

On behalf of:



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Climate Action,
Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety



of the Federal Republic of Germany

PROGRESS

Promoting Green Deal Readiness in
the Eastern Partnership Countries

REGIONAL TRAINING WEBINAR

Summary

**Strengthening the Capacity of Fruit and Berry Producers in
the Eastern Partnership (EaP) to Access the EU Market**

Zoom

23–24 June 2026

Organised by:

PROGRESS Programme Partners: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC Caucasus) with support of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, European Business Association (EBA) Moldova, and Institute for Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (IEF).

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Introduction

The PROGRESS Regional Training Webinar on "Strengthening the Capacity of Fruit and Berry Producers in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) to Access the EU Market" was held on 23–24 June 2026. It brought together nearly 200 participants from 13 countries, including farmers, agribusinesses, business associations, national authorities, civil society, academic institutions and international organizations.

The webinar focused on mandatory EU import requirements for fresh fruit and berries and how producers can meet them. Three substantive sessions covered sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements and maximum residue levels (MRLs); food hygiene, including microbiological and chemical hazards; and traceability, labelling, and marketing requirements as well as EU border control posts (BCPs). Each session combined presentations of EU regulations and best practices by EU experts and case studies from the EaP region. Open discussions followed each intervention, and seven multiple-choice digital poll questions were administered to engage the audience, with 28-35 responses to each question.

Session 1: SPS and MRL Requirements

The first session examined the SPS regulatory framework and MRL controls governing the entry of fresh fruit and berries into the EU. It was highlighted that the EU has an "open" plant health regime, under which countries may export produce if it complies with EU requirements. It was also stated that the EU follows a precautionary principle, focusing on preventing damage to health and the environment. The session covered mandatory EU requirements, the categorisation of harmful organisms and priority pests, phytosanitary certificates, and the TRACES¹ platform. Helpful resources presented for producers include the [EU Better Training for Safer Food \(BTSF\) Academy](#) and the [EU Pesticides Database](#). Key tools to promote more sustainable pesticide use that were identified are risk-based controls, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), pesticide logs, and prevention such as testing before shipment. The emergence of new pests and diseases linked to climate change was highlighted as a challenge for meeting the SPS and MRL requirements, while better forecasting, precision agriculture and use of resistant varieties were some of the mentioned solutions. Difficulties for smallholder farms in meeting the requirements were discussed as well as strategies to overcome them, including group certification, training, and digital tools.

The presentation by a Ukrainian apple farmer raised limited laboratory capacity, the cost and complexity of pesticide residue testing, and restricted access to advice and quality inputs. The national food safety authority of Armenia shared information on Armenia's phytosanitary controls and highlighted growing export ambitions toward the EU and Ukraine.

According to the digital polls, participants saw limited advice and guidance to improve knowledge and skills as the most significant barrier to meeting EU phytosanitary requirements (61%), and identified official guidance from public authorities as their main source of information on pesticide use and MRL compliance (57%).

¹ The digital certification and management platform for importation of goods into the EU.

Session 2: Food hygiene requirements

The second session addressed EU food hygiene requirements, focusing on microbiological and chemical hazards. Speakers presented the European Commission's guidance and EU regulations as well as the most relevant pathogens and contaminants. They identified the environment, wildlife, agricultural water, organic amendments, worker hygiene, and equipment/containers as the main pathways for microbiological contamination of fruit and berries. Water quality, workforce training and climate change were found especially relevant for smallholder producers, while norovirus was singled out as the most important microbiological hazard for berries. Environmental factors such as soil, water, atmosphere and site characteristics were shown to influence chemical contaminant availability and transfer, in addition to harvesting and handling. The persistence of chemical contaminants, including heavy metals, in fruits and berries was noted. Therefore, prevention was seen as paramount through site selection, monitoring and application of good agricultural practices. An approach based on context and risk were highlighted as key. It was also recognized that climate change can increase the length of time that pathogens survive on fruit and berries as well as the availability and mobility of contaminants. It was noted that collaboration can help smallholders access knowledge, monitoring and technical expertise.

The national food safety authority of Moldova presented its priorities and ongoing work, while certification specialists shared practical experience in managing water-related hazards in blueberry production in Georgia, and implementing hazard management systems in fruit production in Azerbaijan.

Respondents to the digital polls identified agricultural water through irrigation and washing as the biggest source of microbiological risk to fruit and berries (49%), ahead of soil and manure (37%). Clear and practical official guidance was seen as the most useful form of support to compliance with requirements on non-pesticide chemical contamination (32%), closely followed by more training for farmers (23.5%) and better monitoring and testing (23.5%).

Session 3: Traceability, Labelling and Marketing Requirements, and EU BCPs

The last session turned to EU traceability, labelling, and marketing requirements and official controls at EU BCPs.

The first presentation explained the principle of traceability as "one step back and one step forward." It highlighted the role of keeping records for five years that are available across the entire value chain and of well-defined lot sizing in reducing non-compliance. It presented the concept of traceability, information to include in the records, marking requirements, general and product-specific marketing requirements, labelling requirements, and overcoming smallholder challenges. The importance of communication between importers and buyers was mentioned as a strategy for increasing compliance.

The second presentation used the example of Spain as a major EU entry point for fresh fruits and berries as it has the largest network of BCPs in the EU. It explained what the BCPs are and how they function, the workflow for checking fruits and berries, relevant data, showing that banana and blueberry were Spain's major fruit and berry import in 2025 respectively, and Spain's major reform unifying the control of plant health and food safety. It highlighted risk-based control planning, the multi-tiered laboratory network, and the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF). Controls include documentary, identity, and physical checks. The

most common errors in documentation were identified as missing additional declarations, expired phytosanitary certificates, and inconsistencies. The main triggers for RASFF fruit and berry alerts were identified as pesticide residues, microbiological risks, and chemical contaminants. The speaker noted that detected non-compliance can lead to intensified controls and even temporary restrictions.

EaP regional case studies included an illustration of Ukraine's SME reorientation towards EU exports and the development of producer associations. In this context, the importance of seeing compliance as an investment in trust and competitiveness rather than a cost was highlighted. A Georgian blueberry association described its export growth, residue testing through EU laboratories, and packaging adapted to individual retailer requirements.

According to digital poll answers, the lack of knowledge and skills was identified as the main difficulty in complying with EU traceability requirements (53%). Non-matching declared information and labels were identified as by far the most common documentation challenges at EU border controls (62%). Among all the EU requirements discussed at the event, MRLs of pesticides were seen as the area posing the greatest compliance challenge (48%) to fruit and berry producers, well ahead of food hygiene (15%).

Conclusion

The webinar confirmed that while EaP producers have potential to grow high-quality fruit and berries, meeting EU mandatory import requirements remains challenging, particularly for smallholders. The discussions highlighted strong synergies between compliance and climate change adaptation, as measures needed to meet EU requirements can also strengthen farmers' resilience to climate-related risks. Key priorities identified include expanding extension and advisory services for producers, strengthening laboratory and testing capacity, enhancing traceability and record-keeping, improving access to quality inputs and water, ensuring effective monitoring and control, and supporting smallholders through producer cooperatives and other collective solutions. It is also important to be aware of voluntary requirements used by some EU buyers.

Under the PROGRESS programme, presentation materials will be shared with the webinar participants, and follow-up activities will continue to support climate change adaptation policy frameworks and knowledge exchange across the region. The next PROGRESS regional event is scheduled for 5–6 October 2026 and will focus on agricultural insurance and climate adaptation finance.

Please find the presentation slides and final agenda at the following link: [PROGRESS Regional Training Webinar - Strengthening the capacity of fruit and berry producers in the Eastern Partnership \(EaP\) to access the EU market](#)