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FAIRS Country Report

Annual

2007

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With 77% of the food and agricultural products imported into the Bahamas coming from the United States, the Bahamas recognizes and accepts U.S. standards for food and agricultural products.

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This report was prepared by the Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Miami, Florida 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.

SECTION I. FOOD LAWS

Approximately 77 percent of food and agricultural products imported into the Bahamas come from the United States. Therefore, the Bahamas recognizes and accepts the U.S. standards for food and agricultural products. The Bahamas sometimes applies the Codex Alimentarius standards for imports from other countries. The Bahamian Food Act of 1985 is not very extensive, and only requires that imported food be free from ingredients and processing that would render it “injurious to health”.

All importers must possess a valid business licence issued by the Ministry of Finance. Bahamian importers are very knowledgeable of the import requirements and clearance procedures and are essential in guiding U.S. exporters through the process. The Bahamian Department of Agriculture (BDOA) regulates imports of certain products by requiring importers to obtain an import permit for each shipment of the following products: fresh produce and plants (fruits, vegetables, plants, flowers, sod, propagative material), live animals, fresh milk, eggs and fresh, frozen and unprocessed meat of poultry, pork and mutton. The Fisheries Division issues the import permits for seafood products. Import permits can usually be obtained within 48 hours.

Phytosanitary certificates from the country of origin must accompany imported fresh produce and plants. Live animals including livestock, cats, dogs, birds and ducks must be accompanied by health certificates. Animals from the United States are only inspected by the Veterinary Division if they arrive without a health certificate. The Bahamas has no quarantine facilities. The Ministry of Environmental Health Services (MEHS) is responsible for inspection of all imported meat and dairy products. However, because of their confidence in the meat inspection procedures in the United States, U.S. meat products are usually not subject to inspection. When food-related health threats arise, the BDOA and the MEHS will monitor imports and work with local distributors to ensure that affected products are removed from the distribution system. Occasionally, items will be banned or duties will be doubled if the government decides that imports are competing unfairly with local production or may pose a phytosanitary threat. For example, import licenses for chicken leg quarters have been restricted in response to complaints from local processors, and citrus fruit from Florida is prohibited due to the citrus canker outbreak.

SECTION II. LABELING REQUIREMENTS

The Bahamas accepts all standard U.S. labeling including the standard U.S. nutritional fact panel. Meat and poultry products from the United States must have the USDA inspection seal.

SECTION III. PACKAGING AND CONTAINER REQUIREMENTS

No special packaging or container sizes are required or preferred. Packaging materials which meet U.S. standards are accepted.

SECTION IV. FOOD ADDITIVE REGULATIONS

The Bahamas accepts the U.S. standards for food additives.

SECTION V. PESTICIDE AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS

The Bahamas accepts U.S. minimum residue limits and tolerance levels for pesticides. Local authorities do not regulate pesticide residues in foods.

SECTION VI. OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Products are not required to be registered or laboratory tested. Retail prices are monitored by the Prices Commission. Although no duties are assessed on product samples, a value must be shown on the export documentation. Import permits are required for samples of meat products. Mail order shipments are examined by Customs and may be assessed duties.

SECTION VII. OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS

No other specific standards apply. The Bahamas follows U.S. standards for organic foods, food and feed ingredients, dietetic and special use foods, infant formula and baby foods.

SECTION VIII. COPYRIGHT AND/OR TRADEMARK LAWS

The Bahamas' Trade Marks Act, Copyright Act and Copyright Regulations protects trade marks and brand names. Trade marks are registered on a renewable basis by the office of the Registrar General for a period of fourteen years.

SECTION IX. IMPORT PROCEDURES

The customs clearance procedure is efficient and is focused on customer service. Bahamian law allows the importer to begin the import clearance of goods before arrival in the Bahamas using shipping documents, such as bills of lading, provided by the shipping company. The importer completes the customs documents and pays the required duties. Depending on the size of the shipment, the clearance process can take as little as an hour and normally no longer than 24 hours. Importers of perishable products can establish "security bonds" through their bank from which Customs can automatically deduct duties, further expediting the clearance process.

APPENDIX I. GOVERNMENT REGULATORY AGENCY CONTACTS

FOR IMPORT REGULATIONS AND PERMITS, CONTACT:

Mr. Simeon Pinder
Director of Agriculture
The Department of Agriculture
Levy Building
P.O. Box N 3028
Nassau, Bahamas
Tel: 1 (242) 325-7502/9
Fax: 1 (242) 325-3960, (242) 356-3919
Email: SIMEONPINDER@bahamas.gov.bs

FOR INFORMATION ON INSPECTION OF MEAT AND POULTRY PRODUCTS, CONTACT:

Ms. Melony Mc Kenzie
Acting Director-Environmental Health
The Department of Environmental Health Services
Nassau Court
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APPENDIX II. OTHER IMPORT SPECIALIST CONTACTS

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