed in collaboration with all RPC pooling companies, who are members of the RPCC, to address **problematic issues** for both growers and retailers, including:

*Location of information* – lack of a standard layout makes locating important information cumbersome; similar information is printed in different places on every label;

*Completeness of Information* – some labels lack information required by government agencies, trade organizations, or retailers. Additionally, current food safety issues have made complete product information even more critical;

*Functionality of Labels* – labels produced may be too small or too thin to stay in the labeling slots of RPCs, fall out or are destroyed during transport;

**Consensus** - The RPC poolers determined that creating an industry-wide label standard would alleviate the problematic issues noted above and also offer a label that could be easily produced. The label template and specifications presented in this document have been developed to minimize cost to growers, facilitate production and compliance, and maximize food safety efforts.

## Sample Label Template and Description

The image shows a sample label template for oranges with various fields and a barcode. Red lines connect descriptive labels to the corresponding fields on the template.

**Product Identification Number** (points to the barcode)

**State and Country of Origin** (points to "Product of CA, USA")

**Growing Method** (points to "Conventional")

**Company Name and Address** (points to "ABC Growers, Somecity, CA 12345")

**Pack or Ship Date** (points to an empty box)

**Variety** (points to "Fancy")

**Lot Number** (points to "Lot 3")

**Grade** (points to "Valencia")

**Commodity** (points to "Oranges")

**Pack Count or Weight** (points to "10-4 lb bags")

**Additional Information** (points to "Coated with food grade vegetable beeswax and/or lac-resin based wax or resin to maintain freshness")

The label content includes: 0 28000 48600 9 (barcode), Product of CA, USA, ABC Growers, Somecity, CA 12345, Conventional, Fancy, Lot 3, Valencia, Oranges, 10-4 lb bags, and Coated with food grade vegetable beeswax and/or lac-resin based wax or resin to maintain freshness.

The RPCC recommends the inclusion of the following information on every label used on an RPC for the transportation of fresh produce:

*Product Name* – the RPCC recommends using commodity and variety names outlined by the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in the ASAP Produce standards.

*Pack Count or Weight* – use the pack required by the retailer to which you are shipping.

*State and Country of Origin* – type the growing state’s abbreviation in the form (this is a *requirement* in many states) and select from the choices available in the drop down menu (USA, Mexico, Canada, Peru, Chile, Costa Rica, or Honduras)

*Grade* – select from the choices available in the drop down (Fancy, US #1-#3).

*Company Name and Address* – only city, state, and zip code are required.

*Growing Method* – select either conventional or organic (for more information on organic labeling standards, see Other Information).

*Pack or Ship Date* – use either the pack or ship date, depending on what is required by the retailer. A stamp or sticker may be placed inside this box, or you may enter the date in the field provided in the template. Date should be entered in the format MM/DD/YY. Do not type any other information in this box.

*Lot Number* – use a lot number, which is important for tracking and tracing and also aids in food safety measures and recalls.

*Product Identification Number* – print UPC code or GTIN, or adhere an RFID tag.

*Additional information* – this field may be used for any information required or recommended by government agencies, retailers, or trade associations (i.e. post-harvest treatments).

The labels should be produced according to the following specifications:

*Size* – the template will produce five 8.5” x 2.2” labels per 8.5” x 11” sheet of paper

*Material* – the labels should be printed on paper between 80-110# thickness, on glossy stock (the gloss will help repel moisture and resist curling)

*Color* – to help quickly distinguish between conventionally and organically grown produce, labels for conventionally-grown will be printed on white paper, and labels for organically-grown will be printed on yellow paper (check with the retailer to ensure they do not already have a preferred organic label color)

## **Organic Produce**

To distinguish clearly between organic and conventional produce, organic labels will have the following differences from conventional labels:

- *Paper color* – yellow for organic produce (white for conventional);
- *Growing method* – select “organic” from the drop down menu in the template
- *Lot number* – is recommended for both types of produce, but is required for organic produce by the USDA
- *Additional information* – this section may be used for any other information recommended by trade associations, or to clarify handling procedures

## **Future Uses**

The label standards and template were developed to be modified easily to accommodate future regulatory changes and requirements. The format of these labels could also be used with one-way packaging to establish an industry-wide labeling standard for fresh produce. Moreover, it is anticipated that the label standards and template can be adapted to non-produce commodities and application requirements.

# RPC Label Template Instructions

## CONTENT

The format of the label has been made into a Word template. Each field of the form may be modified to reflect your specific information. While the content of these fields can and should be changed, the layout, fonts, colors, and other details have been locked and cannot be changed. This is to ensure consistency across all labels, which will allow designated employees to easily locate the critical pieces of information each label contains.

## MATERIALS

Labels should be printed on 8.5"x11" white **80# (sometimes called 80 lb.) Cover Gloss** paper in black ink. If you choose to have your labels printed by a professional printing service, they will know what this term means. If you choose to print your labels in-house, you may find this paper at the following sites:

[Http://www.paperondemand.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=catalog.details&product=192&search=category\\_search&keyword=](http://www.paperondemand.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=catalog.details&product=192&search=category_search&keyword=)

<https://secure9.nexternal.com/shared/StoreFront/default.asp?CS=paper&BusType=BtoC&Count1=895137965&Count2=812278389&ProductID=4196&Target=products.asp>

<https://secure7.nexternal.com/shared/StoreFront/default.asp?CS=paper&BusType=BtoC&Count1=674984157&Count2=592124581&Keyword=80%23&Target=products%2Easp&image.x=41&image.y=6>

This paper can be printed on an inkjet/laserjet desktop printer.

## PRODUCTION (IN-HOUSE)

Once you have input your information into the template, save the file as a word document (.doc, not .dot which is the template extension). Please note that although certain formatting elements appear on this version (shading of fields, drop down box, etc.) they will *not* appear when printed. To see what the label sheet will look like you can simply go to the "print preview" screen.

Once you have printed the label sheet, separate the 5 individual labels. A paper cutter will ensure the straightest cut. The final label size is to be 2.2" (2 3/16") tall by 8.5" wide.

## PRODUCTION (PROFESSIONAL PRINTER)

If you choose to have your labels printed by a professional printer, you will want to send them the following specifications for a quote:

*Number of copies you want printed:* Remember you will get 5 labels per copy. Ask for price breaks at various levels (i.e. 100; 500; 1,000 copies) to help determine quantity

*Artwork is a word document.* Every printer will be able to convert this file to PDF file for you should they require this format.

*Color process is b/w (black and white)*

*Paper needed is white 80# Cover Gloss, 8.5"x11":* Certain printers may have larger sheets available for a lower price, just be sure they know the final size of each label is firm at 2.2" tall x 8.5" wide.

*Cutting service required:* If you prefer for the printer to cut each sheet into 5 labels for you, be sure to specify. There will be an extra fee for this service.

*Number of jobs:* If you submit several different labels to the same printer to print at the same time, the charge will be calculated as separate jobs for each version. For example, if you want to print 5,000 sheets of labels using 1 word document version, you will pay the 5,000 quantity price. If you want to print 5,000 sheets of labels using 2 word documents (for example, 1 label for celery, 1 label for tomatoes), you will pay the 2,500 quantity price twice, and not get the cost-efficiency of the 5,000 quantity.

Printers vary in price dramatically; you may wish to search outside of your geographic area to get the most competitive price since this transaction can be done via fax and email.

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