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## **Qatar**

# **Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and**

# **Standards**

## **1999**

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### **Report Highlights:**

**Updated on : June 20, 1999. Sections updated: All sections. Qatar implements food labeling and shelf-life regulations adopted by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, which require Arabic labels or stickers. Import policies are liberal, with no quotas or other non-tariff barriers. Import duties are 4 percent on practically all food products although staple foods such as wheat, flour, rice, sugar and powdered milk are exempt from import duties.**

## QATAR: FOOD IMPORT REGULATIONS

Updated on: June 20, 1999

**DISCLAIMER:** This report was prepared by the Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, UAE for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care was 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 PRODUCT IS SUBJECT TO THE IMPORTING COUNTRY'S RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY BORDER OFFICIALS AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.**

### *I. FOOD LAWS*

Qatar is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) which also includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. GCC member states are working hard to harmonize food import standards, including label and shelf-life regulations.

A significant step towards regulatory harmonization came with the issuance of Gulf Standard (GS) 150/1993, Part I, under which regional food shelf-life standards were established for seventy five food products.

Qatar adopted GS 150/1993, Part I, the same year, without any modifications, as Qatari Standard (QS) 150/1993, Part I, with implementation effective as of June 1, 1994. Qatar also enforces shelf-life requirements for an additional 95 food products listed in GS 150/1993, Part II. Drafted several years ago, GS 150/Part II, has yet to be officially approved by GCC member states.

Trade contacts report that Qatari officials will work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural imports are not unduly disrupted or delayed. For example, officials widely announce new import regulations well in advance (often up to six months or more) of the date of enforcement.

In addition, officials are willing to approve food labels prior to export. Pre-export approval is strongly encouraged since it can significantly speed import clearance, particularly for new-to-market products.

The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), in coordination with the Department of Standards, Measurements and Consumer Protection, Ministry of Finance, Economy and Commerce (MOFEC), is responsible for establishing food safety regulations. The Department of Commercial Affairs within the MOFEC is responsible for trademark and agency laws, while the Department of Customs is responsible for enforcement of agency laws at the time of import.

The Food Control Division of the Preventive Health Department (PHD) within the MOPH is responsible for enforcing food safety regulations. Health inspectors visually inspect all imported food products, verify compliance with label regulations and, if necessary, draw samples for laboratory analysis by the MOPH.

Not all shipments are subject to laboratory analysis. In general, new-to-market products and products which failed previous inspections are targeted for thorough examination at the time of import. Poultry and meat products are routinely inspected for salmonella and other bacteria.

According to MOPH officials, laboratory analysis is normally completed within five days. Trade sources report, however, that testing may take up to ten days, particularly if several tests are required.

Live animals and plants, animal feed and horticultural products are inspected at the port of entry by inspectors from the Agricultural Development Department, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture.

To facilitate entry, suppliers are strongly encouraged to work closely with their local importer and to obtain pre-export approval for labels, particularly for new-to-market products.

## *II. LABELING REQUIREMENTS*

Label regulations are contained in QS 9/1984, which is identical to GS 9/1984 and very similar to GS 9/1995 which has yet to be approved by GCC member countries. Under QS 9/1984, food labels must contain the following information on the original label or primary packaging:

- Product and brand names;
- Ingredients, in descending order of proportion;
- Additives;
- Net contents in metric units (volume in case of liquids);
- Dates of production and expiry;
- Manufacturer's name and address;
- Country of origin;
- Special storage, transportation and preparation instructions, if any.

Original labels must be printed in Arabic. However, bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g. Arabic/ English) and all the required information printed in the foreign language is also printed in Arabic.

Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of original Arabic or bilingual labels, provided the sticker: 1) is extremely difficult to remove; 2) includes all required label information; 3) does not cover required information on the original label; and 4) does not contradict information on the original label. In fact, local officials consider such stickers to be labels. Labels/ stickers must be applied prior to export. No changes to label information are permitted after export.

Production and expiry (P/E) dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. These dates may not be printed on stickers. U.S. bar coding is not a substitute permitted in lieu of P/E dates and a label may not carry more than one set of P/E dates. Finally, P/E dates must be printed in Arabic and English in the following order, depending upon the shelf-life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of 6 months or less;

-Month/year for products with a shelf-life longer than 6 months.

Under the month/year format, the last day of the month will be considered the expiry date. The month may be printed in numbers or letters. For example, 3/97 and March 97 are both acceptable formats. P/E dates in English digits alone are acceptable. Four digit numbers for the year are required for P/E dates for the year 2001 or above. Two digit numbers are acceptable for the years 2000 or below, i.e. 00 or 99.

The expiration date may be printed in one of the following formats:

- Expiration date: (date)
- Use by: (date)
- Use before: (date)
- Sell by: (date)
- Fit for: (duration) from the date of production.

As previously noted, shelf-life regulations are contained in QS 150/1993, Part I. Qatar also enforces an additional 95 shelf-life requirements listed in GS 150/1993, Part II. According to local health officials, non-compliance with GS 150, Part II, will not result in rejection of a shipment-the first time. Rather, the importer will be issued a warning to comply in the future and subsequent shipments may be rejected for non-compliance.

Nutritional labeling is voluntary. There are no nutritional labeling requirements. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable and there are no RDI label requirements.

Labels for special foods, such as diet and health foods and foods for diabetics and infants, must contain detailed information about the product's vitamin and mineral content, nutritive value per 100 grams and proper use and storage. These foods must be approved and registered by MOH prior to importing.

Products shipped in institutional-size containers must comply with all label regulations. Labeling requirements are waived for food products that are imported in bulk for further processing. P/E dates are also not required for certain products such as fresh fruits and vegetables and fresh bakery items. Finally, production dates alone are sufficient for products deemed to have extremely long shelf-life durations, such as salt, white sugar, spices and condiments, tea, rice and dried pulses.

### *III. PACKAGING AND CONTAINER REGULATIONS*

There are no special packaging or container size requirements for food products. Also, there are no municipal waste disposal laws or limitations on the use of packaging materials.

### *IV. FOOD ADDITIVE REGULATIONS*

Most local regulations governing the use of food additives are based on Codex Alimentarius standards. Food coloring additives are regulated under QS 23/84, which is identical to GS 23/1984. Under this standard, the common name and index number of all coloring additives contained in a product must be noted on the product label. European "E" numbers are acceptable.

Qatar enforces a number of other standards governing the use of additives in a variety of food products. For example, QS 19/1984 regulates additives used in vegetable oils. Other food additive standards are QS 356, 357, 391, 537, 574, 577 and 578. These regulations are identical to Codex Alimentarius standards.

Copies of food additive or other standards may be obtained from the Directorate of Standards, Measurements and Consumer Protection at MOHEC (see Appendix 1 attached). The standards are mostly in Arabic. English language copies of some of the standards are available, but not all.

#### *V. PESTICIDE AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS*

Local regulations governing pesticide and other contaminate residue levels are based on Codex Alimentarius standards. Specifically, QS 383/1994 regulates pesticide and other contaminate residues in food products and is identical to GS 383/1994. The pesticide residue list, similar to the allowed additives lists is positive, i.e., it lists the pesticides that are acceptable to use, with their tolerance levels.

Pesticides must be registered with the Agricultural Development Department at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture (see Appendix I, attached).

#### *VI. OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS*

All processed food products imported for the first time are subject to laboratory testing. Subsequent shipments of products that have passed the initial testing will not require laboratory testing until a period of at least six months has passed. Products which failed previous inspections are targeted for thorough examination at the time of import.

All meat and poultry products must be accompanied by an Islamic (Halal) slaughter certificate issued by an approved Islamic center in the country of origin. The importation of pork and products containing pork is strictly prohibited. Food products containing animal fat must indicate the origin of the fat (e.g., beef fat).

Inspectors routinely test for salmonella in poultry and meat products. A shipment will be rejected for import if salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of the tested samples.

The importation of alcoholic beverages and products containing alcohol is restricted to two organizations. Sales of alcoholic beverages is strictly controlled by the government and advertizing of such beverages is prohibited.

Food products do not require registration or an import permit. However, special foods such as diet and health foods and foods for diabetics and infants, require a special import/sales permit issued by a joint committee of representatives from the Food Control Division of the PHD/MOPH and the Pharmacies and Medicines Control Department of the MOPH. The importer is responsible for obtaining this permit.

The importation of irradiated food products is permitted, but the product's label must clearly indicate that the product has been irradiated.

Qatar Municipality inspectors randomly check food products already in the market. In addition to visually inspecting labels, samples are collected and analyzed to ensure that product ingredients match those listed on the label. Local inspections are conducted without the knowledge of the importer. If a discrepancy is found, the importer is informed and the product removed from the market and destroyed at the importer's expense.

#### *VII. OTHER STANDARDS*

There are no special requirements regulating the import of food samples. Samples destined for food shows and other types of promotional events are exempt from local label and shelf-life regulations. Such shipments, however, must still be accompanied by a health certificate, as well as an invoice noting that the product is not for sale and has no commercial value.

#### *VIII. COPYRIGHT AND/OR TRADEMARK LAWS*

Agency regulations are contained in Commercial Agency Law No. 4/1986. A commercial agency may only be registered to a Qatari citizen or company. Agency contracts may be open ended or time-limited. A brand can be registered to only one agent. A company producing several distinct brands may register each brand with a different agent.

Agency agreements are strictly enforced and customs officials will automatically seize any brand imported by a company that is not the officially registered agent. The consignment will be released only after the importer has obtained written permission from the registered agent. Often an agent will demand a fee, usually a percentage of the consignment's value, for such permission.

Trademark legislation is contained in the Law of Trademarks and Commercial Indications No. 3/1978. The Commercial Affairs Department, MOFEC, is charged with enforcing trademark, as well as, agency regulations. A foreign company may register its trademark directly with the department, but use of a local firm which specializes in such registrations is highly recommended.

Intellectual property rights are regulated under the Intellectual Property and Copyright Law No. 25/1996. The Information Affairs Department of Qatar Broadcasting Corporation is in charge of enforcing this law.

#### *IX. IMPORT PROCEDURES*

Most food products are imported via truck from the United Arab Emirates and enter the country at Abu Samra, which borders Saudi Arabia. Increasing quantities of products are imported through the seaport in the capital city, Doha, mostly by reefers from neighboring United Arab Emirates and from other ports. Small quantities of products, mainly fresh fruits and vegetables and chilled meat products, are imported via Doha International Airport. Fresh products are usually cleared within 24 hours of arrival and all other food products within two to three days. Laboratory analysis may delay clearance of some products for up to ten days, according to trade contacts.

The following documents are required for imported foods:

- Commercial invoice
- Packing list

- Bill of Lading
- Health certificate from the country of origin
- Halal slaughter certificate (for poultry and meat products)
- Certificate of origin
- Radiation free certificate (for European products only)

The commercial invoice, health certificate and the certificate of origin must be notarized by a Qatari embassy or consulate in the country of origin or, in the absence of a Qatari diplomatic mission, by an embassy or consulate of another GCC country. Trade sources report that import documents also may be notarized in Doha at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provided the documents have been properly notarized by an Arab chamber of commerce in the country of origin. Trade sources report notarization fees are high, a flat rate of Qatar Riyals 1,000 (US\$ 288).

A consignment rejected because it is unfit for human consumption must be re-exported (but not to another GCC country) or destroyed, normally within two weeks of arrival. However, this can be extended if there are mitigating circumstances.

Products denied entry due to labeling infractions may later be cleared upon appeal to the Food Control Section of PHD/MOPH, provided the infraction was minor. Serious labeling infractions will result in rejection of a shipment with little chance of a successful appeal. Major labeling infractions include label tampering, missing or incorrectly printed production/expiry dates and dates printed on stickers rather than the original label/packaging.

The import duty for most food products is four percent ad valorem CIF basis. The import duty for alcoholic beverages is 100 percent while the duty on imports of cigarettes and tobacco products is 100 percent, effective July 1, 1999. GCC-origin products are exempt from all import duties.

#### *X. APPENDIX I -REGULATORY AGENCIES/USEFUL CONTACTS*

Contact name/address	Field of speciality
Mr. Nasser bin Mubarak Al-Dolaimi Director, Public Relations and Commercial Information Department Qatar Chamber of Commerce & Industry P.O. Box 402 Doha, Qatar Tel: (974) 621-131 Fax: (974) 621-905	Commercial regulations and trade data
Mr. Abdul Aziz Al-Khulaifi Director, Commercial Affairs Department Ministry of Finance, Economy & Commerce P.O.Box 83 Doha, Qatar Tel: (974) 432-103 Fax: (974) 431-412	Agency and trademark regulations

Dr. Majid R. Al-Kuwary  
Asst. Director for Animal  
Health Affairs  
Agricultural Development Department  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Agriculture  
P.O. Box 1966  
Doha, Qatar  
Tel: (974) 653-083 Fax:(974) 663-163

Live animal and pet  
import regulations

Dr. Majid Abdulla Al-Malki  
Director General  
Qatar Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
P.O. Box 402  
Doha, Qatar  
Tel: (974) 621-131 Fax: (974) 622-538

Commercial regulations  
and trade data

Dr. Ahmad Abdul Karim Al-Mulla  
Deputy Director of Preventive Medicine  
Ministry of Public Health  
P.O. Box 9374  
Doha, Qatar  
Tel: (974) 325-005 Fax:(974) 429-786

Food import regulations  
(Policy)

H.E. Shaikh Abdullah bin Jasim Al-Thani  
Director, Customs Department  
Ministry of Finance, Economy & Commerce  
P.O.Box 81  
Doha, Qatar  
Tel: (974) 414-333 Fax: (974) 414-959

Tariffs and customs  
regulations

H.E. Shaikh Abdullah bin Saud Al-Thani  
Director of Standards, Measurements  
& Consumer Protection  
Ministry of Finance, Economy & Commerce  
P.O. Box 1968  
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Food safety and other  
standards



Mr. Jassim Jeidah  
Director of Central Laboratories  
Ministry of Public Health  
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Inspection and analysis  
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Mr. Ahmed Jaber Sarour  
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Live plants and pesticide  
import regulations

For more information/questions about this report or food and agricultural import regulations of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), please contact:

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