

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY  
USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT  
POLICY

Required Report - public distribution

**Date:** 4/8/2012

**GAIN Report Number:** Oman 2011-02

## Oman

### Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards - Narrative

### FAIRS Country Report - Update

**Approved By:**

Jude Akhidenor

**Prepared By:**

Mohamed Taha

**Report Highlights:**

Oman, as a member of the GCC countries, adopts all the Gulf Standard Organization food import regulations, including food products shelf life. This report provides detailed information on the Sultanate of Oman's food import regulations.

## **Section I. Food Laws:**

### **GCC-Wide Developments**

The Sultanate of Oman is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, the USDA's Office of Agricultural Affairs (OAA), Dubai, covers the rest of the countries collectively known as the GCC-5.

**Food Standards:** In 2008, Yemen became the newest member of the Gulf Standards Organization (GSO), bringing the number of GSO member countries to seven. GSO is responsible for developing food and non food standards in the GCC. The GSO food standards committee, which is chaired by Qatar, has been actively updating GCC food standards over the past few years. The committee has been working to harmonize existing standards within the guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius, ISO and other international organizations. However, in some cases, differences still exist between some of the proposed new standards and existing international guidelines.

In theory, each GCC member should notify the WTO of any proposed new standard. However, typically, one or two of the member countries usually submit the notification. Interested parties who review these notifications should bear in mind that, while a notification may be submitted by a single GCC member, the proposed standard will eventually apply to all GCC member countries. Once a new standard is approved by the GSO food standards committee, each member country officially adopts the standard, thus making it a national standard as well as a GSO standard.

The first GSO shelf life and labeling standards were issued in the nineties. In 2007, the first review of both standards was completed and approved. The current standards brought the GCC into closer compliance with the guidelines of Codex Alimentarius and, for the most part, offer more flexible requirements for importing foods from foreign markets.

In 2011, another updated standards was completed and notified by Bahrain to the TWO. The new draft standards with only limited changes to the existing standards are being studied by WTO member countries.

The GSO has created 3 subcommittees to follow-up on food related issues:

Bio-technology and organic food subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by the UAE

Labeling subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by Oman.

Additives subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by Saudi Arabia

The GSO also, when the need arises, forms working groups to address specific issues. For instance, a working group has developed two Halal standards. The first standard outlines general Halal requirements while the other outlines requirements for approving foreign centers, certifications and Halal labeling.

**Customs and Tariffs:** In January 2003, the "GCC Unified Customs Law and Single Customs Tariff" (UCL) was released. The UCL established a unified customs tariff of five percent on nearly all processed food products. Under the UCL, some food products including live animals, fresh fruits and vegetables, some seafood, grains, flour, tea, sugar, spices and seeds for planting are exempt from tariffs. It also established a single entry point policy. In other words, a product entering any GCC member market would pay the appropriate duty only at point of entry and would then be permitted duty free transit among GCC member countries. In practice, this policy is employed only with unopened containers transshipped between GCC markets. Partial shipments tend to be subject to the five percent import duty again in the country of destination. However, it is expected that all goods, even partial shipments from opened containers, will eventually receive single-entry treatment once customs procedures are fully unified within the next few years.

**Food Import Procedures:** In 2007, the GCC Food Safety Committee developed a "Guide for Food Import Procedures for the GCC Countries." This guide was meant to unify the applied procedures for clearing food consignments, as well as unify the required import certificates for different types of foods. The intent was to help facilitate the movement of food products within the GCC once customs unification is fully implemented. In 2008, the GCC member countries decided to postpone the application of the guide to further study it to ensure it fully complies with the guidelines of international organizations such as Codex Alimentarius, World Animal Health Organization and International Plant Protection Consortium. The guide is still being reviewed by GCC members.

## Oman Food Regulations:

The Sultanate of Oman has adopted the revised GSO Standard (9/2007) for Labeling and GSO (150/2007) for Shelf Life. The Directorate for Specifications and Measurements (DSM), Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCAL) is responsible for formulating food safety regulations and standards. Regulations become law via official decrees issued by the Minister of Commerce and Industry. Usually, a grace period of up to six months is granted prior to enforcement of new regulations.

Regulatory enforcement of food products is divided between the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the various municipalities within the Sultanate of Oman. MOA is responsible for inspection of live animals and plants, red meats, poultry meat, table egg, dairy products, agricultural materials, timber, grains, fresh fruits, fresh vegetables and other unprocessed agricultural products at all points of entry into the country. The Health Quarantine Department within MOH is responsible for the inspection of imported semi- and fully processed food products, including sugar. Local government or “municipalities” may post officials at ports of entry, but their role in inspection of imported foods is very marginal. The municipalities are primarily involved in the regulation of food through inspection of products available in local wholesale and retail markets.

Minor compliance disputes may be settled by providing a letter confirming that such mistake will be avoided in the future. Other bigger disputes are discussed in a committee comprised of representatives from the MOA, the Standard and Measurements Directorate of the MOCAL, the MOH, the Chamber of Commerce and appropriate municipality bureaus. Trade contacts report that consignments rejected for minor labeling and other infractions may be granted a one-time waiver provided the product is safe for human consumption. To facilitate product entry, the U.S. supplier is strongly encouraged to work closely with the local importer to obtain advance label approval, particularly for new-to-market products, from the DSM of the MOCAL; to ensure that the exported U.S. product complies with local food regulations/standards.

Oman implemented a free trade agreement with the United States in January 2009. Products made in the United States that are consumed or utilized in Oman are exempt from the 5 percent GCC tariff.

Oman is currently working on consolidating its food safety authorities under an FDA type legislative body. Also, it has created a “Consumer Protection Authority (CPA)” which reports directly to the administration of the Ministerial Cabinet.

## **Section II. Labeling Requirements:**

Oman adopted the newly developed standards GSO (9/2007) and GSO (150/2007) for labeling and shelf life. Food labels must include the following information in Arabic on the original label or primary packaging:

- Product and brand name
- Country of origin
- Ingredients, in descending order of proportion
- Additives, if any
- Origin of animal fat (e.g., beef fat), if applicable 1/
- Net content in metric units (volume in case of liquids)
- Production and expiry dates
- The name and address of the manufacturer, producer, distributor, importer, exporter or vendor shall be declared on the label
- Special storage, transportation and preparation instructions, if any.

1/ Animal fat should be sourced only from Halal slaughtered animals.

Products shipped in bulk must meet GSO labeling requirements and must be accompanied by small, easy-to-handle samples for possible laboratory verification. For example, edible oils imported in bulk must be accompanied by a small (one liter) sample of the product. The sample container must contain a label that meets all labeling requirements.

Bilingual labels are required, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g. Arabic/English). Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of the original Arabic or bilingual label provided the sticker:

- Complies with all labeling requirements and is applied by the manufacturer.
- Does not conceal required information on the original label.

- Does not contradict information on the original label.
- Is extremely difficult to remove.

If a consignment arrives without an Arabic label, the Ministry of Commerce may waive this requirement on a one-time basis or it may request that the importer add Arabic language stickers, in Oman, on the package before releasing the product. Products imported specifically for the hotel, restaurant and institutional sectors may be exempted from the Arabic label. Always confirm with your importer before shipping.

Perishable products such as eggs and dairy products that have a shelf life of three months or less must carry both production and expiry dates. Minimally processed products such as rice, dry beans, and grain with shelf lives greater than three months are allowed to only carry a production date. Dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at time of production, using indelible ink. "Sell by", "best before" or "use by date", are also acceptable formats in lieu of expiry date. Stickers with date stamps imprinted are not accepted. While technically these dates must be printed in Arabic, dates printed in English or English/Arabic are accepted. If printed in multiple languages, the date must be the same. Any discrepancy in the date will lead to rejection of the product/shipment.

Bar coding is not permitted in lieu of expiry dates. Dates must be printed in the following order, as determined by the shelf life of the product, in either digit or text format:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf life of 3 months or less
- Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than 3 months

Specialty food product labels: items such as diet, health and infant foods, must contain detailed ingredient information (vitamins, minerals, supplements, additives including food colorings, preservatives, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams, health warnings if any and instructions for proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is permitted. Baby foods must be inspected and approved by the Medicine Control Section, MOH. U.S. suppliers should verify with the importer's agent if an import permit is required for the particular specialty food shipment.

Bulk or institutional sized containers must comply with labeling requirements. P/E dates are not required for certain products, including fresh fruits and vegetables as indicated by OS 246/1993. However, importers will often request that production date information be included on the product. Expiry dates are not required for products deemed to be extremely shelf stable such as salt and sugar. Products arriving clearly marked as samples not intended for sale are exempt from label regulations.

### **Section III. Packaging and Container Regulations:**

General requirements for packaged special foods are covered under GS 654/1996, GS 839/97, and GS 1024/2000). Boxes for fresh fruits and vegetables are regulated under GS 124/1990. GSO 1683/2008 - Food Packages Part II was issued to address general requirements for plastic packaging.

Packaging standards are periodically reviewed by GSO for updates to harmonize with international standards issued by Codex, ISO and other international bodies.

### **Section IV. Food Additives Regulations:**

In general, Oman accepts any food or coloring additive approved by the Codex Alimentarius, even those additives that are not listed in GS 23/1998. Under GS 23/1998, the common name and index number of color additives contained in a product must be noted on the label. European "E" numbers are permitted. (See Appendix A for a list of approved color additives).

Oman will recognize a non-listed color or color additive if approved under Codex or other International Standard.

### **Section V. Pesticides and Other Contaminants:**

Oman follows GSO 382/1994 for "Maximum Limits of Pesticide Residues in Agricultural and Food Products - Part I" and GSO 383/1994 for "Maximum Limits of Pesticide Residues in Agricultural and Food Products - Part II". Codex Alimentarius standards are used as guidelines. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries monitors for residues.

The GSO has also developed Standard GSO CAC MRL 02:2009 for the Maximum Residue Limits for Veterinary Drugs in

Foods.

## **Section VI. Other Regulations and Requirements:**

All food consignments must be accompanied by:

1) A health certificate issued by the appropriate government agency in the country of origin that attests to the product's fitness for human consumption. Oman Consulate in the United States must notarize this certificate. If the latter is not present, a notarized certificate by another Arab diplomatic mission is acceptable. If a consignment arrives without a notarized certificate, a sample of the shipment will be taken to the food laboratory for analysis to confirm that the shipment is fit for human consumption. This procedure will take a week and if proved to be fit the shipment will be released. Generally, health officials strongly recommend that the health certificate, be notarized by the Omani Embassy/Consulate to avoid any complications and delays.

2) A Halal slaughter certificate issued by an approved Islamic center in the country of origin for all meat and poultry products must be notarized by the Oman Embassy or Consulate in the United States. If the latter is not present a notarized certificate by another Arab diplomatic mission in the United States is acceptable.

Poultry products are randomly tested for salmonella. Omani and GCC guidelines allow for a maximum tolerance of salmonella in 20 percent of the samples tested.

While alcoholic beverages are restricted to eight import-licensed companies, only two companies are licensed for retail. Non-alcoholic beer requires an import license issued from the MOCAI and mandatory testing at point-of-entry.

Pork and pork products can be imported, but are subject to a 100 percent tariff. Pork and pork products must be sold in a designated section of the retail outlet with a sign "Pork products, not for Muslims".

No special packaging or container size requirements exist for food products. Radiation and dioxin-free certificates are not required for U.S. origin foods. Oman does not have any regulation governing the importation of irradiated food products, but such products have encountered problems at Custom entry points in the past.

Municipality food inspectors randomly check food products in wholesale and retail markets regardless of origin. In addition to a visual label inspection, a sample may be analyzed to verify the accuracy of the label versus actual product content. If a discrepancy is found, the product is removed from the market and destroyed at the supplier's expense. If the infraction is severe, i.e., the label does not identify a pork ingredient or is intentionally altered or falsified, the product may be banned from the market for a specified period of time, usually six to twelve months.

## **Section VII. Other Specific Standards:**

Food samples - No special requirements exist. Samples destined for food shows and other types of promotional events are exempt from local label and shelf-life regulations. Samples must be accompanied by health certificates and invoices that state the products are not for sale and are of no commercial value.

Infant, diet and health foods – No special regulations govern importation. Such products must comply with labeling regulations. Baby foods must be registered at the Ministry of Health which will issue an import permit for every shipment prior to Customs clearance.

## **Section VIII. Copyright and/or Trademark Laws:**

Oman Ministerial Decree No. 38/2000 provided legal recognition of international copyright laws and legal protection on trademarks. The Ministry of Commerce is responsible for brand registration, which usually can be completed in a short time.

In 1996, an agency decree was issued that permitted the importation of food products by importers other than the registered agent. Oman permits parallel imports.

## **Section IX. Import Procedures:**

The Port of Sultan Qaboos in Muscat is Oman's main port. Several expansions and modernization to the infrastructure of the port have taken place in recent years, particularly at the container terminal. Port inspection services (foods and customs) are

improving with the average time required to clear food consignments at 1-2 hours.

The Port of Salalah is undergoing a major expansion and development. This port facilitates Oman's trade with Yemen and other East African countries. The Port of Sohar, the country's third largest port, is also undergoing a rapid expansion and hopes to capitalize on its proximity to other GCC markets.

Import documentation required for food items includes:

- Commercial invoice
- Packing list
- Bill of Lading
- Health certificate (see section VI, must be notarized)
- Halal slaughter certificate for meat and poultry products (see section VI, must be notarized)
- Certificate of Origin
- Import permit from the respective Ministry

The MOA issues import permits for agricultural products under its jurisdiction - live animals and plants, red meat, poultry meat, agricultural materials, timber, grains and other unprocessed agricultural products.

No appeal process exists for food products rejected as unfit for human consumption. Rejected consignments must be destroyed or exported.

Products rejected for minor labeling infractions may be allowed entry upon appeal. New-to-market and ethnic food products are normally allowed entry on a one-time basis, despite minor labeling infractions.

P/E date related infractions (i.e., missing production and expiry dates - dates printed in the wrong order and dates printed on stickers rather than original labels) normally result in rejection of the product. Disputed products may be stored at the port of entry or under bond outside the port until a final resolution is reached.

Arabic language labeling is required. However, the Ministry of Commerce will allow the importer to add Arabic language stickers to the label to permit the sale of the product.

Processed or value added food products are subject to a five percent import duty, ad valorem CIF basis. Pork and pork products, alcoholic beverages and dried lemons are assessed a 100 percent import duty. Bananas and edible oils in retail pack are levied a 25 percent protective tariff while dates are assessed a 20 percent tariff. GCC origin products are exempt from all import duties. Oman has a free trade agreement with the United States. Imports of nearly all U.S. products are duty free provided the products stay in Oman.

## **Appendix I. Government Regulatory Agency Contacts:**

Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al Khusaibi, Director General  
Directorate of Specifications and Measurements  
Ministry of Commerce & Industry  
P.O. Box 550, Postal Code 113  
Muscat, Oman  
Phone: (968) 24 813-238; Fax: (968) 24 815- 992  
E-mail: [dgsm123@omantel.net.om](mailto:dgsm123@omantel.net.om)

Mr. Saleh Al Zadgali, Director of Specifications  
Directorate General for Specifications and Measurements  
Ministry of Commerce & Industry  
P.O. Box 550 - Postal Code 113  
Muscat, Oman  
Phone: (968) 24 813-238; Fax: (968) 24 815- 992

E-mail: [sms\\_9000@hotmail.com](mailto:sms_9000@hotmail.com)

Mr. Sulaiman H. Al Yahmadi, Director  
Health Quarantine  
Ministry of Health  
P.O. Box 393 - Postal Code 113  
Muscat, Oman  
Phone: (968) 24 714-233; Fax: (968) 24 602-161

Eng. Ali Al Kulaibi, Director General  
Animal Wealth Department  
Ministry of Agriculture  
P.O. Box 467 - Postal Code 113  
Muscat, Oman  
Phone: (968) 24 696-300; Fax: (968) 24 696-271

Mr. Abdullah Al Hudaibi, Director General  
Health Control  
Ministry of Regional Municipalities & Water Resources  
P.O. Box 461 – P.C. 112  
Muscat, Oman  
Tel: (968) 246-92564 Fax: (968) 24 692-547  
E-mail: [dghc@mrmewr.gov.om](mailto:dghc@mrmewr.gov.om)

Mr. Haitham Khalfan Al-Akhzami, Director of Food Monitoring  
Health Control  
Ministry of Regional Municipalities & Water Resources  
P.O. Box 461 – P.C. 112  
Muscat, Oman  
Tel: (968) 246-04418 Fax: (968) 24 692-547  
E-mail: [alakhzami1@yahoo.com](mailto:alakhzami1@yahoo.com)