Official Industry Notice: Updated Tomato Reference Standards

For more than half a century, tomato processors worldwide have used USDA and BCR reference tiles to ensure consistent color measurement. However, significant regulatory and supply-chain changes mean these tiles can no longer be produced or supported. To protect global consistency in tomato color grading, HunterLab is providing the following important industry update.

What Has Changed

- **USDA discontinued production of soft tomato standards**—the foundation of USDA tile calibration.
- **USDA metal tiles have not been produced since 2014**, and the USDA no longer supports TPS tile calibration.
- **BCR-400 ceramic tiles were manufactured only once, in 1991**, and the European Union does not offer replacements.
- **Global RoHS bans** prohibit the pigments originally used to manufacture USDA and BCR tiles—meaning **no new USDA or BCR-type tiles can ever be produced**.

Why This Matters

- TPS, a/b ratio, and L*, a*, b* readings depend on **correct tile + instrument pairings**.
- Using legacy tiles on newer instruments such as the ColorFlex EZ or Agera will produce **incorrect results**, sometimes creating commercial disputes or non-alignment between suppliers and buyers.
- Brix level must correspond to tile design (8.5 °Brix for USDA tiles; 12 °Brix for BCR tiles). Using the wrong combination **produces inaccurate readings.**

HunterLab's Solution

To ensure long-term stability for the industry, HunterLab developed the **HunterLab Certified Tomato Reference Standard – #L02-1014-594 (2015)**:

- RoHS-compliant pigments
- Calibrated and certified by **NIST**
- Assigned with documented uncertainties
- Designed to match the BCR a/b ratio while supporting USDA TPS correlation
- Validated through a multi-year correlation study with **Ingomar Packing Company**

What You Should Do Now

- If you are using **USDA metal tiles** or **BCR tiles**, please discontinue use for hitching.
- Replace all legacy tiles with the **HunterLab Certified Tomato Reference Standard – Tomato**.
- Use the correct TPS equations associated with your **specific instrument platform**.
- Ensure all facilities within your supply chain use the **same tile type**, as tiles are not interchangeable.

The Path Forward

This tile is now the **only active, certified, traceable tomato reference standard available worldwide** and is fully compatible with modern metrics including TPS, a/b ratio, and L*, a*, b*.

For more information or assistance migrating from legacy tiles, please contact: **support@hunterlab.com**