

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Syria

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards - Narrative

FAIRS Country Report

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Report Highlights:

Syria is permitting gradual imports of processed foods and the list of permitted imports is expanding. An import permit is necessary. Shipment documents have to be notarized by the Syrian embassy in the country of origin. Syrian labeling regulations do not provide for GMO's, organic foods, nutrient contents, additives, and pesticide residues. Food additives are permitted in general as long as they are permitted to be used in the country of origin. Syrian customs does not permit custom clearing of food stuffs if half the shelf life has passed. The presence of information in Arabic on the label by the producer is very important. Starting from July 18, 2010, the name of the importer has to be included on

the label of the imported food product. The imports have to be inspected in the country of origin by one of two designated international firms.

Section I. Food Laws:

Syria had a very restrictive agricultural and food import regime to protect local production and to save hard currency. Most consumer-ready foods and beverages were not permitted to be imported. Bulk commodities were permitted to be imported if there is shortage in local production. In addition, fruits and vegetables were not permitted to be imported. This strict import regime started to loosen after Syria applied the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement (GAFTA) about nine years ago. Most food items are permitted to be imported now and the list of permitted products is expanding. Imports of cigarettes, wine, and other alcoholic drinks are restricted to public sector companies.

An import permit is necessary for every commodity. It is obtained from the Foreign Trade Department of the Ministry of Economy and Trade. The prior approval of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform is sometimes necessary for some commodities. Bulk commodities can be imported and packed locally. There are no special regulations governing this because a few commodities such as rice and soybean meal are sometimes imported in bulk and packed locally.

The Ministry of Economy and Trade established a list of products that cannot be imported (negative list). Food import laws are enforced by the Customs Department and are very effective.

Section II. Labeling Requirements:

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Section III. Packaging and Container Regulations:

1. There are no packaging or container size requirements or preferences. However, containers should be in international units, i.e. metric units (kilograms and liters, parts or multiples of that).
2. There are no municipal waste disposal laws or product recycling regulations.
3. There are no restrictions on the use of packaging materials like PVC as long as the packaging material is used for food products in the country of origin and has to be new, not recycled.

Section IV. Food Additives Regulations:

There were no provisions for additives in Syrian foreign trade laws. The General Authority for Specifications and Metrology (SASMO) of the Ministry of Industry issues decisions regarding the use of food additives. However, these regulations are mainly intended for the local industry. The general trend is that food additives are acceptable as long as they are permitted to be used in the country of origin of the product.

Section V. Pesticides and Other Contaminants:

Pesticide residues are not provided for in Syrian import regulations. The general trend is to accept the product if it is permitted to be used in the country of origin. Food samples are collected at the ports of entry and sent to university laboratories where a certificate is issued that the product is free of “poisonous materials and fit for human consumption”. Pesticides used in the country of origin do not have to be registered. Registration is mandatory for pesticides to be imported and used in Syria. Registration is done at the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform.

Section VI. Other Regulations and Requirements:

1. Product registration is not required. All imported food and feed products are tested to ensure conformity to local standards before they are released from customs. A customs officer collects samples that are sent to the central laboratory of the Ministry of Economy and Trade, to university laboratories depending on the product, to the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, and to the Atomic Energy Authority. The samples are carried on a daily basis by the customs employees from the ports to the capital, where most of the laboratories are located. The test results are usually ready within a few days. The Ministry of Agriculture tests are at a nominal fee while the Ministry of Economy and Trade tests cost much more. It is the importer’s responsibility to pay these costs.
2. Mail order shipments for food stuffs are not common. Samples sent by express mail or parcel post have to go through the same procedures of testing. Samples less than three kilograms in weight are more easily released from customs because such samples do not go through the retail trade channels.
3. The products are monitored at the retail/wholesale distribution level by the Ministry of Economy and Trade that has squads who check the markets and look for the validity of the date of expiry, the presence of insect infestation, or for deforms in the pack and unusual odors in the product to make sure that the product is still fit for human consumption. Any food product put on shelves after its date of expiry will be removed and the seller will be penalized.
4. The following certificates are required for the goods to be released from customs: a bill, certificate of origin, health certificate, phytosanitary certificate for plant products (veterinary certificate for animal products), and radiation certificate. These documents have to be properly notarized by the Syrian embassy in the country of origin. Any food product cannot be cleared through customs if half its validity date has passed. In late 2010, the Ministry of Economy imposed a new regulation that all imports have to be inspected before shipment in the country of origin by one of two designated companies.

Section VII. Other Specific Standards:

Since most processed/frozen foods were not permitted to be imported to Syria, there are no other

specifications other than conformity with the Syrian standards issued by the General Authority for Standardization and Metrology. It is the duty of the importer to contact this organization and get the specifications before contracting for importing any food item.

Packaged/frozen animal and poultry meat from animals slaughtered according to the Islamic doctrine should have a certain phrase stating the slaughter was done under the Islamic doctrine on the pack.

Section VIII. Copyright and/or Trademark Laws:

Trademarks and/or brand names are protected under domestic law provided the trade mark or brand name is registered at the Office of Intellectual Property Protection, Ministry of Economy and Trade. There are limitations on trade marks and brand name registration. Trade marks prohibited under the foreign trade regulations cannot be registered. This is mainly for local production. However, the same brand name can be imported by more than one importer from the same producer.

Section IX. Import Procedures:

The customs clearing process starts with the arrival of the shipment at the port, its documents to the bank, collecting the samples for testing, obtaining the test results, obtaining the permission to release from customs (this is obtained from the Foreign Trade Department of the Ministry of Economy and Trade), and finally payment of the customs duties. There are no customs duties on foods produced by Arab countries under the GAFTA agreement. The customs clearance procedure takes about one week and is done by a customs clearer assigned by the importer. To be released from customs, all the customs clearing procedures should be finished before half the validity date of the product is over.

Import documents in English do not have to be translated into Arabic.

If a shipment is rejected, there is an appeal system, but it is subject to the approval of the minister under whom the rejection took place. If it is a labeling problem, the Minister of Economy and Trade would be the concerned minister. If the problem is with grain specifications, the appeal has to be addressed to the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform who may personally approve the appeal once and permit the collection of another sample for testing. If a second rejection takes place, the commodity has, by law, to be returned to the country of origin.

Appendix I. Government Regulatory Agency Contacts:

Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform

Baramkeh, Damascus, Syria

Phone: (963-11) 2213613/4

Fax: (963-11) 2244078 and 2244023

Central Feed Laboratory

Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, P.O. Box 12827, Damascus, Syria

Phone: (963-11) 6313017

The laboratory does not have a fax or E-mail address.

Ministry of Economy and Trade

Ibn Nafis Highway, Damascus, Syria

Phones: (963-11) 5137334/8/9

Fax: (963-11) 5122390

Central Laboratory
Bab Tuma, Damascus, Syria
Phone: (963-11) 5425828
Fax: (963-11) 5420953

Atomic Energy Authority
Ghezawi Street, Mazzeh, Damascus, Syria
Phone: (963-11) 6111926/7
Fax: (963-11) 6112289

Appendix II. Other Import Specialist Contacts:

For further help please contact the Office of Agricultural Affairs, American Embassy, P.O. Box 29, Damascus, Syria, Phone: (963-11) 33914127, Fax: (963-11) 33914100, E-mail: Jaber.[Dalati@fas.usda.gov](mailto:Jaber.Dalati@fas.usda.gov)