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## Bahrain

# Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

## Country Report

### 2005

**Approved by:**

Michael T. Henney, U.S. Consulate General, Dubai  
ATO Dubai

**Prepared by:**

ATO: Hovaguim Kizirian

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**Report Highlights:**

Updated on July 17, 2005. Sections Updated: Food Law & Labeling requirements. Bahrain applies 100 percent inspection on new-to-market products, high risk products and products failing previous tests. All other products are subject to random sampling which includes laboratory analysis. Also, in February 2004 the Ministry of Commerce issued Ministerial Decree No. 3 of 2004 which authorized Bahrain's adoption of the Codex General Standard for the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods (Codex Stan 1-1985, Rev.1-1991) as the National Standard. Import policies are viewed as liberal, with no quotas or major non-tariff barriers to speak of. Import duties are now unified across the GCC states at 5 percent on practically all processed food products. Live animals, fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, grains, flours, tea, sugar, spices and seeds for planting are exempt from any import duty.

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**BAHRAIN: FOOD IMPORT REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS**

DISCLAIMER: the Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, UAE has prepared this report for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, the information provided might be dated, as some import requirements are subject to frequent change. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters ensure that all necessary customs clearance requirements have been verified with local authorities through your foreign importer before the sale conditions are finalized. FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS ALWAYS SUBJECT TO THE RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY THE COUNTRY OF IMPORT AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.

**1. Food Laws (updated)**

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

In 1993, the GCC made a significant step towards regulatory harmonization with adoption of Gulf Standard 150/1993, Part I, which harmonized shelf life durations for a number of food products marketed within the six member confederation.

In April 1995, Bahrain became the first GCC member to announce exceptions to GS-150. Ministerial Order No. 8/1995, effective as of November 1, 1995, lengthened the shelf life duration for a variety of food products. Bahraini officials believed that these changes would enhance trade in foods while continue to protect fully the integrity and safety of Bahrain's food supply. (See Appendix II for a list of Bahrain's food shelf life durations).

In general, Bahraini officials are willing to work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural products are not unduly delayed thru the import inspection process. Typically Bahrain will announce a new import regulation well in advance (often up to six months or more) of date of enforcement.

In addition, Bahrain will pre-approve food labels prior to import. Pre-import approval is strongly encouraged since it can significantly speed import clearance, particularly for new-to-market products and brands.

In January 1995 Bahrain joined the WTO. Bahrain officials remain keen to abide by WTO regulations governing food trade, specifically the SPS and TBT agreements. The Public Health Directorate (PHD), Ministry of Health (MOH), in conjunction with the Directorate of Standards and Metrology, Ministry of Commerce (MOC) are responsible for formulating food regulations. The Directorate of Agencies and Industrial Property, MOC, is responsible for formulating and enforcing trademark and agency laws. The Directorate of Customs & Ports, Ministry of Finance and National Economy (MOFNE), is responsible for enforcing local agency laws.

The Public Health Directorate, Food & Water Control Section (FWC), MOH, is responsible for enforcing food safety regulations. For example, the FWC is responsible for inspecting all imported fresh and processed food products, verifying compliance with label regulations and, if deemed necessary, drawing samples and laboratory testing the products.

Bahrain applies 100 percent inspection on new-to-market products, high risk products and products failing previous tests. All other products are subject to random sampling which includes laboratory analysis.

The Food Safety Committee (FSC), an interagency committee composed of representatives from MOH, the Directorate of Standards and Metrology, MOC, and the Directorate of Agriculture, Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Agriculture (MMAA), decides all food safety and control issues, including the imposition of a ban.

Consignments with minor labeling infractions may be granted a one-time waiver, if petitioned, provided the products are found to be safe for human consumption. Small consignments of 20 or less cartons, as well as ethnic food products, may be exempt from Arabic label requirements, provided prior authorization is obtained from the PHD/MOH.

The Directorate of Agriculture, MMAA, inspects live animals and plants, feedstuffs and horticultural products at port of entry.

The U.S. supplier is strongly encouraged to work closely with his local importer to obtain pre-import approval on labels, particularly for new-to-market products, and to ensure that the product meets all other requirements prior to import.

## **2. Labeling Requirements (Updated)**

In February 2004 the Ministry of Commerce issued Ministerial Decree No. 3 of 2004 which authorized Bahrain's adoption of the Codex General Standard for the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods (Codex Stan 1-1985, Rev.1-1991) as the National Standard. This decree supplanted Gulf Standard 9/1995 which previously governed food label requirements for products marketed in Bahrain.

Under the Codex standard, the food label must include on the original label or primary packaging the following information:

1. Product and brand name,
2. Ingredients and additives, in descending order of proportion,
3. Net content in metric units (volume in case of liquids),
4. Manufacturer's name and address,
5. Country of Origin,
6. Lot identification,
7. Expiry date,
8. Instructions for use.
9. Special storage, transportation and handling instructions, if any

(Note: There are no local nutritional labeling requirements. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable.)

Original labels must be printed in Arabic, but exceptions do exist. For example, bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g. Arabic/English). In addition, Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of Arabic or bilingual labels, provided the sticker:

- Is extremely difficult to remove,
- Includes all label information,
- Does not cover the original label, and
- Does not contradict information on the original label.

In fact, local officials consider such stickers to be labels.

Expiry dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. U.S. bar coding is not

accepted in lieu of expiry date. The expiry date must be printed in the following order, depending on the shelf life of the product:

- 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.

Dates must be printed in digit form; text is not permitted. For example, September 24, 2005 is not acceptable; 24/9/05 is acceptable.

Ministry of Health officials report that Bahrain is committed to honor its WTO obligation to implement internationally recognized standards. Thus MOH will apply the Codex Alimentarius standards in case of any conflict with existing regulations.

Furthermore, MOH officials note that soon Bahrain may recognize manufacturer established shelf lives for food products and may cancel the requirement for expiry dates on packaged food products currently in force.

Ministerial Order No. 2/1989 governs the importation of specialty food products, such as certain diet and health foods and foods for diabetics and infants. Under this order, all specialty foods must be pre-registered with the Directorate of Pharmacies and Drug Control, MOH, prior to import.

Specialty food labels must contain detailed information regarding ingredients (e.g., vitamins, supplements, minerals, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams and instructions for use and proper storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable. There are no RDA label requirements.

Products shipped in bulk or institutional-sized containers are subject to all labeling requirements. As noted earlier, small shipments and ethnic foods may be exempt from Arabic language label requirements. Fresh produce cartons are exempted from Arabic language label requirements.

### **3. Food Additives**

Bahrain applies the CODEX Alimentarius standards for food additive use, including color additives. The common name and index number of all food color additives contained in a product must be noted on the product label. European "E" numbers are accepted.

### **4. Pesticide and other Contaminates**

Bahrain applies the CODEX Alimentarius standards for pesticide residues and other contaminants in food products.

### **5. Other Regulations and Requirements**

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.

All imported eggs must be individually stamped with the supplier name or country of origin.

Unofficially poultry products are granted a 20 percent tolerance for salmonella bacteria. Inspection officials routinely test for salmonella and will reject a shipment if salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of samples taken.

No special packaging or container size requirements exist for food products.

Bahrain Standard 988/1998, which is identical to GS 988/1998, defines the permitted level of radioactivity in foodstuff. Irradiated food products are permitted but the label must include the international irradiated foods logo. A certificate of irradiation type and level is required for these foods.

Food products imported from European countries, particularly Eastern Europe, require a radiation-free certificate. This requirement was imposed as a result of the Chernobyl accident.

Bahraini health authorities randomly check food products already in the market. In addition to visually inspecting labels, samples are taken and analyzed to ensure that product ingredients match those listed on the label. This procedure is 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.

## 6. Other Standards

"Sample" consignments face no special requirements. Samples destined for food shows or other type of promotional event are exempt from local label and shelf life requirements. However, such shipments must be accompanied by a health certificate and an invoice noting that the product is not for sale and is of no commercial value.

As noted in Section 2, Ministerial Order No. 2/1989 governs specialty food products. All specialty foods must be pre-registered with the Directorate of Pharmacies and Drug Control, MOH.

Alcoholic beverages and pork, as well as food products containing alcohol or pork, are strictly regulated. For example, retail outlets can only sell pork products from special counters that are clearly marked.

Alcoholic beverages can be imported by only four companies. These companies may retail the product directly thru their own establishment or market it to institutional end users, such as hotels and licensed restaurants. Supermarkets are prohibited from selling alcoholic beverages. Media is prohibited from advertising alcoholic products, although in-house promotion in the liquor store or licensed restaurant is permitted.

## 7. Copyright/Trademark Laws

Legislative Decree No. 10/1992, amended by Legislative Decree No. 8 of 1998, governs commercial agencies. Importation of a brand officially registered to a local agent is less strictly regulated than before. At present any trader may import a product that is registered in another firm's name, provided the registered agent is paid a commission, the maximum of which is 5 percent. The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) may reduce or even exempt the payment of any commission. The principal may terminate an existing agency agreement. The agent is responsible for proving to a grievance committee that his activities resulted in an apparent success in promoting the product. The Directorate of Customs and Ports will release a consignment only if imported by the registered agent or if the importer obtains written permission from the registered agent, after paying the commission. MOC may waive this commission for certain products, if deemed in the public's interest.

The Agencies and Industrial Property Directorate of the Ministry of Commerce handles trademark registration, which usually can be completed within a short time. Although a

foreign company can register its trademark directly with the directorate, usually a local, specialized accounting firm would be retained to conduct such work.

## 8. Import Procedures

Nearly all of Bahrain's food imports enter the country via the main port of Mina Salman, located in the capital, Manama. The port boasts state-of-the-art facilities and equipment.

Imports from Saudi Arabia, a major supplier of food products to Bahrain, usually arrive via the 25-mile long King Fahed causeway, which links Bahrain to its neighbor.

Bahrain International Airport also receives a considerable amount of food products, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables and chilled meat and deli products.

Fresh products are usually cleared within 24 hours of arrival and all other food products within as little as two to three days to a week, depending on the type of laboratory analysis required.

The following are documents required for food imports:

- Commercial invoice,
- Packing list,
- Bill of Lading,
- Health certificate from the country of origin,
- Halal slaughter certificate (for meat and meat products),
- Certified certificate of origin (see below).

A U.S./Arab chamber of commerce and the Bahrain Embassy, or one of its consulates, in the United States, must notarize the certificate of origin. Another Arab embassy or consulate may be used, if a Bahraini government mission is not located near the exporter.

If no other Arab government mission is located near the exporter, a statement from the local American chamber of commerce verifying this situation will suffice. A U.S./Arab chamber of commerce, however, must still notarize the certificate of origin.

A consignment rejected for being unfit for human consumption must be re-exported (but not to another GCC country) or destroyed, normally within two to three months of arrival.

Products denied entry due to labeling infractions may later be cleared upon appeal, provided the infraction was minor. New-to-market and ethnic food products with minor labeling infractions have been cleared for import on a one-time basis.

Serious labeling infractions will result in rejection of a shipment with no real chance of successful appeal. Major labeling infractions include: label tampering, missing or incorrectly printed expiry date or date printed on the sticker rather than original label/packaging.

In January 2003, Bahrain implemented the "GCC Unified Customs Law and Single Customs Tariff" (UCL). The UCL established a unified customs tariff of five percent on practically all processed food products. Under the UCL, live animals, fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, grains, flours, tea, sugar, spices and seeds for planting are exempt from any import duty.

The UCL established a single entry point policy. In other words, a product entering any GCC member market would pay the appropriate duty at point of entry into the GCC, then be permitted duty free transit among GCC member countries. To date, however, not every GCC





Head, Veterinary Services  
Ministry of Municipalities Affairs  
and Agriculture  
P.O. Box 251  
Manama, Bahrain  
Tel: (973) 17-691-256  
Fax: (973) 17-694-673

Livestock and pet import licensing

### III. MINISTRY OF COMMERCE

Ms. Mona Al-Zeera  
Acting Director of Standards & Metrology  
Ministry of Commerce  
P.O. Box 5479  
Manama, Bahrain  
Tel: (973) 17-523-030  
Fax: (973) 17-530-730

All standards, including food standards

Mr. Mohamed Ali Ajoor  
Director of Consumer Protection  
Ministry of Commerce  
P.O. Box 5479  
Manama, Bahrain  
Tel: (973) 17-523-264  
Fax: (973) 17-530-180

Consumer protection, food policy

Mohammad D. Al-Shaer  
Director of Agencies  
and Industrial Property  
Ministry of Commerce  
P.O. Box 5479  
Manama, Bahrain  
Tel: (973) 17-530-335  
Fax: (973) 17-536-479

Trademark and agency regulations

Mr. Ali Ibrahim Al-Mahmeed  
Director General of Customs  
Directorate of Customs & Ports  
P.O. Box 15  
Manama, Bahrain  
Tel: (973) 17-727-178  
Fax: (973) 17-725-556

Customs/Duties

Mr. Abdulnabi Awad  
Director, Foreign Trade and Information  
Bahrain Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
P.O. Box 248  
Manama, Bahrain  
Tel: (973) 17-229-555  
Fax: (973) 17-216-453

Trade regulations and data

## 10. APPENDIX II- FOOD SHELF LIFE DURATIONS IN BAHRAIN

### A. Exceptions to Gulf Standard 150/93, Part I

**Table 1. Frozen Foodstuffs**

These products must be stored at temperatures not to exceed (-18 C).

|    | Product              | Packing                    | Shelf Life |          |
|----|----------------------|----------------------------|------------|----------|
|    |                      |                            | Bahrain    | GCC      |
| 1. | Sausages             | Plastic packs              | 12 months  | 9 months |
| 2. | Prawns & Crustaceans | Plastic or cardboard packs | 12 months  | 8 months |
| 3. | Eggs                 | Suitable packs             | 12 months  | 9 months |

**Table 2. Foodstuffs Requiring Special Storage**

|    | Product                  | Packing                               | Shelf Life |          |
|----|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|----------|
|    |                          |                                       | Bahrain    | GCC      |
| 1. | Fresh eggs (Table eggs)  | Suitable packs to be stored at 4-10 C | 6 months   | 3 months |
| 2. | Labneh (Strained yogurt) | Suitable packs to be stored at 0-5 C  | 15 days    | 6 weeks  |

**Table 3. Packaged Foodstuffs**

These products are to be stored at suitable temperatures in well-ventilated stores.

|     | Product                       | Packing  | Shelf Life |           |
|-----|-------------------------------|--|------------|-----------|
|     |                               |  | Bahrain    | GCC       |
| 1.  | Seafood, canned sterilized    | Cans, metallic   | 18 months  | 24 months |
| 2.  | Milk, sterilized              | Non-metallic packs   | 12 months  | 6 months  |
| 3.  | Milk, sterilized flavored     | Tetra packs  | 9 months   | 6 months  |
| 4.  | Cheese, processed             | Cans, metallic   | 24 months  | 18 months |
| 5.  | Fruit juices, dried           | Suitable packs   | 24 months  | 18 months |
| 6.  | Raisins                       | Paper or plastics packs  | 24 months  | 12 months |
| 7.  | Tomato sauce                  | Cans metallic  | 24 months  | 12 months |
| 8.  | " "                           | Glass containers   | 24 months  | 18 months |
| 9.  | Dry baby foods, milk based    | Tightly sealed metallic containers or vacuum packed and sterilized     | 24 months  | 18 months |
| 10. | Strained baby foods           | Tightly sealed glass containers, sterilized                            | 18 months  | 12 months |
| 11. | Baby fruit juices             | Tightly sealed glass containers, sterilized                            | 18 months  | 12 months |
| 12. | Artificial beverage powders   | Suitable packs   | 24 months  | 18 months |
| 13. | Biscuits, sweetened or salted | Paper packs or wrapped in special paper or cellophane or aluminum foil | 12 months  | 9 months  |
| 14. | " "                           | Cans, metallic   | 18 months  | 12 months |
| 15. | Biscuits, sweetened or        | Paper packs or wrapped in  | 12 months  | 9 months  |

|     |                              |  |           |           |
|-----|------------------------------|--|-----------|-----------|
|     | salted                       | special paper or cellophane or aluminum foil |           |           |
| 16. | " "                          | Cans, metallic                               | 18 months | 12 months |
| 17. | Brown sugar                  | Paper or plastic bags                        | None      | 18 months |
| 18. | Tehina (Sesame oil emulsion) | Suitable packs                               | 12 months | 9 months  |

## B. Standards Unchanged From Gulf Standard 150/93, Part I

**Table 1. Frozen Foodstuffs**

These products are to be stored at temperature not exceeding (-18 C).

|     | Product                                  | Packing                    | Shelf Life                       | Remarks                                  |
|-----|--|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1.  | Minced meat, burger meat and liver       | Plastic packs              | 9 months                         |  |
| 2.  | Beef, buffalo, sheep, and goat meat      | Suitable containers        | 12 months from date of slaughter | Must arrive within 4 months of slaughter |
| 3.  | Chickens, rabbits turkey, duck and geese | Plastic packs              | 12 months from date of slaughter | Must arrive within 4 months of slaughter |
| 4.  | Fatty fish 1/                            | Plastic or cardboard packs | 6 months                         |  |
| 5.  | Lean fish 1/                             | Plastic or cardboard packs | 12 months                        |  |
| 6.  | Eviscerated fish                         | Plastic or cardboard packs | 9 months                         |  |
| 7.  | Ice cream                                | Suitable containers        | 12 months                        |  |
| 8.  | Butter                                   | Suitable containers        | 12 months                        |  |
| 9.  | Margarine                                | Plastic or paper foil      | 12 months                        |  |
| 10. | Fruits                                   | Suitable containers        | 12 months                        |  |
| 11. | Fruit juices                             | Suitable containers        | 18 months                        |  |
| 12. | Fried potato chips                       | Plastic bags               | 18 months                        |  |
| 13. | Dough products                           | Suitable containers        | 12 months                        |  |

1/ Fatty fish are fish species with oil content of 5 percent or more in the edible part. Lean fish are fish species with oil content of less than 5 percent in the edible part.

**Table 2. Chilled Foodstuffs**

These products are to be stored at temperatures of 0-5 C.

|    | Product                          | Packing                        | Shelf Life | Remarks |
|----|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|---------|
| 1. | Yogurt and flavored yogurt       | Suitable, tightly sealed packs | 10 days    |         |
| 2. | Yogurt, heat treated             | Suitable packs                 | 6 weeks    |         |
| 3. | Yogurt drink (laban) pasteurized | Suitable, tightly sealed packs | 7 days     |         |
| 4. | Cheeses, processed               | Non-metallic packs             | 18 months  |         |
| 5. | Cheeses, hard                    | Suitable packs                 | 12 months  |         |
| 6. | Butter                           | Suitable packs                 | 2 months   |         |
| 7. | Margarine                        | Plastic foil packs             | 3 months   |         |

**Table 3. Foodstuffs Requiring Special Storage**

|    | Product                     | Packing                               | Storage Condition Temperatures   | Shelf Life   |
|----|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. | Beef and Buffalo meat       | Suitable containers                   | 0 C to (-2 C)  | 21 days from slaughtering date   |
| 2. | Meat packed under vacuum    | Plastic containers                    | 0 C to (-2 C)  | 10 weeks from slaughtering date. (To arrive within 40 days of slaughter) |
| 3. | Stuffed or covered biscuits | Metallic containers                   | not to exceed 25 C, in well ventilated stores, far from moisture and contamination sources | 12 months  |
| 4. | Flour                       | Paper or plastic bags                 | not to exceed 21 C, in well ventilated stores, far from moisture and contamination sources | 12 months  |
| 5. | Mayonnaise                  | Glass or metallic containers          | not to exceed 25 C, in well ventilated stores, far from moisture and contamination sources | 12 months  |
| 6. | All types of chocolate      | Paper, aluminum foil or plastic packs | not to exceed 25 C, in well ventilated stores, far from moisture and contamination sources | 12 months  |
| 7. | Fresh eggs (Table eggs)     | Suitable containers                   | from 11-15 C   | 1 month  |

**Table 4. Packaged Foodstuffs**

These products must be stored at suitable temperatures, in well-ventilated stores.

|     | Product                                  | Packing   | Shelf Life |
|-----|--|---|------------|
| 1.  | Canned meats                             | Cans, metallic                                  | 24 months  |
| 2.  | Evaporated milk                          | Cans, metallic                                  | 12 months  |
| 3.  | Dried milk, skimmed                      | In moisture proof packaging                     | 12 months  |
| 4.  | " "                                      | Cans, metallic under inert gas or vacuum packed | 18 months  |
| 5.  | Dried milk, full cream                   | Cans, metallic under inert gas or vacuum packed | 18 months  |
| 6.  | Milk, condensed sweetened                | Cans, metallic                                  | 12 months  |
| 7.  | Milk, sterilized flavored                | Cans, metallic                                  | 12 months  |
| 8.  | " "                                      | Other packs                                     | 6 months   |
| 9.  | Margarine                                | Cans, metallic                                  | 12 months  |
| 10. | Canned vegetables and fruits             | Cans, metallic                                  | 18 months  |
| 11. | " "                                      | Glass containers                                | 24 months  |
| 12. | Jams, jellies and marmalade              | Cans, metallic or glass jars                    | 24 months  |
| 13. | " "                                      | Plastic or aluminum foil packs, tightly sealed  | 12 months  |
| 14. | Dried fruits, such as figs, prunes, etc. | paper or plastic packs                          | 12 months  |
| 15. | Hot sauces, all types                    | Glass containers                                | 24 months  |
| 16. | Pickles                                  | Glass containers tightly sealed                 | 18 months  |
| 17. | " "                                      | Cans, metallic plastic lined                    | 12 months  |
| 18. | Tomato sauces, spiced                    | Cans, metallic                                  | 12 months  |

|     |   |   |           |
|-----|---|---|-----------|
| 19. | " "   | Glass containers  | 18 months |
| 20. | Tomato puree (pulp) and catsup  | Cans, metallic  | 12 months |
| 21. | " "   | Glass containers  | 18 months |
| 22. | Potato chips and popcorn  | Plastic bags  | 6 months  |
| 23. | " "   | Aluminum foil bags under inert gas or tin coated cardboard packs or in metal cans | 9 months  |
| 24. | Breakfast cereals such as corn, wheat or rice flakes, etc.                                  | Paper/ aluminum foil packs  | 12 months |
| 25. | Baby foods in powder or pellet form, prepared from cereals pulses, vegetables, fruits, etc. | Cardboard packs, aluminum coated  | 12 months |
| 26. | " "   | Cans, metallic packed under inert gas or vacuum, tightly sealed                   | 18 months |
| 27. | Beverages, carbonated   | Cans, metallic  | 9 months  |
| 28. | " "   | Glass containers  | 12 months |
| 29. | Cocoa powder  | Metal, glass or aluminum sheet packs, under inert gas or vacuum                   | 24 months |
| 30. | " "   | Other packs such as paper/plastic   | 12 months |
| 31. | Coffee, roasted ground  | Metal or aluminum foil packs, packed under vacuum or inert gas                    | 18 months |
| 32. | Coffee, instant   | Cans, metallic or glass containers  | 24 months |
| 33. | " "   | Aluminum foil or special paper packs  | 12 months |
| 34. | Cake mixes  | Paper or aluminum foil packs  | 18 months |
| 35. | Flour   | Bags, cloth   | 6 months  |
| 36. | Macaroni  | Cardboard packs or plastic bags   | 4 months  |
| 37. | Starch, all types   | Paper or plastic packs  | 24 months |
| 38. | Jelly powder  | Paper or plastic packs  | 18 months |
| 39. | Plain hard candy  | Suitable packs  | 24 months |
| 40. | Enriched hard candy   | Suitable packs  | 12 months |
| 41. | Soup powder   | Paper, plastic or aluminum foil packs   | 18 months |
| 42. | Soup, partially dehydrated in cubic form, etc   | Paper, plastic or aluminum foil packs   | 12 months |
| 43. | Vinegar, all types  | Glass containers  | 24 months |
| 44. | Halawa Tehiniah   | Metallic or plastic packs   | 12 months |
| 45. | " "   | Wrapped in paper or aluminum foil   | 6 months  |