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Division

AIM
Inspection
Series

Positive Lot Identification (PLI) Manual

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“SCI moving forward in the 21st Century using technology, innovation, and old fashioned hard work”

Positive Lot Identification (PLI) Manual
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INTRODUCTION

Positive Lot Identification (PLI) is the application of identifying marks to product that has been inspected by AMS Specialty Crop Inspection Division personnel or Federal-State licensees. The following policies and procedures apply to the inspection of fresh fruits, vegetable, nuts and other products but may also be used in the inspection of processed products. PLI marks are used to connect a package, master container, pallet or conveyance to an inspection certificate. The purpose of the instructions contained in this manual is to consolidate policies and procedures for SCI Division personnel and Federal-State licensees when procuring, delivering, billing, identifying, documenting, maintaining physical control, storing, transferring, reporting theft or loss, insuring physical inventory, and disposing of official stamp equipment and other accountable items used for PLI.

PLI does not include the application of “officially sampled” stamps or marks. For more information refer to [Accountability and Care of “Officially Sampled” Stamps](#).

GUIDE FOR ELECTRONIC USAGE

The AIM system of instructional manuals is available electronically in Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF) at the following intranet address:
<http://agnis/sites/FV/PPB/AIM/default.aspx>.

When accessed electronically, AIM materials have hyperlinks and hypertext (visible as underlined [blue text](#)) available to the PDF user. Clicking on a hyperlink takes the reader to a web site with information relating to the subject. Hypertext links the reader to a different page within the current manual, or a different manual, with information relating to the subject. For example, the hypertext in the Table of Contents allows a reader to go directly to the section of interest in the manual by clicking on the section title.

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POSITIVE LOT IDENTIFICATION (PLI)

The purpose of the PLI program is to provide the fruit and vegetable industry with an inspection service that positively tracks the movement of product through the marketing and distribution system. PLI is a high-integrity system used to identify a particular package, unitized container, pallet, or carrier of fruits, vegetables, nuts and miscellaneous products as being officially sampled, inspected and certified by USDA, a duly authorized Federal-State inspector, or a duly authorized representative of a contracted company under an approved alternative inspection program.

PLI provides the highest degree of assurance that a specific load, or lot, can be linked to an official inspection certificate or numbered notesheet (Federal, Federal-State or Federal-State Quality Assurance Inspection form). A PLI mark on containers does not signify that a lot meets a particular grade or size, only that it has been inspected and can be identified throughout the marketing chain.

The use of PLI is optional except when required by a state program, marketing agreement/order, Federal government purchase program or commodity futures and options program. PLI is a requirement of various state and federal marketing orders and grower/shipper/marketing organizations as well as specialized SCI Division programs such as Partners in Quality (PIQ) and the Customer Assisted Inspection Program (CAIP). Users of inspection and PLI pay for these services and rely on USDA and the Federal-State Inspection Service (FSIS) to ensure program integrity which includes the advantages and benefits of identifying officially sampled, inspected and certified product. To maintain user confidence and program integrity, it is essential that **all** PLI imprinting/marketing devices are properly controlled by SCI, FSIS and authorized program participants. Additionally, imprints of official stamps must be legible and appear only on lots which are officially sampled and inspected by a USDA grader, licensed inspector, or authorized representative of an alternative inspection program.

Advantages of PLI

- PLI provides a recognizable form of identification for product that has been sampled, inspected, and certified under a USDA sanctioned inspection program.
- PLI stamp imprints on containers are recognized throughout the marketing chain.
- PLI is recognized by the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act Division (PACA) for dispute resolution.
- Certification of lots/loads is acceptable to the Canadian Board of Arbitration.
- PLI is recognized by USDA as official proof of certification when inspection results are questioned by financially interested parties.
- PLI provides a means of tracking product for internal control by packers, shippers, marketing order committees, wholesale warehouses, etc.

POLICY FOR USE OF PLI STAMPS/DIES AND OTHER IDENTIFICATION ITEMS

For Federal-State offices and users under Alternative Inspection Programs the assignment of stamps is controlled by FSIS through stamp accountability records. Permanently-affixed stamp accountability numbers are assigned by the FSIS district or area offices. FSIS offices are required to maintain detailed accountability records to track the issuance, status, and location of each stamp number. Official imprinting and devices are accountable and once purchased must be controlled by FSIS and USDA. In-line printing devices (jet-dot or laser printers) must also be inventoried and the portion of the device that operates the PLI imprint must be controlled by FSIS. FSIS offices must furnish a copy of PLI stamp and printer accountability records to the Federal Program Manager/Supervisor (FPM) at least once a year.

Upon request from SCI headquarters, FPM must provide a listing of all commodities being inspected in addition to PLI methods utilized.

For Federal offices, general accountability of stamps will be maintained by the SCI Division, Equipment and Forms Depot (Depot) and headquarters (HQ). Each field office that is assigned stamps must maintain local accountability and submit an annual report to HQ by no later than January 15 of each year. Lost or stolen stamps must be reported promptly to headquarters and the Depot.

Accountability of PLI Devices

PLI stamps and other accountable items must be controlled by USDA and FSIS. All authorized personnel that are assigned official imprinting devices or PLI items must take adequate measures to ensure proper use, control and care of these items. The following is required for all PLI devices:

- Accurate records of imprinting or marking devices used for PLI, including exact description of device and location of usage;
- Approval by the FPM;
- Ordered through the state and FPM;
- Authorized inspection personnel assigned to packing operations must maintain control of PLI devices at all times. This also applies to industry personnel in PIQ and other authorized alternative inspection programs;
- Inspectors and company personnel are jointly responsible for keeping imprinting devices clean, numbers intact, and properly inked to imprint legibly and completely;
- When imprinting devices are destroyed, lost or replaced, appropriate documentation covering disposition of the device must be entered on the Positive Lot Identification Stamp(s)/Die(s) Accountability Sheet ([FV-371](#));

- All PLI related items must be kept under lock and key or computer password protection and, in the case of in-line imprinting devices, locked or sealed in place; unless a Memorandum of Understanding is signed, and,
- All packing operations under an alternative inspection program must ensure full security and control of PLI items through a demonstrated PLI integrity system approved by USDA and FSIS. It is the responsibility of FSIS to verify use and control of PLI devices when used in alternative inspection programs.

Documenting Accountability of Stamp(s)/Die(s)

All FSIS and USDA personnel or authorized company representatives must take adequate measures to ensure proper use, control and care of assigned PLI accountable items. A record of accountability for storage, assignment, transfer, disposal, and theft or loss is essential to properly track PLI stamp(s)/die(s). An annual review of PLI accountability records must be performed by the FPM or OIC using form [FV-371](#) or a similar form. The review should be sent to the FPM (for state offices) or HQ (for Federal offices). Refer to [Exhibit A](#) for an example of this form.

Assignment/Transfer/Disposal

The assignment/transfer of stamps must be documented with an accountability form that will be kept up to date and provided during office reviews. Official stamps/dies that are beyond repair or worn out must be destroyed by the responsible FSIS official and notification sent to the FPM. Federal market hand stamps/dies that are beyond repair must be sent to the Depot for destruction.

Storage Accountability for PLI Assigned to Private Entities

Each company that uses hand stamps or in-line roller stamps must provide a USDA/FSIS approved, secure location for storage of stamps. FSIS will provide padlocks and keys to secure inspection-related equipment.

All secure locations must contain an up-to-date accountability form, listing all stamps and dies assigned to the facility ([Exhibit A](#)). A duplicate of this record sheet must also be maintained at the district supervisor's office.

NOTE: Companies under an alternative inspection program will be responsible for documenting in-house PLI control and security methods.

Federal and Federal-State Serially Numbered Seals and Clips

Federal and Federal-State serially numbered seals are accountable items and must be controlled in the same manner as stamps, dies, and preprinted stickers.

Accountability of Pre-printed and Numbered Tags

Pre-printed tags are commonly used as a PLI method for milled peanuts. Specific instructions and an example of an accountability sheet are included in the Milled Peanut Inspection Instructions. Since the use of pre-printed tags is limited for commodities other than peanuts, no specific form has been designed for accountability purposes. Essentially, the same procedures outlined in the previous section must be followed for ordering and accountability of these tags. If an inspector provides a packer with pre-printed tags, that inspector is responsible for maintaining control and accountability of those tags. That responsibility may be delegated to other inspectors assigned to the same packing operation.

RECORDING PLI MARKS

When PLI marks are encountered while inspecting a lot or load at shipping point or at the market, inspectors must record the complete information about the markings. The type of PLI (stamps, stickers, tape, seal, etc.), must be recorded on the notesheet. At shipping point, complete PLI markings and numbers must be noted on the notesheet and certificate in the appropriate blocks. If only one PLI marking is used in a shipment it will be permissible to stamp the notes and each copy of the certificate with a legible imprint of the markings used. At receiving markets, Federal or Federal-State PLI marks must be noted on the notesheet and quoted in the “Brands/Markings” or “Lot ID” blocks on the certificate. If there are numerous PLI marks, they may also be recorded in the “Remarks” section. The inspector must record if the PLI is “USDA” or “Fed-State.” If the state name is on the PLI mark, it must be recorded; it is permissible for inspectors to use the two letter postal abbreviations for the state when recording marks. If numbers or words in the PLI marks are not legible the inspector should record as much information as possible and note that the remaining marks are not legible.

If PLI markings do not meet the requirements set forth in this manual, a statement must be made in the “Remarks” section of the certificate describing the markings (or lack of). Additionally, inspectors are to inform HQ of the situation to facilitate follow-up action at the applicable shipping point location(s). Some examples are:

- Approximately 35% of packages are marked “FL Fed-State Insp. 08,” remainder are not marked.
- Many cartons stamped “Federal State Lot 876” with no legible state or permanent stamp number.
- Pallets are tagged with Oregon Federal-State PLI stamps on white adhesive stickers.
- PLI Stickers are applied to the sides of pallet bins (or large tote bags) with open tops.

Reporting Theft or Loss

If a stamp/die or other accountable item is lost, stolen or otherwise missing, the accountable person must promptly notify their immediate supervisor. If the item is missing at a packing operation, the plant manager must be notified and the inspector and plant manager must make a

thorough search of the facility. When a company is under an alternative inspection program, a responsible company representative must do the search. The district supervisor must record the missing accountable item (stamp/die) on the accountability form and report it to the FPM who must notify headquarters.

Once it has been determined that an accountable item is missing, the responsible inspector (or authorized company representative) must prepare a written statement detailing the loss and efforts made to find the item. The FSIS supervisor will provide assistance with the written report if needed. A copy of the report must be forwarded to headquarters. The original must be kept on file in the supervisor's local office with copies sent to the principle state office and FPM. The FPM will forward the information to HQ. If the accountable item is assigned to a packing operation, a copy will also be retained at the packing house. At terminal markets similar procedures will be followed, notifying the FPM or HQ through your chain of command.

PLI DEVICES AND METHODS

PLI may be used to identify packages, master containers, pallets, bins, containers, or carriers. The most common PLI methods are in-line and stationary lot stamping. PLI pallet stickers and tape are also used as a quick and efficient way to attain positive lot identification when individual containers are not PLI marked. The following methods for achieving PLI are approved by SCI. Other methods may be used, provided that the type of identification will accurately link a lot with the corresponding certificate or serially-numbered notesheet. Before using a method that is not described in this manual, consult with the FPM or HQ. If there is any doubt about a method meeting PLI requirements, the FPM should contact headquarters.

Seals

A USDA licensed inspector or authorized representative observes the loading of inspected lot(s) and applies Federal or Federal-State serially numbered seals to each door or entryway of the conveyance. Serial numbers of attached seals are recorded on official notesheets and certificates. An applicant requesting this method of PLI must be advised that once a seal is broken, the load is no longer recognized as PLI unless the packages, bulk bins, or pallets also have PLI markings to positively link the product to a certificate or serially-numbered notesheet. The FSIS must maintain detailed seal accountability records. At terminal markets, this is a responsibility of the Officer in Charge.

Pre-stamped Identification Tags

This method is frequently used in the peanut industry. FSIS or an authorized representative stamps an accountable number of tags with specific information, e.g., house number, crop year, lot, etc. These tags are issued to the company, which becomes responsible for the accountability of each tag. The company affixes tags to the containers during inspection and packing operations (under monitoring by FSIS).

NOTE: If this method is used for bagged products such as potatoes or onions, the on-site inspector or authorized representative should provide a predetermined quantity of tags bearing the PLI stamp imprint. Tags must have a legible Federal-State PLI stamp imprint with a

permanent accountability number and date, lot code or other unique means of linking the lot to a specific certificate or serially numbered notesheet.

In-Line Stamping

Most PLI is accomplished after product is packaged and before leaving the packing line conveyor. PLI information is hand stamped on containers or imprinted by automatic devices such as wheel stamps, impact plates, or ink jet (jet-dot printers).

When containers are in-line stamped, printed by a mechanical means or hand stamped, all containers must bear a PLI imprint and **a minimum of 75 percent of containers on a pallet must have readily-legible PLI markings.**

A Federal or Federal-State inspector must be present at the time of packing and imprinting containers with PLI marks unless the packing house is participating in an approved alternative inspection program;

A [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) signed by FSIS and a packing house representative acknowledging division policy regarding the use and control of in-line PLI devices.

NOTE: An inspector may be allowed to inspect in more than one packing house with an operating in-line stamp during limited absences from the premises. This will be allowed only if the plan is approved by USDA and/or the company is a participant in an approved alternative inspection program that contains this provision.

Pre-printed Clip-on/Quick-lock Closures, Stickers and Identification Labels

Many packing operations use approved clip on closure tags or adhesive stickers/labels that are printed just prior to use. They may be used on consumer packages, master containers, or pallets. These may contain company information as well as the official PLI lot information. The PLI information should be easily recognizable and should be separate from the other label information such as producer, brand, or size. All letters and numbers will be easily legible. The FSIS inspector must be on the premises during packing except when the company is under an approved alternative inspection program. FSIS must control the numbering. The printer will be locked or sealed in a secure manner when the inspector or authorized program participant is not present. PLI stickers or labels applied to reusable plastic containers (RPCs) or other non-porous packaging should be scored (cut) so they cannot be removed in one piece. Each of these PLI methods must be approved in writing by a FPM. A copy or photo of the clip or label should be kept on file along with the approval. See [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1: Printed clip-on tag.



Inserts (shims)

Paper inserts or “shims” which are placed inside the closure end of sacks/bags after filling ([Figure 2](#)) will meet PLI requirements, **provided**, the insert is large enough to remain in place and not shift substantially inside the container. Additionally, **all** inserts must be PLI printed or stamped with at least **75 percent** of the sacks/bags on a pallet (or in the lot if not palletized) having appropriate PLI markings that are **readily** noticeable through the container. Refer to the [Information Required on PLI Imprints](#) section for more information. Small inserts that do not stay in place at the end of the sack/bag will **not** be considered PLI.

Figure 2: Sack/bag insert.



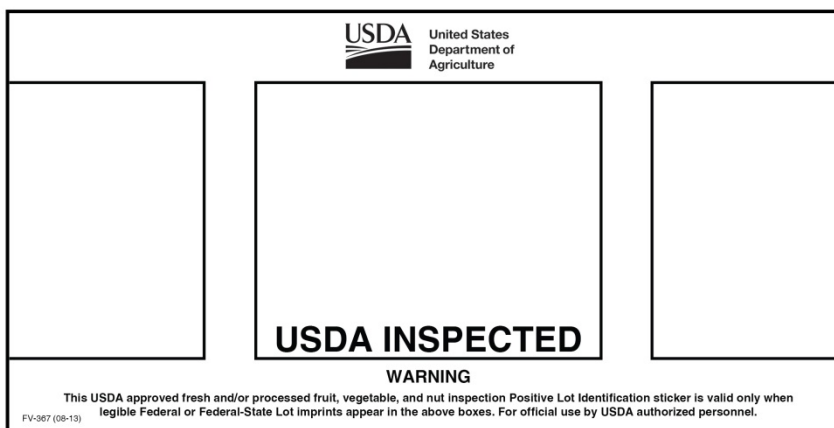
Adhesive Stickers and Labels

A generic USDA non-releasing sticker that is fluorescent chartreuse in color ([Figure 3](#)) is available from the Depot. This sticker is readily recognized in marketing channels as a symbol of PLI. Supplies may be outsourced, **provided**, they conform in color, design, and adhesive formula to the generic sticker. When a company outsources PLI stickers they must obtain approval by the Federal-State office and supply a sample of the product as well as the number of stickers ordered. Adhesive stickers must adhere to the package or pallet wrap/banding so that they cannot be removed and re-used. Inspectors should check the application of stickers to ensure that the adhesive is “set” and the stickers cannot be removed without tearing. Extra pressure during application may be required. This same requirement applies to stickers preprinted by the packing house.

Whenever a PLI sticker is torn, mutilated, or otherwise disturbed, the integrity of PLI may be affected. If damage to PLI stickers appears to be the result of a transit shift or unloading damage, PLI should be recorded on the notesheet and certificate.

NOTE: Stickers may release from containers under extremely high humidity or freezing conditions. If this occurs, it should be obvious whether PLI integrity was disturbed. Contact headquarters when in doubt regarding the integrity of PLI stickers.

Figure 3: Example of a generic PLI sticker. (Actual size 4 inches high, 8 inches long; color is fluorescent chartreuse.)



PLI on Palletized Product

Individual containers that are stacked on pallets will meet PLI requirements when at least **75 percent** of the containers on a pallet bear a legible PLI stamp imprint. Other methods of achieving PLI on palletized product include:

A. Pallets with Banding or Wrap

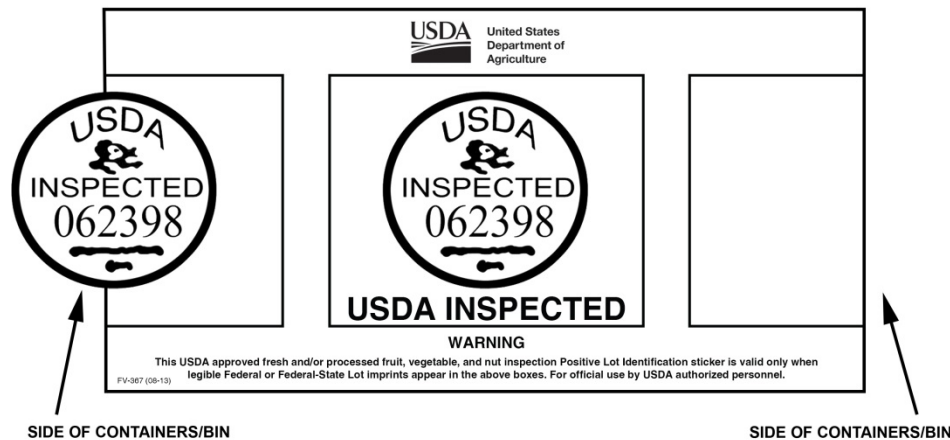
A minimum of **one** sticker is required on each banded/wrapped pallet regardless of product or type of packaging ([Figure 4](#)). SCI strongly suggests the use of two stickers per pallet to enhance PLI recognition in marketing channels.

On pallets with net/film wrapping, stickers may not be placed on the outside of the wrapping alone. The sticker must be affixed to a portion of adjoining packages or incorporated into the wrapping and/or product containers in some fashion. Stickers that cannot be removed from the plastic wrap without tearing are considered “incorporated” into the wrapping.

The uppermost horizontal or vertical band must have a PLI sticker attached. The sticker may overlap the band or wrapping and be affixed to parts of two containers or may be tightly folded over the band or mesh, adhering just to the band or mesh and itself (this method is preferred for waxed or wet containers).

All stickers must be affixed to a sack/bag below the top layer of each pallet and applied prior to pallet wrapping unless affixed to the closure string **and** pallet wrapping.

Figure 4: Placement of PLI sticker(s) on palletized packages that are banded, net/film wrapped.



B. Pallets without Banding or Wrap

1. Cartons

Palletized cartons without banding, shrink film or net wraps requires a minimum of **two** stickers per pallet. One sticker must overlap a bottom layer and second layer container. The other sticker must be applied to top and adjacent layer containers and cover a portion of at least two containers. The sticker may be in a vertical, horizontal or diagonal position. For cartons, PLI stamp imprints are required in the center and one end section of each sticker (Figure 5). Stamp imprints on end sections must overlap onto containers or bins (i.e., imprints half on sticker and half on containers or bins). The purpose of stamping the end section is to enhance integrity of stickers which may partially release under certain environmental conditions.

2. Sacks or Bags

Palletized sacks or bags without banding or wrap may have stickers attached in several ways: Affixed over the closure string of two or more bags or attached to a closure string (Figure 6); or, affixed to the sack/bag label provided it has good adhesion and is readily visible. One sticker will be on the top layer and one sticker on a lower layer. Stickers must be affixed to sacks/bags or they will **not** be considered PLI. The PLI imprint must be stamped in the center section of each sticker. An imprint will not be necessary on an end section (as on cartons).

Figure 5: Stamp imprints required in center and one end box.

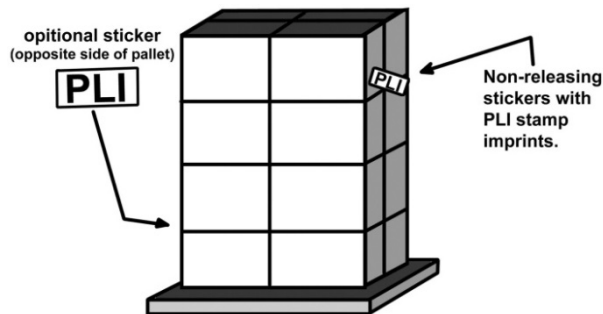
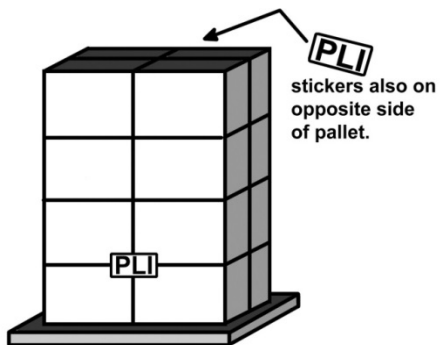


Figure 6: PLI stickers on palletized product with no banding, net/film wrapping. Stickers may be placed on opposite sides than as illustrated.



C. PLI Tape

Use of tamper-proof tape with a stamped PLI imprint is a quick method of accomplishing PLI on palletized product. A PLI stamp is used to imprint the overlapping ends of the tape to validate PLI. When taping palletized containers, the tape should be slightly misaligned on top layer packages to allow the stamp to be applied on both pieces, half on the tape stuck to the packages and half on the overlapping tape ([Figures 7](#) and [8](#)). **NOTE: Use of PLI tape itself is not positive lot identification. PLI is valid only when the tape has been stamped with a recognized USDA/Federal-State stamp.**

Figure 7: PLI tape applied to top layer packages on pallet.

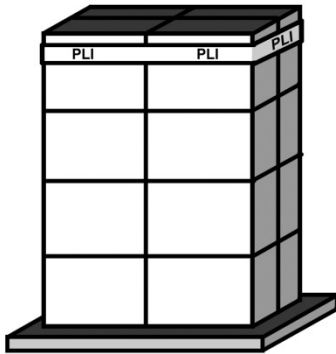
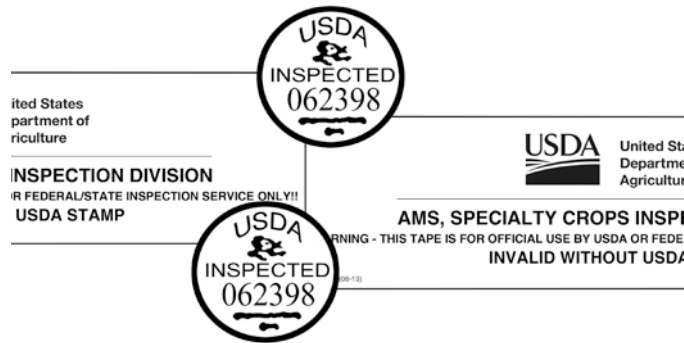


Figure 8: PLI stamp applied where tape ends overlap on side of container.



When ordering PLI tape, the statement “Invalid without USDA PLI Stamp Imprint” must be printed and repeated approximately every twelve inches on the tape.

D. Product in Bulk Bins or Tote Sacks

Open top cardboard or wood bins cannot have an acceptable PLI method without some type of top, cover, strap, band or lifting ears that can be secured with the PLI sticker, tape or seal.

There are numerous ways to meet PLI requirements on bins containing bulk commodities or consumer packages. The most common methods include:

1. Bin with Lid

Bins are constructed of many different materials. To properly secure a bin for PLI, a lid or some other secure cover should be placed over the open top. The lid may be secured with the use of PLI tape, stickers or seals.

If bins are stacked, only the top bin must have a lid. The stack integrity must be maintained using PLI tape, stickers or banding between each bin.

2. Use of PLI Stickers or Tape to Secure Lid to Bins

PLI stickers or a sufficiently long strip of PLI tape may be used on two opposite sides of a bin. Stickers or tape will connect the lid to the bin side, having some slack or play in the middle to allow for limited movement but no tearing of stickers or tape. Each end of the tape, as well as the center and end sections of PLI stickers, must bear legible USDA/Federal-State PLI stamp imprints ([Figure 9](#)). Other types of tape may be used provided they will remain tightly adhered to bin surfaces and are secured with PLI stickers.

3. Use of PLI Sticker on Lid Band

A common method of securing a lid to a bin is with plastic/metal banding and a fastening device (crimping sleeve, buckle or heat bonding). This type of banding usually results in moderate band tension around the bin with little or no band movement. PLI may be accomplished by placing a sticker over the band on the lid and stamping the middle **and** end sections (end section imprints should be half on lid and half on sticker) ([Figures 10](#) and [11](#)). If the lid is composed of a substance that a sticker will not adhere to, encircle the strap with the sticker and join the sticker ends together.

4. Use of PLI Stickers or Tape on Bulk Totes

A cardboard sheet may be placed over the product and then banding all four lifting ears together with a band. Place a PLI sticker over the buckle. PLI may be accomplished by using PLI tape in place of a band and stamp overlapping ends of the tape to validate PLI.

Open top tote bags may also have PLI stickers incorporated into one or more of the lifting loops so the bag cannot be emptied without tearing or removing the sticker.

Figure 9: PLI tape or stickers to secure bin lid.

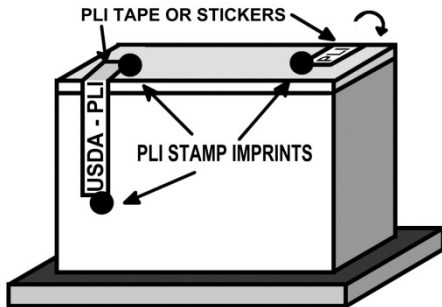


Figure 10: PLI sticker used to secure bin with lid and multiple bands.

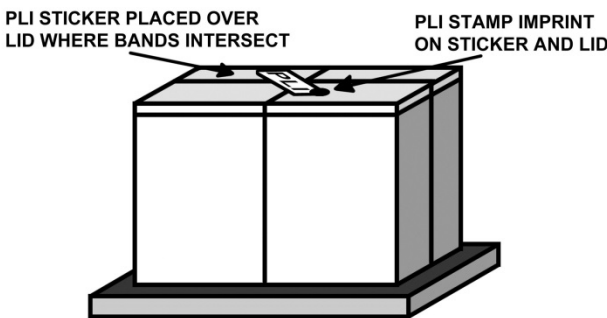
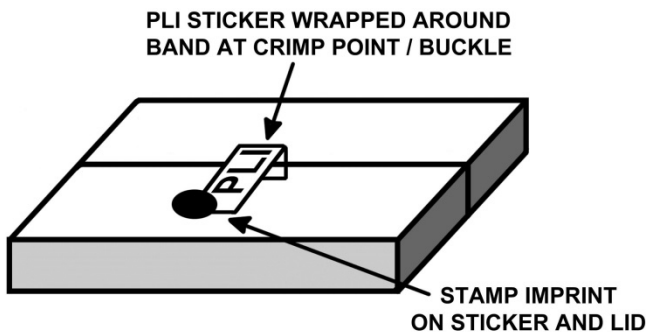


Figure 11: PLI sticker used to secure bin with single band.



5. Bin without Lid

Optimum PLI security is attained by use of a rigid lid with PLI tape or stickers **and** legible PLI stamp imprinting on appropriate areas of the tape or stickers. However, bin coverings made of film, small-hole mesh, or foam may be used instead of a lid, **provided**, the entire open area of the

bin is covered and secured on all sides by PLI tape or stickers. Ends of tape/stickers overlapping onto the bin must bear legible PLI stamp imprints to be considered as PLI. For example, a square or rectangular shaped bin has four sides. The plastic, foam or mesh cover must be affixed at each side of the bin with PLI tape or stickers. The center section of stickers and ends adhering to bin sides must bear a PLI stamp imprint. Ends of tape adhering to bin sides must bear a PLI stamp imprint. The end sections of stickers and ends of tape on bin sides should have PLI stamp imprints half on the end of tape or sticker and half on the bin side. Other PLI stamp imprints may be made on the tape ends to ease the process of identification through marketing channels.

E. Use of PLI Stickers or Tape on Pallets of RPCs

On palletized RPC with banding, the uppermost horizontal band must have a PLI sticker attached over the buckle. PLI may be accomplished by using PLI tape in place of a band and stamp overlapping ends of the tape to validate PLI. PLI affixed to individual RPCs must be secure and not removable without tearing or breaking the PLI.

Stamping of Stationary Lots

PLI hand stamping may be performed in-line or after packages are removed from the packing line conveyor and placed on pallets or in stacks on the floor. **All containers** stamped by hand require a PLI imprint with at least **75 percent** of containers having **readily-legible** PLI imprints.

To achieve PLI for palletized containers before stamping, it is permissible to stamp the outer two sides provided they meet the legibility requirements. If fewer than 75 percent would be stamped using this method, then **all** containers on each side of the pallet must be legibly stamped.

Warehouse personnel may perform the actual stamping. The inspector is responsible for, and must ensure, the proper use and control of the assigned stamp. The inspector must secure the stamp in a locked, on-site location or take it with other assigned equipment when leaving the premises. Stamp usage and security is the responsibility of the participant if the packing house is under an alternative inspection program containing this provision.

Figure 12: In-line roller stamp.



Federal-State Inspected
Florida 237-0324

Figure 13: Ink jet printer.

Fed-State ID-345-0516

Placement of PLI Marks on Containers

When containers are hand stamped, mechanically stamped or ink jet printed, the following guidelines apply for placement of PLI markings:

- For containers with full telescopic type lids (e.g., apples, pears, citrus), PLI marks must be applied to unmarked areas of the ends or sides of lids. It is permissible to stamp lids or tops of packages if art work and markings on sides/ends do not leave enough area for readily-legible PLI marks;
- For containers with short lids that slide down over the top of cartons only several inches, (e.g., tomatoes), PLI marks must be applied to areas on the ends or sides of the carton bottom. **These marks must be visible and legible when the lids are in place.** If containers have short lids that are strapped or taped to the carton, it is permissible to apply PLI marks on the lid;
- If containers are reused after PLI marks are applied, the original PLI marks must be obliterated before new PLI marks are applied or a new PLI mark should be applied next to every old PLI mark. **NOTE:** If a company repacks product or reuses previously-packed PLI marked containers and changes any obvious identification (pack style, brand/label, product, size, packer/shipper, grades), the certificate/notesheet covering the lot in its original state is no longer valid. USDA will not recognize the original PLI marks as valid for those containers because the lot characteristics have changed and are not consistent with information on the original certificate/notesheet. Using a USDA recognized stamp to imply an inspection, when there is no valid inspection, may be considered misrepresentation of official identification marks which could be punishable by either fines, jail time or both and is legally cited under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946; and
- Reusable/recyclable plastic containers typically provide an area on the ends for a label or paper insert. A PLI-stamped insert is **not** valid PLI due to the ease with which an insert may be removed from the container. To fulfill the requirements of PLI, individual containers must have a PLI sticker or PLI tape affixed to it, or, if unitized (pallet) PLI is desired, PLI tape or stickers must be applied in the manner consistent with the previously-mentioned PLI pallet procedures.

A. Use of Sample Stamp

In approved packing operations where the inspector is not continually on-site, inspectors must have an FSIS-approved “**SAMPLE STAMP**” which will be used

to mark pallets of containers that are sampled and inspected during their visit. The sample stamp must remain with the inspector at all times, and must not be left with the applicant during the inspector's absence.

The sample stamp will be used in the following manner:

- When an inspector is assigned to more than one location, the inspector will sample and inspect containers from the pallets on the floor and randomly stamp, or cause to be stamped, sufficient packages on each pallet so that the sampled pallets will be easily recognized upon their return.
- Actual stamping may be done by plant personnel under the inspectors' supervision.
- After sampling everything packed since the last visit, the inspector takes the sample stamp and proceeds to the next packing operation where the same procedure is followed. This enables the inspector to readily identify the pallets that should be sampled and inspected upon return to the packing operation.

Other important features of the **SAMPLE STAMP** procedure include:

- The length of time an inspector may be away from an individual packing operation will be coordinated through the FSIS supervisory personnel and the FPM.
- Inspectors must draw representative samples and inspect any product packed during their absence.
- Packers must not ship uninspected product prior to final inspection and release by the inspection service.
- A supervisory inspector may do random checks in the absence of the assigned inspector.

The inspector must maintain control of PLI stamping devices at all times.

If a participant does not abide by program guidelines and requirements, they will no longer be allowed to obtain PLI without the presence of an inspector during operating hours. For the subsequent packing season, USDA and FSIS will review the participant's performance prior to approving the type of PLI method to be used in the facility.

Exceptions to the procedures listed above may be made when a packing operation is under an alternative inspection program. The applicant, operating under an alternative program with an [MOU](#), will have the responsibility to maintain proper security and control of PLI imprinting

devices. FSIS and USDA will periodically audit packing operations for compliance with PLI requirements.

ORDERING AND RESPONSIBILITY

Information Required on PLI Imprints

The following information is required for each method of PLI imprinting:

- “Federal-State” or “Fed-State” or “USDA” permanently affixed;
 - In the case of Federal-State stamps, the state name where product is inspected and stamped (e.g., “IDAHO” or the postal abbreviation “ID”);
- A permanently affixed accountability number with at least one digit (e.g., “X”, “00”, “A1A” etc.) which imprints on a container, sticker, or tape with other PLI markings (refer to the section “Ordering and Accountability of Stamps/Dies” for procedures on multiple dies with an identical imprint); and
- A changeable number that provides a link to a specific certificate or serially numbered notesheet is required. A date or sequential numbering code is a common method to use (e.g., “06200”). **If an applicant packs multiple grades on the same day using the same brand in containers that are not grade marked, a single date code is insufficient and some other identifiable number must be used to distinguish lots.** Packers may use their own coding method to differentiate lots, provided it is approved by the state and FPM to be a recognized marking for PLI.

Prior to 2013 use of the Cornucopia logo was optional on all stamping mechanisms. Existing stamps may still be used, but new orders may not bear the cornucopia logo. Refer to [Figures 12](#) and [13](#) for examples of PLI imprints.

Ordering Official Imprinting Devices

Hand stamps and automatic in-line imprinting devices are most commonly used for PLI. Increasing numbers of packing operations are acquiring ink jet computer controlled printers to imprint other information (e.g., dates, lot, grower, packing line, packing time, bar codes) including PLI. The SCI policy for acquiring official stamp imprinting devices (dies), stamping equipment, and control of official devices is as follows:

- PLI policy requires all shipping point imprinting devices (dies) to be ordered through the FSIS district or area manager with the knowledge of the FPM. [Form FV-24](#) must be used for ordering.
- Official mechanisms and stamp imprinting devices used by Federal graders (destination markets) must be ordered from the Depot.

- Packers may purchase their stamping mechanism directly from suppliers. The ordering, receipt and placement of imprinting devices must be handled through the FSIS district supervisor. Packers, working through FSIS, must assure that the proper imprinting device (compatible with stamping mechanism) is acquired. Official imprinting devices are accountable equipment and, once purchased, must be controlled by FSIS and USDA.
- In PIQ or other approved programs, official imprinting devices must be ordered through FSIS and paid for by the participant unless alternative arrangements are made. The participant, working through FSIS, must assure that the proper imprinting device (compatible with stamping mechanism) is acquired. Once the devices are delivered, participants have the responsibility for security, control and use of the devices under a documented PLI integrity system. The USDA/FSIS will periodically audit the participant for compliance to PLI requirements.

Ordering and Accountability of Stamps/Dies

A. Stamps/Dies and Other Items for PLI

Purchases of in-line stamp dies are usually charged to the packer unless alternative arrangements have been made. Although the packer may pay for an imprinting device that references USDA/FSIS, the placement and receipt of the order must be handled through the State and FPM. The dies, once manufactured and shipped to the specified location (packing house or state office), must remain under the complete control of FSIS. **Exception:** A company under an alternative inspection program must order dies through the State and FPM. Receipt of the dies is the responsibility of FSIS. The company is responsible for placement, control and security of PLI imprinting devices under a documented PLI integrity system which FSIS and USDA will periodically audit.

Hand stamps are typically paid for by the Federal or State agency. Such purchases must be shipped from the manufacturer directly to the State Program Manager/Supervisor.

B. Multiple Dies with Same Permanent Number

All PLI imprinting devices must have a permanently affixed accountability number that imprints on a container along with other required PLI information. If a packer needs multiple dies, each with the same information, USDA recommends that each die also have an additional unique accountability digit that also prints on the container. For example, a packer needs three stamp dies with the same information for three different packing lines. The permanent accountability numbers may be 1-123, 2-123, 3-123 or A-123, B-123, C-123. This will provide each stamp with its own unique digit to facilitate proper accountability. Duplicate stamp faces will be permitted provided that:

1. Detailed accountability records are maintained to track the issuance, status, and location of **each** stamp number and corresponding duplicate die;
2. All duplicate dies must be kept in locked storage under custody of the accountable individual until issued or destroyed;
3. A duplicate stamp face may be issued **only** when the original or previously issued die has been returned and destroyed by FSIS;
4. Whenever a die, or its duplicate, is lost, stolen, or otherwise missing, **all** duplicate dies must be returned to the accountable supervisor. If the missing die is not located within 30 days of reported disappearance, **all remaining copies of that die are to be destroyed and the permanent accountability number is never to be reused on a PLI imprinting device; and**
5. Periodic inventories of all stamps and duplicate dies must be performed by FSIS supervisors and FPM and furnished to HQ upon request.

Ordering Procedures

A. District Supervisor/Manager

The FSIS district supervisor/manager will order stamps and other PLI items (seals, preprinted tags, stickers and tape), assign accountability numbers for stamps and distribute these items to appropriate packing operations or inspectors. They are also responsible for the inventory of all items assigned to inspectors under their control. Periodic checks should be made to ensure up-to-date accountability. Each inspection office that controls PLI devices must perform an annual inventory of the devices. Offices should have the inventory available during BIQMS reviews or office checks/surveys.

B. Federal Program Managers

The FPM is responsible for assigning a permanent number for individual Federal-State hand stamps and must ensure that accountability numbers are not duplicated. This responsibility may be delegated to the FSIS district supervisor or other FSIS supervisory personnel.

C. Officer-in-Charge (OIC)

The terminal market OIC is responsible for all hand stamps issued to their office. OICs must order inspection stamps from the Depot by completing the [Order Form for Specialty Crops Inspection Division Equipment and Miscellaneous Items \(FV-380\)](#). Fax or mail the order form to the Depot, which will issue replacement dies

or stamps with dies. The roller stamp mechanism and die number is recorded in Depot accountability records and reported to HQ through your chain of command.

A transmittal slip will accompany all stamp and die orders. Upon receipt, the OIC signs and returns a copy of the slip to the Depot. The item(s) will be stored in a locked storage facility, pending issuance. Use the [Positive Lot Identification Stamp\(s\)/Die\(s\) Accountability Sheet \(FV-371\)](#) to enter the date an item is received and/or stored. To safeguard and control the item(s), the OIC must obtain a signature on property records to acknowledge receipt and transfer of responsibility when issuing accountable property to inspectors.

Five Steps for Use of Positive Lot Identification Stamp(s)/Die(s) Request Form

The [Positive Lot Identification Stamp\(s\)/Die\(s\) Request Form \(FV-24\)](#) is a one page document designed for use when placing an order to a manufacturer for accountable PLI items such as hand stamp and roller stamp dies. It is available from the Depot in packages of 50 each and may be reproduced locally. Complete the form, as follows:

A. Step One

Under “**A. Stamp Description,**” the state or district supervisor will ensure that the manufacturer’s name, address and packing house name and address is neatly written or typed in the spaces provided before obtaining a company representative’s signature. The number of hand stamps or in-line printing dies being ordered, the house number and district supervisors’ assigned district number or inspection number must be entered. The district supervisor will assign die accountability number(s) and then sign and date under “**C. State/District Authorization.**” To authorize the stamp purchase, the signature of an authorized company representative is required under “**B. Applicant’s Request.**” The district supervisor must retain a copy of the form for three years. Forward one copy of the form to the FPM.

B. Step Two

Upon receipt and verification of the state or district supervisor’s request, and confirmation of the die accountability numbers, the FPM signs and dates the area provided under “**D. Federal Authorization**” (this task may be delegated to the FSIS district manager). The form is then forwarded to the stamp manufacturer.

C. Step Three

The manufacturer completes the stamp/die order and fills in “**E. Manufacturer’s Statement**” and inserts a copy of the completed [FV-24](#) in the shipping package and forwards the order to the district supervisor’s office.

D. Step Four

Upon receipt of a stamp/die order, the district supervisor will verify the number of stamps ordered and die accountability numbers, then sign and date in **“F. Local/District Receipt”** block.

NOTE: If the order is not received within **20 days**, the district supervisor should contact the manufacturer. The FPM should be promptly notified if the shipment is lost or the manufacturer did not receive the order.

E. Step Five

The district supervisor delivers the stamp(s)/die(s) to the appropriate company along with two copies of the [FV-24](#) form. The FSIS inspector assigned to the packing house or an authorized firm representative will verify the order with the district supervisor and then sign and date in **“G. Authorized PIQ-PLIDS Firm Representative/Inspector’s Receipt”** (FPM and district copies). Die accountability numbers and all other pertinent information must be entered on the stamp ordering/accountability form and become part of the record.

Ordering/Accountability of Seals

Seals may be ordered by the district supervisor through the state and FPM. If seals are purchased from a manufacturer, it will be necessary to obtain a written affidavit attesting that seals (inclusive numbers) produced by the firm that bear permanent accountability numbers are the only seals produced by this firm that reference USDA/FSIS. FSIS does not have to obtain a manufacturer’s affidavit for seals ordered from the Depot.

Regardless of how seals are obtained, it is necessary to maintain an accountability record to include the following:

- Inclusive numbers of seals received in shipment;
- Date seals were received; and
- Date and inclusive numbers of assigned seals and to whom assigned.

REFERENCE LINKS

**Version Date
(Printed for distribution)**

- Accountability and Care of “Officially Sampled” Stamps:** _____
<\\sfvdc0726b\filecodeshare\Administration\AccountabilityCareOfficiallySampledStamps.pdf>
- FV-24: Positive Lot Identification Stamp(s)/Die(s) Request Form:** _____
<http://eforms.ams.usda.gov/metastormpdf/fv24/>
- FV-371: Positive Lot Identification Stamp(s)/Die(s) Accountability Sheet:** _____
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=stelprdc5109514>
- FV-380: Order Form for Specialty Crops Inspection Division Equipment, and Miscellaneous Items:** _____
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5103545&acct=procdgrdcert>

Checked Materials have been printed from the links in this manual and included for reference.

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Exhibit C – FV-24: Positive Lot Identification Stamp(s)/Die(s) Request Form



FORM APPROVED BY OMB No. 0581-0125

**SPECIALTY CROPS INSPECTION DIVISION
POSITIVE LOT IDENTIFICATION STAMP(S)/DIE(S) REQUEST FORM**


According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB number. The valid OMB number for this information is 0581-0125. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing the instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

A. Stamp Description

Stamp Location (Applicant): _____

Stamp Manufacturer: _____

Stamp Manufacturer: Please reproduce, at the Applicant's expense, _____ hand stamps or _____ in-line coder printing dies bearing the approved USDA Federal-State Inspection logo with the following permanently affixed accountability number(s).

 _____ Inches _____ Inches	House Number	District Number	Inspection Number	Office/Market Number
	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____

B. Applicant's Request

As a duly authorized agent of the above firm (Applicant), I hereby request that the above stamp/die order be approved and produced. I/We agree to be responsible for all charges assessed by the stamp manufacturer for this order. I also acknowledge that all stamps/dies ordered are the exclusive property of the United States Department of Agriculture and/or the _____ Federal-State Inspection Service.

Applicant's Authorization Signature _____
Date of Request

E-Mail Address: _____

C. State/District Authorization

I have reviewed the above request and give approval for the order to be processed.

State/District Authorization Signature _____
Date of Request

D. Federal Authorization

All stamps/dies which make reference to or imply that a product has been USDA or Federal-State inspected are accountable items and are the property of the United States Department of Agriculture. No stamps/dies shall be produced without specific written consent of the Federal Program Manager/Supervisor.

Federal Program Manager/Supervisor's Signature _____
Date of Authorization

NOTE: These stamps/dies are to be mailed to the Federal-State District Supervisor who will distribute them.

Mail Stamps/Dies to: _____

E. Manufacturer's Statement

I certify that each stamp/die produced by this firm bears a permanent accountability number and the only stamps/dies produced by this firm with markings referencing the USDA and/or the _____ Federal-State Inspection Service are those that have been authorized in writing by the USDA.

Manufacturer's Signature of Compliance _____
Title _____
Date of Shipment

F. Local/District Receipt

I have received _____ (quantity) stamp/dies bearing the following permanently affixed accountability number(s).

District Supervisor's Signature _____
Date Received

G. Authorized PIQ-PLIDS Firm Representative/Inspector's Receipt

I have received the above listed stamps/dies and they are now my responsibility.

Authorized Signature _____
Date Received

APPENDIX II: MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING

Memorandum of Understanding (A)

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AGRICULTURAL
MARKETING SERVICE, FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAMS, SPECIALTY
CROPS INSPECTION DIVISION, FEDERAL-STATE INSPECTION PROGRAM**

**Contract of Agreement for Usage of
Positive Lot Identification (PLI) In-Line Stamping Devices (10/00)**

This agreement covers PLI device number(s) _____.

I (We), _____, located at _____,
(insert name of applicant) (insert main office or headquarters)

hereinafter referred to as the applicant, hereby make this application for usage of PLI stamping devices commencing on _____ or as soon thereafter as appears practicable to the Federal-State Inspection Program (FSIS) in _____ continuing from season to season except as terminated by Section I-G of this contract, and to cover lots of fresh fruits and vegetables as we may designate at:

Location of Facility	Products Covered

- I. It is mutually agreed that with respect to:
 - A. PLI device imprints and usage - The applicant will comply with the policies, procedures and specifications set out in this agreement, PLI instruction manual, and all inspection manuals, guidelines, memos or visual aids for the product(s) being stamped;
 - B. The PLI device must print the following information:
 - 1. "Federal-State" or "USDA";
 - 2. The state's name or abbreviation;
 - 3. A permanent accountability number assigned by FSIS;
 - 4. A date code or other identifiable number. Separate date codes or numbers must be used when multiple grades of the same label are packed;
 - C. FSIS will retain complete oversight and control of the device and its use. The applicant will ensure that the device is used only during packing operations of officially sampled and inspected product and will be secured when an inspector is not on the premises;
 - D. Devices not legibly printing the required information must be immediately corrected by the applicant;
 - E. Imprinted PLI information shall not be affixed to a commodity that is not being certified by FSIS. This shall include the re-styling of packages previously inspected. PLI imprints on non-certified commodities or any other abuse of the PLI privilege will result in immediate confiscation of the imprinting device(s) by FSIS;
 - F. Confiscation of any PLI device will be for the remainder of the current packing season and/or until it can be demonstrated that integrity has been restored to the system. If the applicant requires PLI stamping during that time, FSIS will provide a hand-applied PLI imprint which will remain under FSIS supply and control.

- G. USDA Compliance or PACA action may be initiated as a result of any violation of PLI usage guidelines. Additional penalties may apply for flagrant or repeated violations.
- H. Termination of usage – the applicant may use the in-line PLI device(s) until such privilege is suspended, withdrawn or terminated by:
 1. Mutual consent;
 2. Either party giving the other party 7 days written notice specifying the date of termination;
 3. Immediate Confiscation (see F);
 4. FSIS at any time due to bankruptcy of the applicant, closing of the business of the applicant or change in controlling ownership of the facility; or
 5. FSIS at any time, acting pursuant to any applicable laws, rules, or regulations which debar the applicant from receiving benefits of the service.
- II. Appeal Rights – appeal requests must be made in writing and include the reason for appeal and an explanation of the circumstances. This request must be filed with the local FSIS office within 24 hours of confiscation.
- III. No member of congress, or resident Commissioner, shall be admitted to any share or part of this agreement or to any benefit to arise therefrom, unless it is made with a corporation for its general benefit.
- IV. This application, when approved, shall constitute a contract between the undersigned applicant, FSIS in _____ and Specialty Crops Inspection (SCI) Division in accordance with the terms and conditions provided therein and shall supersede any previously executed contract(s) for use of PLI devices at the designated facility.

(insert state)

APPROVED FOR THE APPLICANT:

APPROVED FOR _____ FSIS:
(insert state)

BY (Signature)

BY (Signature)

TITLE

TITLE

DATE

DATE

APPROVED FOR AMS, SCI:

BY (Signature)

TITLE

DATE

Memorandum of Understanding (B)

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AGRICULTURAL
MARKETING SERVICE, FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAMS, SPECIALTY
CROPS INSPECTION DIVISION, FEDERAL-STATE INSPECTION PROGRAM**

**Contract of Agreement for Usage of Positive Lot Identification (PLI) Hand Stamping
Devices under an Approved Alternative Inspection Program (10/00)**

This agreement covers PLI device number(s) _____.

I (We), _____, located at _____,
(insert name of applicant) (insert main office or headquarters)
 hereinafter referred to as the applicant, hereby make this application for usage of PLI stamping devices commencing on _____ or as soon thereafter as appears practicable to the Federal-State Inspection Service (FSIS) in _____ continuing from season to season except as terminated by Section I-G of this contract, and to cover lots of fresh fruits and vegetables as we may designate at:

Location of Facility	Products Covered

- I. It is mutually agreed that with respect to:
 - A. PLI device imprints and usage - The applicant will comply with the policies, procedures and specifications set out in this agreement, PLI instruction manual, and all inspection manuals, guidelines, memos or visual aids for the product(s) being stamped;
 - B. The PLI device must print the following information:
 - 1. "Federal-State" or "USDA";
 - 2. The state's name or abbreviation;
 - 3. A permanent accountability number assigned by FSIS;
 - 4. A date code or other identifiable number. Separate date codes or numbers must be used when multiple grades of the same label are packed;
 - C. FSIS will retain complete oversight and control of the device and its use. The applicant will ensure that the device is used only during packing operations of officially sampled and inspected product and will be secured when an inspector is not on the premises;
 - D. Devices not legibly printing the required information must be immediately corrected by the applicant;
 - E. Imprinted PLI information shall not be affixed to a commodity that is not being certified by FSIS. This shall include the re-styling of packages previously inspected. PLI imprints on non-certified commodities or any other abuse of the PLI privilege will result in immediate confiscation of the imprinting device(s) by FSIS;
 - F. Confiscation of any PLI device will be for the remainder of the current packing season and/or until it can be demonstrated that integrity has been restored to the system. If the applicant requires PLI stamping during that time, FSIS will provide a hand-applied PLI imprint which will remain under FSIS supply and control.
 - G. USDA Compliance or PACA action may be initiated as a result of any violation of PLI usage guidelines. Additional penalties may apply for flagrant or repeated violations.

- H. Termination of usage – the applicant may use the hand stamping PLI device(s) until such privilege is suspended, withdrawn or terminated by:
 - 1. Mutual consent;
 - 2. Either party giving the other party 7 days written notice specifying the date of termination;
 - 3. Immediate Confiscation (see F);
 - 4. FSIS at any time due to bankruptcy of the applicant, closing of the business of the applicant or change in controlling ownership of the facility; or
 - 5. FSIS at any time, acting pursuant to any applicable laws, rules, or regulations which debar the applicant from receiving benefits of the service.
- II. Appeal Rights – appeal requests must be made in writing and include the reason for appeal and an explanation of the circumstances. This request must be filed with the local FSIS office within 24 hours of confiscation.
- III. No member of congress, or resident Commissioner, shall be admitted to any share or part of this agreement or to any benefit to arise therefrom, unless it is made with a corporation for its general benefit.
- IV. This application, when approved, shall constitute a contract between the undersigned applicant, FSIS in _____ and Specialty Crops Inspection (SCI) Division in accordance with the terms and conditions provided therein and shall supersede any previously executed contract(s) for use of PLI devices at the designated facility.

(insert state)

APPROVED FOR THE APPLICANT:

APPROVED FOR _____ FSIS:
(insert state)

BY (*Signature*)

BY (*Signature*)

TITLE

TITLE

DATE

DATE

APPROVED FOR AMS, SCI:

BY (*Signature*)

TITLE

DATE