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## **Qatar**

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### **Annual**

### **2007**

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**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.

## SECTION 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. The GCC member states have unified several food standards, and are working to jointly harmonize food import standards, including labeling and shelf-life regulations.

GCC member states continue to work towards harmonizing their food import standards, including labeling and shelf-life regulations. The first significant step towards this harmonization of food regulations came with issuance of Gulf Standard (GS) 150/1993, Part I, which established regional food shelf-life standards for seventy-five food products. In 1993 Qatar adopted GS 150/1993, Part I, without any modifications, as Qatari Standard (QS) 150/1993, Part I, and implemented it effective June 1, 1994. GS 1023/2000, Part II, expanded the list authorized in Part I by 95 additional food products. Qatar currently enforces the identified shelf-life requirements for those 95 additional food products.

On behalf of the GCC states, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recently prepared a revised standard for the shelf life of food products. While a final version of the standard has reportedly been prepared, it has not been officially announced to replace GS 150/1993 and GS 1023/2000. The revised standard will reportedly bring the GCC into closer compliance with the guidelines of Codex Alimentarius.

Similar to shelf life, the State of Qatar drafted a standard to replace the existing GS 9/1995 for the "Labeling Requirements of Prepackaged Foods." Reportedly, a final version of this standard is also nearing completion within the GCC review process.

In January 2003, Qatar implemented the "GCC Unified Customs Law and Single Customs Tariff" (UCL). Under the UCL, a unified customs tariff of five percent is applied 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.

Under the UCL, the GCC also adopted a single entry point policy, meaning a product 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 country has implemented the single entry point policy for a variety of reasons, including disparity of food control procedures, quality of health laboratories and procedures for dividing tariff proceeds among member countries.

GCC countries have developed the "Guide for Food Import Procedures for the GCC Countries." This guide is meant to unify the applied procedure in all the GCC countries for clearing food consignments as well as unifying the required import certificates for different types of foods. Bahrain notified the WTO of the proposed action and the U.S. government has submitted comments on the proposal. See report number TC7013 for more details.

Qatari officials, for the most part, will work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural imports are not unduly disrupted or delayed at port of entry. Food labels can be approved through a pre-approval process prior to import. Achieving such pre-import approval is strongly encouraged, particularly for new-to-market products.

On May 5, 2005 the Emir of Qatar issued a law abolishing the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH). On the same day, the Emir issued decrees establishing a National Health Authority (NHA) and its Board of Directors. The NHA carries out all functions previously conducted by the MOPH.

The National Health Authority (NHA), in coordination with the General Organization for Standards and Metrology and the Ministry of Economy & Commerce, (MOEC), is responsible for establishing food safety regulations. The Food Control Committee (FCC), an interagency committee, headed by the Assistant Undersecretary of NHA for Technical Affairs, which incorporates representatives from NHA, Doha Municipality and the Agricultural Development Department, decides on all food safety and control issues, including import bans.

The Department of Commercial Affairs, MOEC, is responsible for trademark and agency laws. The Customs and Ports Authority is responsible for enforcement of agency laws at the time of import.

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

Not all shipments are subject to laboratory analysis. In general, new-to-market products and products that failed a previous inspection are targeted for thorough examination upon importation. Poultry and meat products are routinely inspected for Salmonella and other pathogens. According to NHA officials, laboratory analyses could take up to one week to ten days, depending on the nature of required tests.

The Agricultural Development Department of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture is responsible for inspecting live animals and plants, animal feed and horticultural products at the port of entry.

## **SECTION II: LABELING REQUIREMENTS**

As noted previously QS 150/1993, Part I and Part II contain Qatar's shelf-life regulations. According to local health officials, non-compliance with GS 150/1993, 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 then be rejected for non-compliance.

QS 9/1996, which is identical to GS 9/1995, contains Qatar's labeling regulations. Under QS 9/1996, 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 instructions for storage, transportation and preparation, if any

Original labels should be printed in Arabic. However, bilingual labels are permitted, provided Arabic is one of the languages (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.
- 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 importation. No change to label information is permitted after importation.

Labeling of nutritional value is voluntary. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable. Labeling of recommended daily intake RDI is not required.

Exception: Labels for specialty foods, such as diet and health foods, foods for diabetics and infants, must contain detailed information about the product's vitamin and mineral content, nutritive value per 100 grams, proper use and storage. The NHA must approve and register these foods prior to import.

Labeling regulations apply to products shipped in institutional-size containers for direct consumption in hotels, restaurants and institutions.

Labeling requirements are waived for food products that are imported in bulk form for further processing.

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. Neither stickers nor U.S. bar codes are permitted as substitutes. Multiple P/E dates on the label are not acceptable. Finally, P/E dates must be printed in Arabic (and English if a bilingual label) 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, 4/2004 and April 2004 are both acceptable formats. P/E dates in English digits alone are acceptable, but it is preferable to have the dates in both languages.

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.

P/E dates are not required for certain products, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, and fresh bakery items.

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.

### **SECTION III: PACKAGING AND CONTAINER REGULATIONS**

General requirements for packaged special foods are covered under GS 654/1996, GS 839/97, and GS 1024/2000.

### **SECTION 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 23/1984. This standard requires the common name and index number of all coloring additives contained in a product 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 and fats while QS 356, 357, 381, 577, 578 and 1018 regulate other food additives. These regulations mimic Codex Alimentarius standards for food additives.

The General Organization for Standards and Metrology at MOEC, see Appendix I, can be contacted for copies of food additive or other standards. The standards are mostly in Arabic. Some standards are available in English, but not all.

### **SECTION V: PESTICIDE AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS**

Local regulations governing pesticide and other contaminate residue levels are based on Codex Alimentarius standards. Specifically, QS 382/1996 and QS 383/1996 regulate pesticide and other contaminant residues in food products. The pesticide residues list, as is the food additives list, is a positive list, i.e., approved pesticides with tolerance levels are identified.

Pesticides must be registered with the Agricultural Development Department, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture.

### **SECTION VI: OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS**

All new-to-market processed food products are subject to laboratory analysis. Subsequent shipments of a product that has passed the initial testing will be subject to further laboratory analysis again after six months. A product failing a previous inspection will be thoroughly examined on subsequent shipments for an undisclosed length of time.

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. Import of pork and products containing pork is strictly prohibited. Food products must identify the origin of any animal fat (e.g., beef tallow). Maximum alcohol content in barley beverage (non-alcoholic beer) is 0.05%.

Poultry and meat products are routinely tested for Salmonella. If Salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of the tested samples, the shipment will be rejected. Import of alcoholic beverages and products containing alcohol is restricted to one organization. The

government strictly controls the sale of alcoholic beverages. Advertising of such beverages is prohibited.

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

Importation of irradiated food products is permitted, but the product's label must clearly indicate that the product has undergone such treatment.

Qatar's municipality inspectors randomly check food products in wholesale and retail markets. In addition to the visual inspection of labels, samples are collected and analyzed to ensure product ingredients match those listed on the label. Local inspections are unscheduled. If a discrepancy is found, the product is removed from the market and destroyed at the importer's expense after notification.

## **SECTION VII: OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS**

Imported food samples are not subject to special requirements. Samples destined for food shows and other types of promotional events are exempt from regulations covering labeling and shelf-life. Accompanying the samples must be a health certificate, and an invoice noting that the product is not for sale and is of no commercial value.

## **SECTION VIII: COPYRIGHT AND/OR TRADEMARK LAWS**

Commercial Agency Law Number 8/2002 regulates Agency matters. Only a Qatari citizen or Qatari company may register a commercial agency. An agency contract 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. Customs officials will automatically seize any brand imported by a company that is not registered as the official agent. With the registered agent's written consent, the consignment will be released. Often an agent will demand a fee, usually a percentage of the consignment's value, for such permission.

Law of Trademarks and Commercial Indications No. 9/2002 regulate Trademark matters. The Commercial Affairs Department, MOEC, is charged with enforcing trademark, as well as, agency regulations. A trademark can be registered directly with Commercial Affairs by a foreign company or through a local firm that specializes in such registrations. The latter is recommended.

Intellectual Property and Copyright Law No. 7/2002 regulates Intellectual Property matters. The Ministry of Economy and Commerce (MOEC) is charged with enforcing this law and other intellectual property matters.

## **SECTION 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 in reefer containers on barges from the neighboring United Arab Emirates. 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 most other food products within two to three days. Laboratory analysis, however, may delay clearance of some products for up to ten days.

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 and health and country of origin certificates must be notarized by the Qatari Embassy or consulate in the United States. In the absence of a Qatari diplomatic mission, any embassy or consulate of another GCC country can do the job. Trade sources report that import documents also may be notarized in Doha at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the documents had been properly notarized by an Arab Chamber of Commerce in the country of origin. Rejected consignments for health/quality reasons must be re-exported (but not to another GCC country) or destroyed, normally within two weeks of arrival. This grace period can be extended if extenuating circumstances exist.

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

In January 2003 Qatar implemented the Unified GCC Customs Law, which imposes an import duty of five percent ad valorem, CIF basis on most processed food products. Live animals, fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, grains, flours, tea, sugar, spices and seeds for planting are exempt from any imports duty. The import duty for alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and tobacco products remains at 100 percent. GCC-origin products are exempt from all import duties.

### **Other Relevant Reports**

TC7013 <http://www.fas.usda.gov/gainfiles/200707/146291603.pdf>



## APPENDIX 1: GOVERNMENT REGULATORY AGENCY CONTACTS

Contact name/address -----	Field of specialty
<b>Ms. Wassan Al Baker</b> Director, Central Laboratories National Health Authority P.O. Box 21266 Doha, Qatar Tel: (974) 441-7676 Fax: (974) 435-3769	Analysis of imported food products/Food Safety Committee member
<b>Mr. Abdallah S. Al-Khanji</b> Director, Agricultural Development Dept. Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture P.O. Box 1966 Doha, Qatar Tel: (974) 449-2666 Fax: (974) 432-2002	Live plants and pesticide import regulations
<b>Dr. Mohamed Saif Al-Kuwary</b> Director General General Organization for Standards and Metrology Ministry of Economy & Commerce P.O. Box 23277 Doha, Qatar Tel: (974) 440-8651 Fax: (974) 447-9052	All standards, including food
<b>Mr. Mohamed Bin Saif Bin Al Thashal Al Hajri</b> Assistant Manager, Doha Municipality Health Affairs P.O. Box 16773 Doha, Qatar Tel: (974) 447-8075 Fax : (974) 447-9672	Food & Health affairs
<b>Mr. Ahmad Saad Al-Qahtani</b> Head of Port Health and Food Control Section National Health Authority P.O. Box 5373 Doha, Qatar Tel: (974) 436-7983 Fax: (974) 436-7989 e-mail: <a href="mailto:aalqahtani2@hme.org.qa">aalqahtani2@hme.org.qa</a>	Inspection of imported food products
<b>Dr. Qassim Nasser Alqahtani</b> Director, Animal Wealth Department Agricultural Development Department Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Agriculture P.O. Box 1966 Doha, Qatar Tel: (974) 465-3083/4 Fax: (974) 466-3163	Live animal, animal genetics and pet import regulations

**Mr. Mohammed Al-Saadi**

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Commercial agency  
regulations

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Food import regulations  
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Food safety issues