

CONFORMITY CHECKS OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES SOLD ONLINE IN SWEDEN



The swedish experience of starting up inspections in a complex field of business.

Plant inspection unit

- Responsible for conformity checks of fruits and vegetables, import, wholesale, retail and online
- We cover all of Sweden
- 15 people in our unit
- Total of 30 people work with plant related inspections (expect seed)

Since 2022 inspections of online sales of fruit and vegetables are a part of our annual inspection plan.

Background: Why did we start the pilot project?

- Marketing standards applies to distance selling
- Risk for decreased validity for the marketing standards in general if one (growing) branch of the industry remains without inspections
- We have seen a massive increase in online sales the past few years
- We had a preception that compliance is lower online compared to physical retail stores
- Gather knowledge on the organization of online sales in the field
- Explore legal obstacles and possibilities
- Ultimately create an effective inspection method for at least one segment in the field of online sales of fruit and vegetables



Inspections of fruit and vegetables sold online – pilot project 2021

Compliance with EU 543/2011 in fruit and vegetables sold online, in Sweden.

Our interpretation of the general purpose of the marketing standards – to facilitate trade and to ensure that consumers have basic information before making a purchase.

These inspections focus on the consumers perspective since we choose to focus on operators who have online sales similar to physical retail stores - selling fruit and vegetables to consumers.



Summary of the project – in short

Three methods tested:

Pilot 1 – Inspection of information displayed on website

Pilot 2 – Inspection of information displayed on website + comparison with ordered products

Pilot 3 – Inspection of information displayed on website + comparison with stock in physical location

And networking with representatives from the field.



Inspection population

We choose to focus on operators similar to physical retail stores.

The 7 operators are the largest we have in Sweden, we estimate that these 7 together have a large majority of the market shares. Meaning that if we can eventually higher the conformity in this group it would have a large impact of the market at large.



Pilot 1 – Inspection of information displayed on website

All products on each website was inspected. The following criteria were checked:

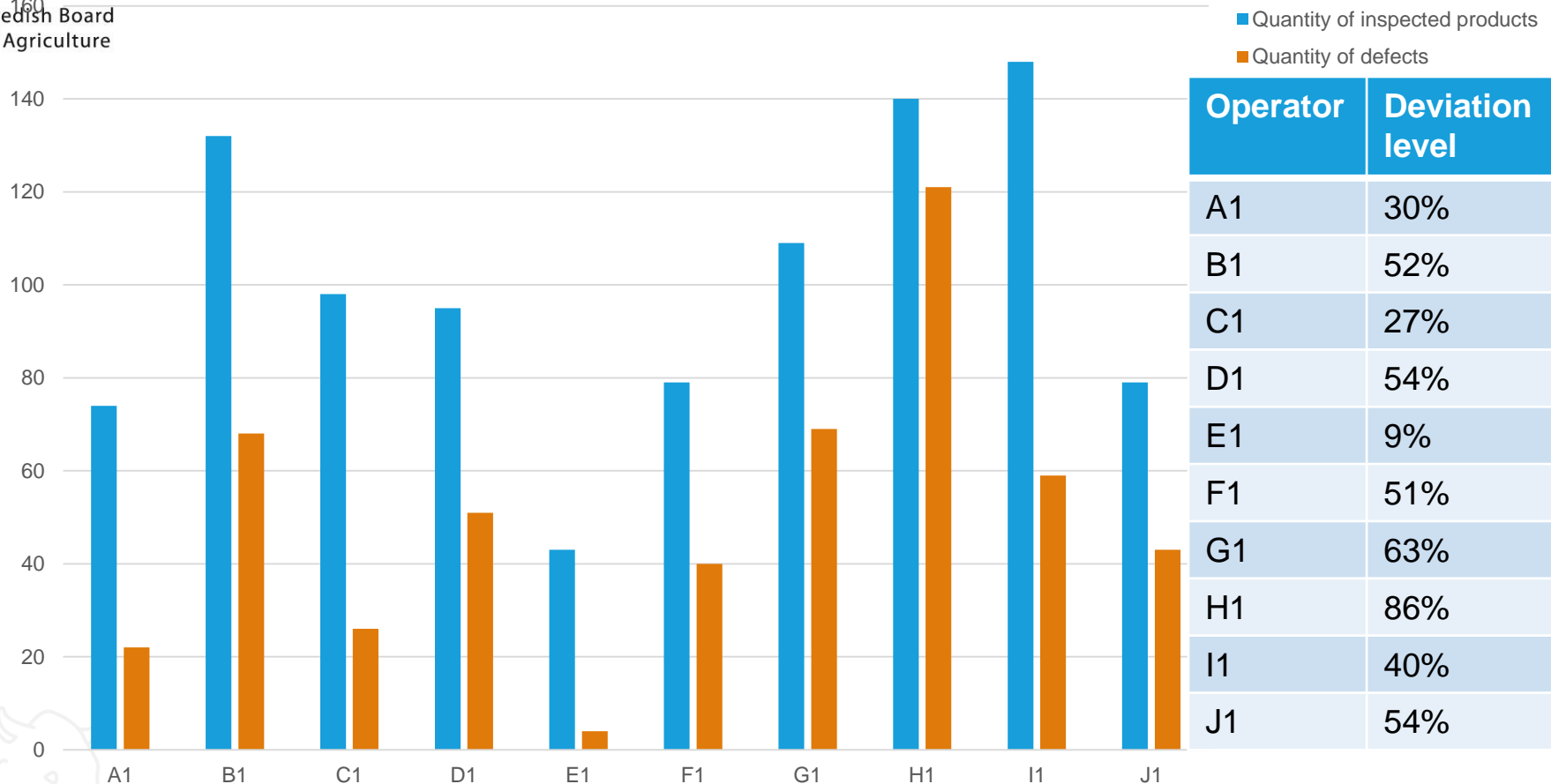
- Country of origin
- Class (when applicable)
- Variety (when applicable)

Notes on every defect and in some cases screenshots of the defects, it turned out it was overwhelming to take screenshots of all flaws.



Results Pilot 1

160
Swedish Board
of Agriculture



Flaws consisted of a mix of multiple or missing countries of origin, missing class and variety.

Pilot 2 – Inspection of information displayed on website + comparison with ordered products

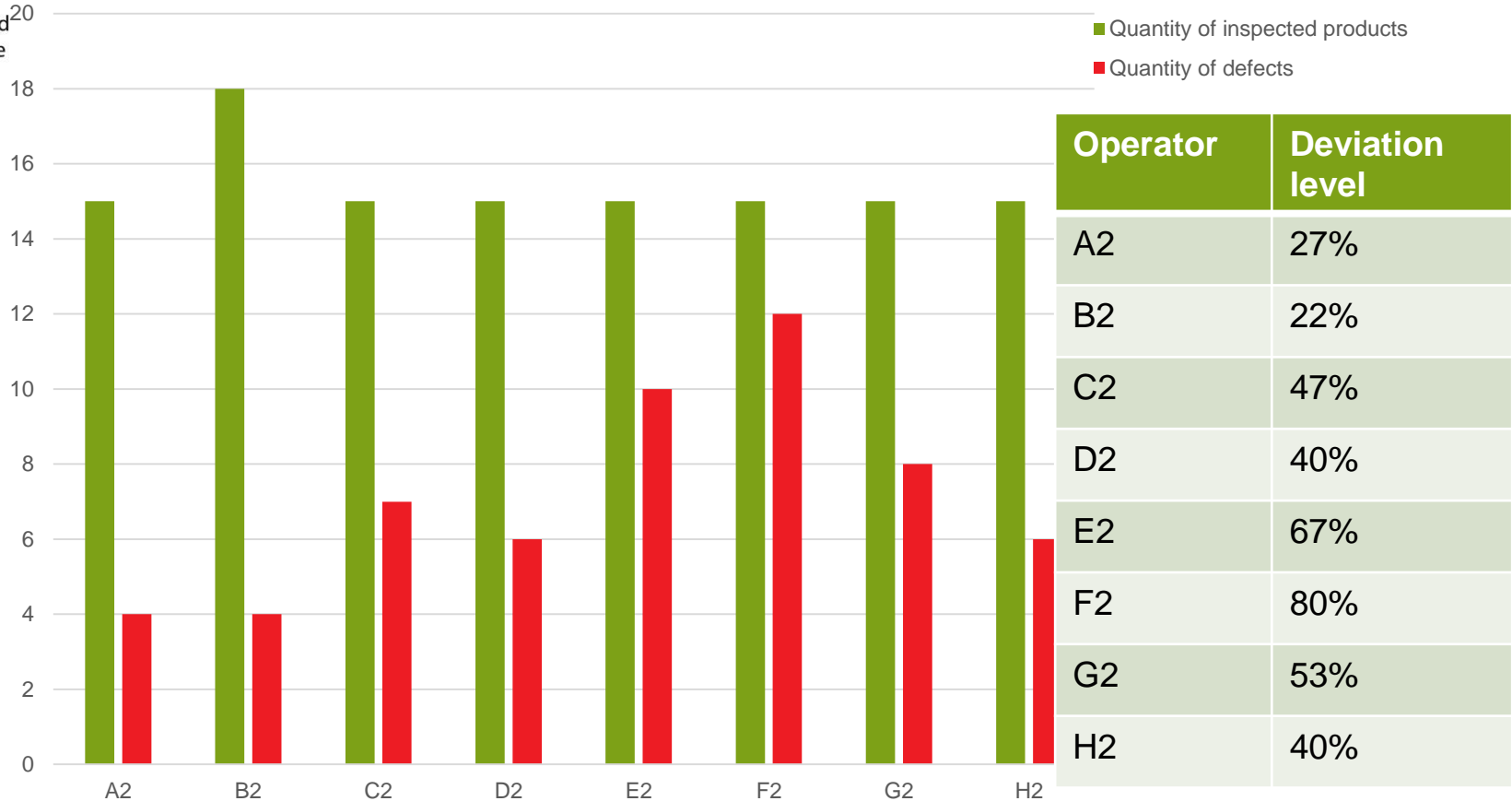
Total of 15 products inspected per inspection and screenshots of every product saved for comparison. The following criteria were checked:

- Country of origin
- Class (when applicable)
- Variety (when applicable)

After inspection on website the products were ordered (with Swedish Board of Agriculture as the shopper) for delivery or pick up. Three of each when products were sold without packaging and one of each for products with packaging. When ordered products were received we did a physical inspection and compared the information given on the website with the products. Also did a brief inspection of quality of products.



Results Pilot 2 ordered products



Flaws consisted of discrepancy between country of origin on website and country of origin on physical product. Also poor quality in some cases.

Pilot 3 – Inspection of information displayed on website + comparison with stock in physical location

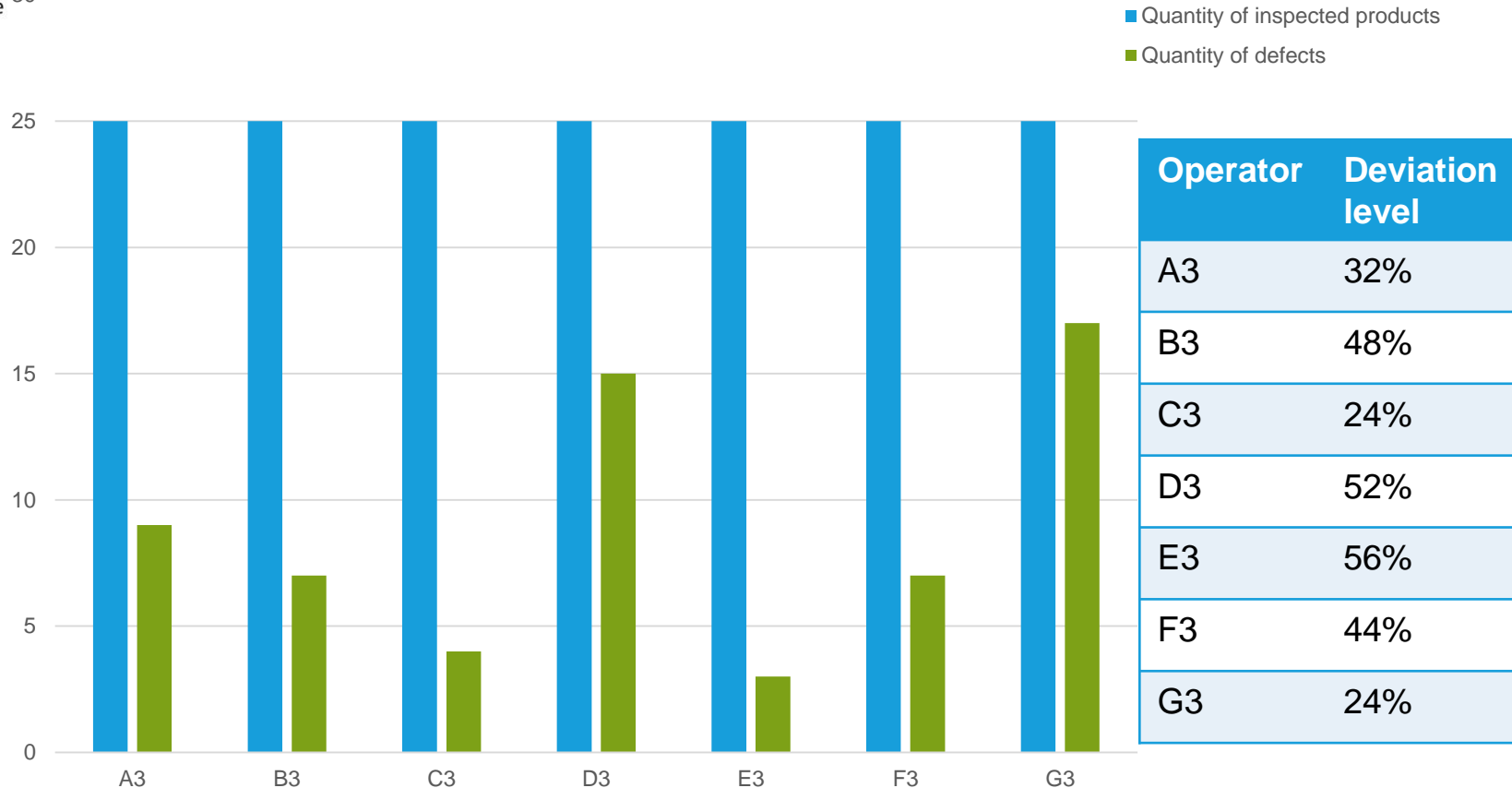
Total of 25 products inspected, at least one of each product from the list. Screenshots of every product saved for comparison. The following criteria were checked:

- Country of origin
- Class (when applicable)
- Variety (when applicable)

On the same day as the website was inspected we also did an inspection at the physical location of the stock. Information given on the website was compared with the products found in the store or warehouse.



Results Pilot 3 in physical stock



Flaws consisted of products not being available at all in the store and discrepancy between information on website and in store.

Experiences from pilot project

- Knowledge in the industry was low
 - Operators have very different distribution solutions
 - Often the physical retail store has no or very little to do with the website – controlled by central IT department
 - Great response from representatives in the industry – by starting the network the issue of online sales came to life
 - Reasonable workload to get from zero to fully functional inspections
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- **It is possible to do inspections of online sales**

Obstacles

We have no effective penalty or other regulating measure for these inspections, except for the fee concerning a follow up inspection.

The marketing standards are not in line with how e-commerce with fruit and vegetables are distributed.

We have waited too long to start inspections in the field and keep up knowledge levels in the businesses. People in our society are now used to e-commerce and the simplicity of it. The operators in the field have built complex and expensive systems without "being regulated" or inspected.

There could be legal and ethical problems with the method of ordering products for inspections.



Live conformity checks from 2022

Conformity checks of online trade are since 2022 a part of our annual inspection plan.

Two types of inspections – single and combination (now extended). Methods developed with our experience from the pilot project.

51 inspections 2022, 42 single, 9 combination.

Plan for 2023: 50 inspections, focus on single first then a priority on extended inspections.

Positive outlook for the future

Compliance in information displayed on the websites is dramatically improved after inspections 2022.

Flexible type of inspection.

Relationships in the industry have developed and we have benefits from that in our conformity checks at wholesale and retail as well.

Our humble and relationship oriented approach towards the industry has been effective.

Thank you!

Please contact us if you have any questions or input regarding our conformity checks of online sales of fruit and vegetables.

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