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Prepared By: FAS/Managua

Approved By: Evan Mangino

Report Highlights:

This report describes Nicaraguan regulatory requirements and import procedures for food and agricultural products. As of June 2023, there had been no major changes since the 2022 report.

This report was prepared by the Office of Agricultural Affairs in Managua for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, information provided may not be completely accurate either because policies have changed since its preparation, or because clear and consistent information about these policies was not available. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters verify the full set of import requirements with their foreign customers, who are normally best equipped to research such matters with local authorities, before any goods are shipped.

FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCTS IS SUBJECT TO THE IMPORTING COUNTRY’S RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY BORDER OFFICIALS AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.

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Executive Summary

Nicaragua has been a World Trade Organization (WTO) member since 1995 and is a signatory to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which entered into force on February 22, 2017, and contains provisions for expediting the movement, release, and clearance of goods. Under WTO transparency obligations, Nicaragua informs WTO members of proposed regulations and provides a comment period for WTO members to review and provide their inputs. In the past year, Nicaragua did not notify and/or pass any legislation that changed the current import procedures for processed foods.

The legal framework for Nicaragua's food imports consists of Central American Technical Regulations (RTCAs) adopted under the Central American Integration System (SICA), which seeks to harmonize the import procedures in Central America, as well as the Nicaraguan Technical Norms developed by the Nicaraguan Government in coordination with the Nicaraguan food industry. The most relevant RTCAs and technical norms are discussed in this report.

Although there are efforts at the Nicaraguan Ministry of Trade, Industry and Development (MIFIC) to comply with WTO governing regulations and to facilitate trade, in practice, Nicaraguan import procedures can be less predictable. Discretionary measures taken by government officials at ports of entry can result in significant losses for U.S. exporters. In the past year, FAS has observed several shipments rejected for reasons ranging from misinterpretation of regional food safety regulations to denial of a product's country of origin and therefore its preferential treatment under the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). Other import complications reported included failure to recognize digital sanitary certificates for animal feed ingredients, questioning product values stated on commercial invoices, increased inspection rates, and fees levied for minor errors, such as misspellings on commercial invoices.

U.S. agricultural exports to Nicaragua have more than tripled since CAFTA-DR entered into force in 2006. The United States is Nicaragua's top food supplier, sending significant volumes of corn, soybean meal, rice, pork, chicken meat, and a wide variety of processed foods. As the Nicaraguan food processing industry is not well developed, there will continue to be good opportunities for U.S. exporters of consumer-ready products. Even though this report provides a list of the key food import regulations in Nicaragua, FAS/Managua highly recommends U.S. exporters verify the full set of import requirements with their import partners before shipping any goods, as import procedures may be subject to change.

Section I. Food Laws

Regulatory responsibilities for imported foods are divided between the Nicaraguan Institute of Agricultural Protection and Health (IPSA) and the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health (MINSa). IPSA is responsible for the inspection of agricultural products, including fresh produce, grains, meat, animal feed, agrochemicals, and seeds at the borders. MINSa handles processed food product registration and the issuing of import permits for processed foods. MINSa also maintains product standards and technical norms, which can be found online at [MINSa's Food Regulation Division](#).¹

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the content available on Nicaraguan government websites is available exclusively in Spanish.

Nicaraguan importers are required to obtain an import permit prior to the importation of any shipment. Importers generally request import permits for processed foods from MINSA. IPISA issues import permits for commodities, such as grains, raw meats, and fresh produce, due to phytosanitary or sanitary risks of imported products. MINSA requires processed foods be registered and assigned a sanitary registry number prior to importation; MINSA will not issue an import permit for processed products without a sanitary registry number.

There are two broad laws that establish the foundation for imported food regulations and procedures. The [Basic Law of Animal and Plant Health](#) (Law 291) has as its main objective the prevention of the propagation of pests and diseases. The [General Health Law](#) (Law 423) covers all aspects related to human health, including food safety aspects of processed food imports.

As a member of the Central American Integration System (SICA), which seeks to harmonize food safety and import regulations in the region, Nicaragua has adopted several Central American Technical Regulations (RTCAs) related to import procedures and food safety. All SICA member states, including Nicaragua, are required to adhere to RTCAs. In recent years, Central American Countries have standardized regulations for the labeling of processed foods, microbiological standards, and food additives. Additionally, Nicaragua has a series of mandatory and voluntary technical norms (known as NTON) that prescribe further requirements for plants, animals, food products, agrochemicals, and other products. The Nicaraguan Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Development (MIFIC) develops NTONs in coordination with Nicaraguan food and agricultural industries as well as other relevant Ministries.

Section II. Labeling Requirements

There are two primary RTCAs that cover all aspects related to labeling requirements: the RTCA on General Labeling of Prepackaged Food Products ([RTCA 67.01.07:10](#)) and the RTCA on the Labeling of Prepackaged Food Products for Human Consumption for the Population Older than Three Years ([RTCA 67.01.60:10](#)). The main objective of these regulations is to establish the minimum labeling requirements for food products. In 2016, the Central America Customs Union (CACU) adopted a comprehensive guide ([RTCA 67.01.02:10](#)) to facilitate the implementation of the RTCA on the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods. The guide provides a number of examples of prepackaged food labels and answers a number of frequently asked questions. At this time, there are no regulations for the labeling of genetically engineered foods. For information on biotechnology regulations please refer to FAS/Managua's [2022 Biotechnology Annual Report](#).

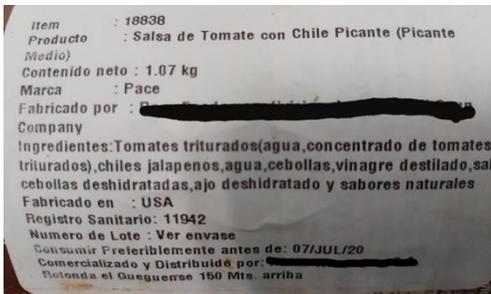
According to the Central American Technical Regulation on General Labeling of Prepackaged Food Products ([RTCA 67.01.07:10](#)), all imported food products must have labels in Spanish. Despite this language requirement, other languages may be used as well, as long as the required information is also included in Spanish. The information that must appear on the label, except when indicated otherwise by a national standard or by the *Codex Alimentarius*, includes: a) product name, b) net content and drained weight in international system units, c) artificial color and flavors (if any), d) MINSA sanitary registry number, e) ingredients listed in decreasing order by weight, f) importer's name and address, g) lot

number and expiration date, h) country of origin, and i) preservation and use instructions. The sticker-type label, in Spanish, is commonly applied by the importer prior to retail sale.

The RTCA on Nutritional Labeling of Prepackaged Food Products for Human Consumption for the Population Older than Three Years ([RTCA 67.01.60:10](#)) requires listing nutrients such as total fat, saturated fat, carbohydrates, sodium, protein, and energetic value on the prepackaged food label. This regulation applies to prepackaged food products that include nutritional value, nutritional and health declarations, and that will be sold directly for human consumption in Central America. Donated and sample products are exempt from this regulation.

Samples of Current Labels

A Spanish-language sticker label applied to imported ketchup



Locally Produced Beverage



Baby Foods

Nicaragua lacks a specific labeling regulation for baby foods, but it follows a series of codex regulations for baby foods, including the Advisory Lists of Nutrient Compounds For Use in Foods for Special Dietary Uses Intended for Infants and Young Children ([CAC/GL-10-1979](#)), the Standard for Canned Baby Foods ([CODEX STAN 73-1981](#)), and the Standard for Processed Cereal-Based Foods for Infants and Young Children ([CXS 74-1981](#)).

Alcoholic Beverages

Alcoholic beverages must comply with the RTCA for Labeling Alcoholic Fermented Beverages ([RTCA 67.01.05:11](#)). This regulation requires that alcoholic beverages should have a label, in Spanish, that indicates the name of the product, alcohol content, net content, ingredients list, name and address of the importing or distributing company in Nicaragua, MINSA sanitary registry number, expiration date, lot tracking number, and a warning sign which states that the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages is harmful to health. Additionally, the manufacturer may use the terms “lite” or “light” only if the alcoholic beverage contains at least 25 percent less of the energetic value of the regular alcoholic beverage.

Dairy and Dairy Products

Dairy and dairy products must follow the requirements established under the RTCA for the use of Dairy Terms ([RTCA 67.04.65:12](#)) and the RTCA on General Labeling of Prepackaged Food Products ([RTCA 67.01.07:10](#)). The general principles of the dairy terms regulation are that foods must be described or presented in a way that ensures the correct use of dairy terms to protect the consumer against possible confusion or misinterpretation and to guarantee the application of fair-trade practices. The dairy terms regulation allows for the registration of dairy products with vegetable oils as ingredients, but prohibits the use of dairy terms for non-dairy products.

There are no other specific labeling requirements for special use foods including genetically engineered foods, health claims, organic, halal, or plant-based meat/dairy alternatives.

Section III. Packaging and Container Regulations

Nicaragua does not have any general law on packaging and container requirements. Food service and warehouse type importers sell their products in larger size containers. Most retailers sell their products in sizes that are more convenient for consumers in terms of price and contents.

Packaging Sustainability Measures

There are no specific packaging sustainability measures, such as single-use bans, recycling regulations, recycled content, and other design requirements and/or national strategies for reducing packaging waste.

Section IV. Food Additives Regulations

MINSAs regulates food and beverage additives through the Central American Technical Regulation on Food Additives ([RTCA 67.04.54:10](#)), which designates food additives and utilization limits according to the additive function and the type of food. Any substance used as an ingredient is exempt from this regulation. The technical standards in this regulation were adopted from Codex’s general regulation on food additives ([Codex Stan 192-1995](#) (Rev. 6-2005)) as well as from the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), the Flavor and Extract Manufacturers Association of the United States (FEMA), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The food additives approved list with maximum permissible levels is in the [RTCA.67.04.54:10](#). Food flavorings accepted by JECFA, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and/or by FEMA are permitted for use.

The Food Additives RTCA ([RTCA 67.04.54:10](#)) establishes a mechanism to update the list of approved additives. The Central American Food Additives Commission (CCAA), which is formed by experts from SICA countries, can update the food standards based on changes in the Codex Alimentarius General Food Additive Regulations and/or when a member country requests the inclusion, exclusion and/or modification of a food additive based on scientific evidence supported by studies conducted by internationally recognized agencies, such as the FDA or the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). In this case, a SICA member country must request the approval of the food additive by filling out a form provided in Annex V of [RTCA 67.04.54:10](#) and provide the physio-chemical characteristics of the new additive, the analytic method, studies conducted by internationally recognized agencies, as well as toxicological studies that prove the safety of the new additive. SICA member countries must unanimously approve the addition of a food additive to the approved additives list.

The CCAA coordinator must update the food additive list every time the Codex Commission carries out the approval of food additive proposals from the Codex Additives Committee. To update the food additive list, the CCAA must notify other SICA member states of the proposed changes in a period not exceeding thirty calendar days and send a copy of the updated regulation for their approval. Once the updated regulation is approved, the Central American Ministries Council of Economic Integration (COMIECO) publishes a resolution.

Section V. Pesticides and Other Contaminants

IPSA is the Nicaraguan regulatory agency that tests for pesticides and other contaminants on fresh produce, grains, raw meats, and dairy products. Nicaragua has adopted [Codex Maximum Residue Limits \(MRL\) for pesticides](#) and [Extraneous Maximum Residue Limits](#), since it does not have any regulations on this matter. Nicaragua requires MRL tests for Nicaraguan export products (e.g., meat, seafood, and peanuts), but MRL testing is not required for imported products.

In Nicaragua, all pesticides must comply with regulation [Law 274](#) and with the [mandatory technical norm \(NTON-02-010-02\)](#) on environmental standards for the classification and labeling of pesticides that establishes the general criteria for eco-toxicological classification as well as for the selection of labeling signs and symbols.

Section VI. Other Requirements, Regulations, and Registration Measures

Facility and Product Registration Requirements

Processed food facilities must be registered and approved by FDA, APHIS and/or FSIS, and must send a written communication to IPSA to express interest in exporting to Nicaragua. IPSA's risk analysis division reviews the request and determines if the facility is suitable to export to Nicaragua. In cases when the facility is not officially registered and/or monitored by any of the U.S. agencies mentioned above and the food products are of high sanitary risk, IPSA may request an on-site inspection paid for by the exporter. On-site inspections are infrequent and uncommon.

Processed food products are regulated by MINSAs through the Food Control Directorate, which requires the following steps to register food products:

- Request the sanitary registry number at MINSAs and pay for the certification and laboratory analysis. (Registration fees are approximately \$100).
- Pay for the laboratory analysis and certification at MINSAs.
- Provide technical specifications of the product.
- Provide a certificate of free sale issued by a competent government authority in the country of origin.
- Provide three samples of 500 grams each from the same lot. For liquids, the importer must provide three samples of one liter.
- Provide two product labels. If the label is not in Spanish, the importer must provide a Spanish translation.
- Provide the cashier receipt for the certifications.

Registration is valid for five years and can be renewed 30 calendar days prior to expiration date by presenting all the requirements listed above. All documents presented in English must be translated into Spanish. Once MINSAs registers a product, it will issue a certificate of free sale for mass distribution in Nicaragua. The registration process takes on average 21 calendar days when all the required documents are presented.

Inspections at the Border

The key legislation that establishes inspection procedures is COMIECO [Ministerial Decree No. 338-2014](#) on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Guidelines for the Facilitation of Trade in Central America. This Ministerial Decree classifies imported animal, plant, and processed food products according to sanitary and phytosanitary risk categories. If the imported product falls under the “A” category, the imported product must be inspected at the border because it is considered to be of high risk. If the imported product falls into the “B” (medium risk) or “C” (low risk) categories, the imported products will be inspected randomly at the border by IPSA. IPSA conducts inspections based on Ministerial Decree No. 338-2014 and on IPSA risk analyses of new products. Some exporters have complained of inspections that appear arbitrary and/or lacking scientific basis.

Section VII. Other Specific Standards

Diet Foods

Diet foods, other than nutritional supplements or proteins without any therapeutic indication, are regulated by the General Division of Health Services of the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health (MINSAs). The law that regulates diet foods is the general law of medicines and pharmacies (Law 292). This law requires that all pharmaceutical products must be registered at MINSAs prior to sale and can only be sold to legally authorized pharmacies in Nicaragua.

Vitamin Enriched Requirements

Nicaragua has approved several technical norms to fortify sugar with Vitamin A ([NTON 03 028-99](#)); rice with Vitamins B1, B3, B6, B9, B12, Iron and other micronutrients ([NTON 03 091 11](#)); wheat flour with micronutrients such as Iron, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B2, Niacin and Folic Acid ([RTCA. 67.01.15:07](#)); and salt with Iodine and Fluoride ([NTON 03 031-09](#)). The technical norm for the fortification of rice has only been applied to rice donations targeting public schools.

Sample Products

Imported processed foods for display and tasting purposes need to comply with the RTCA for Importation of Processed Food Products for Tasting and Exhibition [RTCA 67.01.32:06](#). This regulation applies to all processed food products that do not have a sanitary registry number and will be used for display and tasting purposes. Importers need to fill in annex A of [RTCA 67.01.32:06](#) and provide a copy of the certificate of free sale. The imported products need to have a label that states that the products are not for sale. Sample products are not exempt from the regular sanitary and phytosanitary import procedures and would need to meet the sanitary/phytosanitary requirements for animal/plant health as if it were a commercial shipment (e.g., an FSIS Form 9060-5).

Genetically Engineered Grains

Nicaragua has a law for the prevention of risks arising from Living Modified Organisms through molecular biotechnology ([Law 705, 2010](#)). This law provides the guidelines to request the approval of new genetically-engineered (GE) crops and other living modified organisms. However, as of the printing of this report, the Government of Nicaragua has not enacted implementing regulations for the law. As a result, grain importers must request permission from the Office of the President to import GE products (e.g., corn, soybeans, etc.). For more information about the current status of biotechnology in Nicaragua please refer to FAS/Managua's latest [Biotechnology Annual Report](#).

Raw Chicken and Pork Meat

Nicaragua implements the Central American Technical Regulation for the Microbiological Criteria of Processed Foods ([RTCA 67.04.50:17](#)), which establishes the microbiological criteria for raw meats. The regulation allows for no more than one positive sample out of five for *Salmonella* on raw chicken and requires the absence of *Salmonella* on raw pork meat. It also establishes limits of two positive samples out of five for generic *E. coli* on raw pork meat. If the presence of the microbiological hazards is above the technical standards, an import shipment faces the risk of being rejected and destroyed.

Plant-Based Meat and/or Dairy Alternatives

There are no specific standards for plant-based meat and/or dairy alternatives.

Section VIII. Trademarks, Brand Names, and Intellectual Property Rights

Intellectual property is protected differently in Nicaragua than in the United States. Rights must be registered and enforced in Nicaragua under local laws. According to the Nicaraguan [Law of Brands and Patents](#) (Law 380), the registration of brands and patents in Nicaragua is administered by the Ministry of Trade (MIFIC). The process to register a brand is described in Law 380.

U.S. trademark and patent registrations will not protect a U.S. company in Nicaragua. Registration of patents and trademarks is on a first-in-time, first-in-right basis, and companies should consider applying for trademark and patent protection before selling products or services in Nicaragua. It is important that companies understand intellectual property is primarily a private right, and the U.S. government cannot enforce rights for private individuals in Nicaragua. It is the rights holders' responsibility to register, protect, and enforce their rights, retaining their own counsel and advisors, if needed. Companies should seek advice from [local attorneys](#) or intellectual property consultants who are experts in Nicaraguan law.

Small- and medium-sized companies should understand the importance of working together with trade associations and organizations to support efforts to protect intellectual property and stop counterfeiting. There are a number of these organizations, both Nicaragua- and U.S.-based, including:

- [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [American Chamber of Commerce in Nicaragua](#)
- [National Association of Manufacturers](#) (NAM)
- [International Intellectual Property Alliance](#) (IIPA)
- [International Trademark Association](#) (INTA)
- [International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition](#) (IACC)
- [Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America](#) (PhRMA)
- [Biotechnology Industry Organization](#) (BIO)

Section IX. Import Procedures

Every importer must be registered as a taxpayer at the General Directorate of Income and have a unique tax number known as an RUC. The first step is to request an import permit to MINSA. Processed foods also required a sanitary register number from the Ministry of Health (MINSA). Good communication between the exporter and importer is essential for a successful commercial relationship and ensuring the correct permits and procedures are followed.

Once the container arrives at the border, importers must present the following information to IPSA:

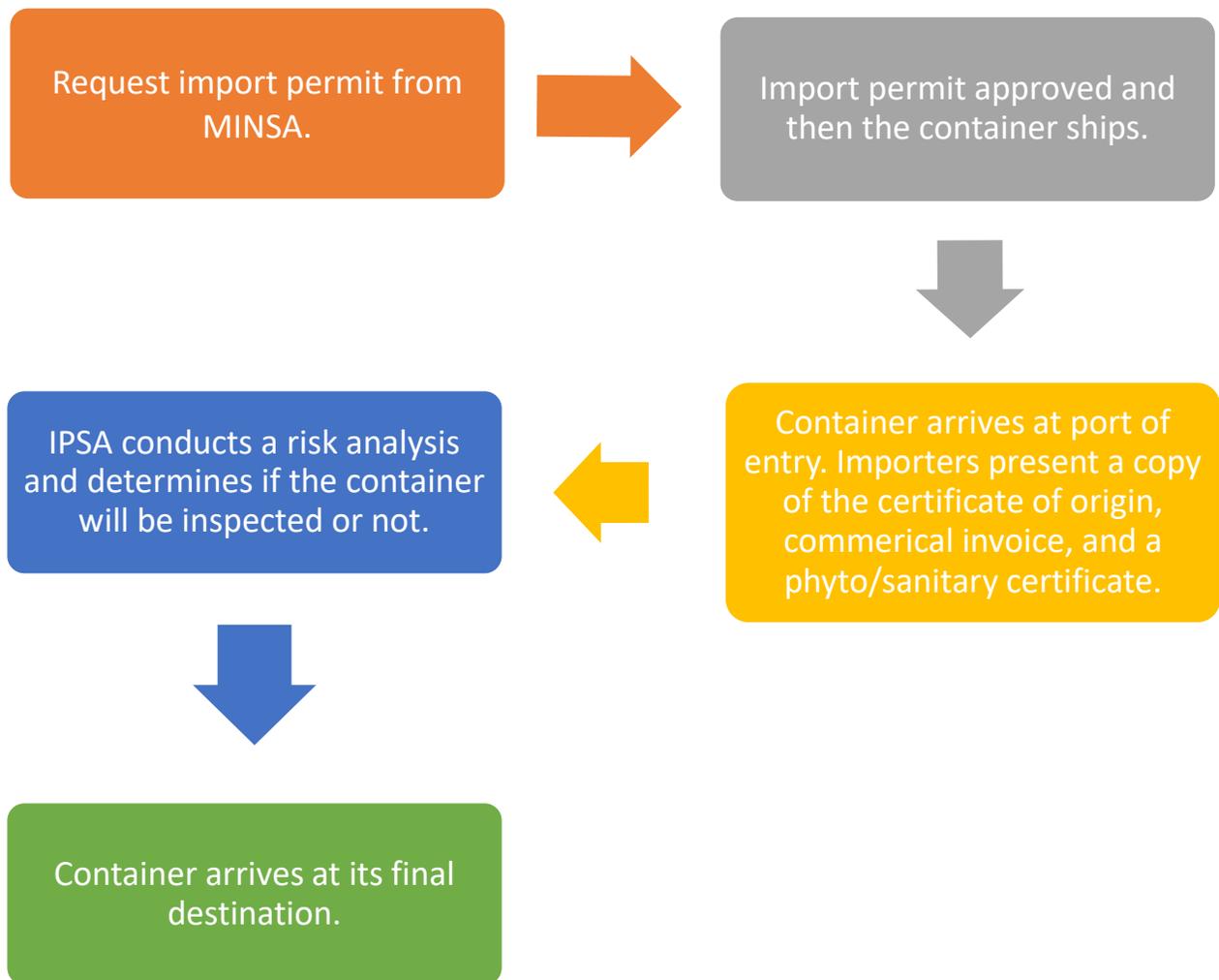
- import permit,
- sanitary or phytosanitary certificate,
- certificate of origin, and
- a copy of the commercial invoice.

The importer must also present the following information to the Nicaraguan Customs Authority (DGA):

- bill of lading,
- packing list,
- original invoice,
- declaration of invoice authenticity,
- import permit, and
- certificate of origin.

It takes from three to five days for a container to be delivered to the importer’s warehouse once it reaches the Nicaraguan border. If the imported product falls under the “A” category according to COMIECO Resolution [No. 338-2014](#), the imported product must be inspected at the border because it is of high risk. If the imported product falls into the “B” (medium risk) or “C” (low risk) category, the imported products will be inspected randomly at the border. Please refer to flow chart below.

Import Procedures Flow Chart for Processed Foods



If there is a problem with the paperwork or the container needs further inspection, it could take more than a week for the shipment to be released. Importers may also face laboratory testing fees; the average cost is \$175 per container. Testing is targeted at high-risk products such as raw meat.

Section X. Trade Facilitation

All products must be issued an import permit before the merchandise can enter Nicaragua. There are no advance rulings, pre-clearance programs, and/or electronic certificates or filings.

The import permit for processed foods is requested by the importer at the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health (MINSA). The importer physically requests the import permit in the headquarters of this agency, and it takes about 24 hours to get the approval or denial. The cost of the import permit per container varies from \$100 to \$120. Although MINSA has a website, they do not offer any type of electronic filing.

Although Nicaragua is a signatory to the World Trade Organization's (WTO) [Trade Facilitation Agreement](#), which intends to reduce bureaucratic delays for moving goods across the borders, burdensome import requirements remain. FAS/Managua recommends U.S. exporters verify the full set of import requirements with importers before any goods are shipped, as import procedures might be subject to change.

Appendix I. Government Regulatory Agency Contacts

Government Agencies

Ministry of Health
Food Regulations Division
Phone: (505) 2289 4700 Ext.217
E-mail: alimento@minsa.gob.ni

Institute of Agricultural Protection and Health (IPSA)
Food Safety Division
Phone (505) 2298-1330 / 2298-1331 / 2298-1349
E-mail: inocuidad@ipsa.gob.ni

Attachments:

No Attachments