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### **Plural forms of governance for complying with sanitary standards**

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Agri-food firms deal with multiple and stricter sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards and regulations that result in additional costs of compliance. This issue has drawn the attention of professionals, scholars and policy makers. Most researches have focused on the measurement of the impact of standards on commerce and revenues, the role of the private sector on the increasing development of new sanitary schemes, among others. Our analysis seeks to throw light deeper into the firm level. We analyze how firms conducting international transactions of perishable goods manage its constraints while seeking to convert SPS compliance into signals of corporate reliability to place them in a better position in the global marketplace. We study the European importers of multi-origin fresh fruits, with emphasis on apples. We apply a multi-case qualitative analysis of data collected from 18 importing firms (multinationals, category management procurement, retailers, among others). Drawing on new developments of transactional cost economics, our findings show that complexity and strategic behavior (Ménard, 2013) are determinants for the choice of governance. Complexity emerges from the manifold layers of public and private standards and the difficulty for measuring and controlling sanitary quality at the upstream and downstream stages. Strategic behavior emerges from the decision by firms to position in multiple or single marketing channels (supermarkets, wholesalers, niches). Both coupled determinants explain the complementary existence of plural forms of governance from spot markets, vertical integration and different contractual arrangements more or less formalized and standardized.