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Oman

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

Country Report

2006

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Executive Summary

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DISCLAIMER: This report has been 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 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 the Omani importer before 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.

U.S. food products are rarely rejected due to the unauthorized use of an additive.

General (Updated)

The Sultanate of Oman is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that also includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The GCC member states have unified several food standards, and are working to harmonize all remaining food import standards. The GCC states have agreed to base their regulations and standards on directives, rules and regulations issued by the FAO's Codex Alimentary in order to remain in line with international practices. This includes matters related to biotechnology, novel foods, food coloring agents and other food additives.

The GCC took a major step towards regulatory harmonization with issuance of Gulf Standard (GS) 9/1995, which revised previous label regulations for prepackaged food products, and GS 150/1993, Part I, which established shelf-life standards for a number of food items. Oman adopted GS 9/1995 as Omani Standard (OS) 58/1995 and GS 150/1993, Part I, as OS 246/1993. In its accession WTO agreement, Oman accepted the manufacturer recommended shelf life duration for products identified in OS 246/1993.

On June 26, 2000, the Omani Minister of Commerce issued Ministerial Decree No. 74/2000 which relates to food labeling and safety. This decree, said to complement OS 58/1995, contains the following main components:

Article (1): Labeling information on food and food products shall be in accordance with the Codex General Standard for the labeling of prepackaged foods (Codex Standards), all information shall be written in Arabic and any other language beside Arabic.

Article (2): Food products shall not contain alcohol, pork, lard or their derivatives.

Article (3): Definitions and limits of food additives, contaminants, residue of pesticides and residue of veterinary drugs in food and food products shall be in accordance with Codex Alimentary standards.

Article (4): Whatever contradicts this decree shall be canceled.

Such wording created slight confusion over Oman's commitment to the GCC on one hand, and its commitment to the WTO on the other. An Omani high level official acknowledged that the country understands that by attempting to follow CODEX regulations simultaneously with GCC standards could cause slight confusion among third parties. However, the official noted

Oman is hopeful that time will lead other GCC member states to voluntarily come into compliance with their WTO commitments. Towards that end, all GCC member states have agreed to adopt CODEX regulations governing the use of food coloring agents and other food additives.

As a result of the U.S. – Oman bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA), several of the food regulations are in focus to ensure their conformity with the country's WTO and Codex obligations.

The Directorate for Specifications and Measurements, Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCAI), is responsible for formulating food safety regulations and standards. Regulations become law by official decree issued by the Minister of Commerce and Industry. Usually, a grace period of up to six months is granted prior to enforcement of new regulations.

On April 30, 2005 Oman lifted its ban on U.S. beef and beef-based products including pet food containing meat and meat by-products from the U.S. via decree 24/2005.

As ruled by all GCC states, Oman enforces a 5 percent import duties on most imported food products. Staples and fresh produce are mostly exempt from the import duties.

1. Food Laws Overview

Regulatory enforcement of food products is divided between the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the various municipalities within the Sultanate of Oman. MAF is responsible for inspection of live animals and plants, red meats, poultry meat, agricultural materials, timber and grains and other unprocessed agricultural products at all points of entry into the country. The Health Quarantine Department, MOH, is responsible for inspection of imported semi- and fully-processed food products, including sugar. Municipalities may post officials at the country's ports of entry, but their role in inspection of imported foods is very marginal. The Municipalities are primarily involved in the regulation of food thru inspection of products available on the local market.

Compliance disputes are settled by a committee comprised of representatives from the MAF, the Standard and Measurements Directorate of the MOCAI, the MOH, the chamber of commerce and appropriate municipality bureaus. Trade contacts report that consignments rejected for minor labeling and other infractions may be granted a one-time waiver, provided the product is found to be safe for human consumption.

To facilitate product entry, the U.S. supplier is encouraged to work closely with its local importer agent to obtain pre-clearance approval for labels, particularly for new-to-market products, and to ensure that the U.S. product complies with local food regulations.

2. Labeling Requirements

Until a unified GCC adoption of the newly proposed labeling requirements, OS 58/1995 and Oman Ministerial Decree No.74/2000 define Oman's labeling requirements. Labels must be in Arabic or can be bilingual, if one language being Arabic. Required information must appear on the original label or primary packaging. Required information includes:

- Product and brand name
- Country of origin
- Ingredients, in descending order of proportion
- Additives, contaminants, any residues of pesticide or veterinary drugs
- Origin of animal fat (e.g., beef tallow), if applicable

- Net content in metric units (volume in case of liquids)
- Production and expiry dates (P/E)
- Name and address of manufacturer, packer, distributor, exporter, importer or vendor
- Nutritional information for foods for special dietary uses
- Special storage, transportation and preparation instructions, if any.

Products shipped in bulk must meet Omani labeling requirements and must be accompanied by small, easy-to-handle samples for possible laboratory verification. For example, edible oils imported in bulk are required to be accompanied by a small (one liter) sample of the product. The sample container must contain a label that meets all labeling requirements.

Language

Bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g. Arabic/English). Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of the original Arabic or bilingual label provided the sticker:

- Complies with all labeling requirements and is applied by the manufacturer,
- Does not conceal required information on the original label,
- Does not contradict information on the original label,
- Is extremely difficult to remove.

If a consignment arrives without an Arabic label, the Ministry of Commerce may waive this requirement on a one-time basis or it may request the importer add Arabic language stickers on the package before releasing the product. Always confirm with your import agent before shipping.

Product Dating

Dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at time of production, using indelible ink. Stickers with date stamps imprinted are not accepted. While technically these dates must be printed in Arabic, dates printed in English or English/Arabic are accepted. If printed in multiple languages, the dates must be the same. Any discrepancy in dates will lead to rejection of the product/shipment.

Bar coding is not permitted in lieu of P/E dates. Dates must be printed in the following order, as determined by the shelf-life of the product, in either digit or text format:

- 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

As noted previously, OS 246/1993 is a voluntary, not mandated, guide for determining the shelf life of a product for the Oman market. Because products could be shipped from Oman to regional markets most Omani traders will request products comply with OS 246/1993.

Specialty food product labels, for items such as diet, health and infant foods, must contain detailed ingredient information (vitamins, minerals, supplements, additives including food colorings, preservatives, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams, health warnings if any, and instructions for proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is permitted. Baby foods must be inspected and approved by the Medicine Control Section, MOH. U.S. suppliers should verify with the import agent if an import permit is required for the particular specialty food shipment.

OS 58/1995 requires production and expiry (P/E) dates on products. In 2000, Oman relaxed this requirement under its WTO accession agreement. Currently only perishable products, such as eggs and dairy products are required to bear dates of production and expiry. Shelf-stable products, such as packaged food, may carry expiry dates only. The U.S. supplier is advised that if a product would be destined for a second GCC member country, that country would require P/E dates on the original package. No GCC member country accepts P/E information printed on a sticker in lieu of the original package.

Bulk or institutional-sized containers must comply with labeling requirements. P/E dates are not required for certain products, including fresh fruits and vegetables and fresh bakery items, as indicated by OS 246/1993. Importers will often request production date information be included on the product though. Expiry dates are not required for products deemed to be extremely shelf-stable such as salt and sugar. Products arriving clearly marked, as samples not intended for sale, are exempt from label regulations.

3. Food Additives

In general, Oman accepts any food or coloring additive approved by the Codex Alimentarius, even those additives that are not listed in GS 23/1998. Under GS 23/1998, the common name and index number of color additives contained in a product must be noted on the label. European "E" numbers are permitted. (See Appendix A for a list of approved color additives).

4. Pesticides and Other Contaminants

Oman Standard OS 482/1994 correlates to GS 382/1994 for "Maximum Limits of Pesticide Residues in Agricultural and Food Products - Part I" while OS 483/1994 correlates to GS 383/1994 for "Maximum Limits of Pesticide Residues in Agricultural and Food Products - Part II". Codex Alimentary standards are used as guidelines. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries monitors for residues.

5. Other Regulations and Requirements

All food consignments must be accompanied by:

- 1) Health certificate issued by the appropriate government agency in the country of origin that attests to the product's fitness for human consumption.
- 2) Halal slaughter certificate issued by an approved Islamic center in the country of origin for all meat and poultry products.

Both an Arab Chamber of Commerce and the Oman Embassy or Oman Consulate in the United States, must notarize these certificates. If the latter are not present, another Arab diplomatic mission would be acceptable.

Poultry products are randomly tested for salmonella. Omani guidelines allow for a maximum tolerance of salmonella in 20 percent of the samples tested.

While alcoholic beverages are restricted to 8 imported-licensed companies, only 2 companies are licensed to retail it. Non-alcoholic beer requires an import license issued from the MOCAI and mandatory testing at Point-of-entry.

Pork and pork product can be imported, but are subject to 100 percent duty. Pork and pork products must be retailed in a separate section of the retail outlet that is headed with a sign "Pork products, not for Muslims".

No special packaging or container size requirement exists for food products. Radiation and dioxin-free certificates are not required for U.S. origin foods. Oman does not have any regulation governing the importation of irradiated food products, but such products tend to encounter problems at Custom entry points.

Municipality food inspectors randomly check food products in the market regardless of origin. In addition to a visual label inspection, a sample may be analyzed to verify the accuracy of the label versus actual product content. If a discrepancy is found, the product is removed from the market and destroyed at the supplier's expense.

If the infraction is severe, i.e., the label does not identify a pork ingredient or is intentionally altered or falsified, the product may be banned from the market for a specified period of time, usually six to twelve months.

6. Other Standards (Updated)

Food samples - No special requirements exist. Samples destined for food shows and other types of promotional events are exempt from local label and shelf-life regulations. Samples must be accompanied by health certificates and invoices that state the products are not for sale and are of no commercial value.

Infant, diet and health foods – No special regulations govern their import. Such products must comply with labeling regulations. Baby foods must be registered at the Ministry of Health who will issue an import permit for every shipment prior to Customs clearance.

7. Copyright/Trade Mark Laws

Oman Ministerial Decree No. 38/2000 gave legal recognition of international copyright laws and legal protection on trademarks. The Ministry of Commerce is responsible for brand registration, which usually can be completed in a short time.

In 1996, an agency decree was issued that permitted the importation of food products by importers other than the registered agent. Oman permits parallel imports.

8. Import Procedures

The Port of Sultan Qaboos in Muscat is Oman's main port. In recent years, the port has invested in infrastructure expansion and modernization, particularly at the container terminal. Port inspection services (foods and customs) are improving with the average time required now to clear food consignments at 1-2 hours.

The Port of Salalah is undergoing a major expansion and development program. This port facilitates Oman's trade to Yemen and other East African countries. The Port of Sohar, the country's third largest port, is expected to undergo a face-lift in the near future as well.

Import documentation required for food items include:

- Commercial invoice
- Packing list
- Bill of Lading
- Health certificate
- Halal slaughter certificate (for meat and poultry products only)
- Certificate of Origin
- Import permit from the respective Ministry

The Arab Chamber of Commerce and Oman Embassy or Consulate must notarize the health and Halal certificates.

The MAF issues import permits for agricultural products under its jurisdiction - live animals and plants, red meat, poultry meat, agricultural materials, timber, grains and other unprocessed agricultural products.

No appeal process exists for food products rejected as unfit for human consumption. Rejected consignments must be destroyed or re-exported.

Products rejected for minor labeling infractions may be allowed entry upon appeal. New-to-market and ethnic food products are normally allowed entry on a one-time basis, despite minor labeling infractions.

P/E date related infractions (i.e., missing production and expiry dates, dates printed in the wrong order and dates printed on stickers rather than original labels) normally result in rejection of the product. Products arriving without date of production might be permitted provided date of expiry is mentioned. Disputed products may be stored at the port of entry or under bond outside the port until a final resolution is announced.

Arabic language labeling is required. However, the Ministry of Commerce will allow the importer to add Arabic language stickers to the label to permit the sale of the product.

Basic commodities, such as rice, sugar, wheat, wheat flour, corn, barley, fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh and chilled meat and poultry, bulk edible oils, powdered milk, seedlings and planting seeds, are exempt from import duties.

Processed or value added food products are subject to a five percent import duty, ad valorem CIF basis. Pork and pork products, alcoholic beverages and dried lemons are assessed a 100 percent import duty. Bananas and edible oils in retail pack are levied a 25 percent protective tariff while dates are assessed a 20 percent tariff. GCC-origin products are exempt from all import duties.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Lists of Permitted Food Colors

1. Natural Food Colors ^{1/}

Color / Description	International No.	Other Names
Red to Yellow Shade		
Carmine	120	Cochineal, Carminic Acid
Annato extracts	160A	Bixin, Norbixin
Beta Carotene	160B	Carotene blend
Lycobine	160D	
Beta-Apo-8-carotenal	160E	
Beta-Apo-8-carotenoid acid	160F	
Lutein	161B	
Carrot oil	None	
Beet root red	162	Beta nine
Red to Purple Shade		
Anthocyanins	163	
Grape skin extract	163	
Blackcurrant extract	163	Enocianina
Beet powder	None	
Paprika	None	
Paprika oleoresin	160C	
Orange and Yellow		
Saffron	None	Natural yellow 6
Turmeric powder	100	
Curcumim	100	
Turmeric oleoresin	None	
Riboflavin	101	
Riboflavin-5-Sodium Phosphate	101	
Green		
Chlorophylls	140	Chlorophyllins
Chlorophyll copper complex	141	
Sodium and potassium salts of chlorophyll copper complex	141	
Brown		
Plain caramel	150A	
Caustic sulfite caramel	150C	
Ammonia caramel	150C	
Ammonia sulfite caramel	150D	
Black		
Activated vegetable carbon	153	
Inorganic Colors		
Titanium dioxide	171	Food white 6
Iron oxides	172	

2. Artificial Food Colors

Color/ Description	International No.	Other Names
Red		
Azorubine	122	Carmosine, Food red 3
Allura Red 17	129	Food red 40
Yellow		
Sunset yellow FCF	110	Food yellow 3, Food orange S, Yellow 6 for food, drugs and cosmetics
Tartrazine	102	Food yellow 4, Yellow 5 for food, drugs and cosmetics
Brown		
Chocolate brown HT	155	Food brown 3
Green		
Fast green FCF		
Blue	143	Food green 3, Green 3 for food, drugs and cosmetics
Indigo tin	132	Carmine indigo, Blue 2 for food, drugs and cosmetics, Food blue 1
Brilliant blue FCF	133	Food blue 2, Blue 1 for food, drugs and cosmetics
Black		
Brilliant black BN	151	Food black 1, Black PN

3. Coloring Additives Allowed for Use in Selected Foods

International No.	Color	Food	Maximum Limit
127	Erythrosine	Cherry & Products	None
128	Red 2 G	Sausages	20 ppm
161G	Canthaxanthin	Cooked Sausages	30 ppm
		Frozen Foods	100 ppm
173	Aluminum	External Cover for Cake and Pasta	According to Good Production Practice
174	Silver	External Cover for Sweets	According to Good Production Practice
175	Gold	External Cover for Sweets	According to Good Production Practice
180	Lithotrubine	Cheese Covering	According to Good Production Practice
None	Orange B	Sausage and Frankfurters Covering	150 ppm
None	Citrus Red 2	Orange Peel	2 ppm

Parts per million = ppm

4. Recently Prohibited Colors

International No.	Color	Remarks
104	Quinolin yellow	Prohibited in all food products
124	Ponceau 4R	Prohibited in all food products

1/ Note: Oman will recognize a non-listed color or color additive if approved under Codex or other International Standard.

Appendix B. Regulatory Agencies/Useful Contacts**Mrs. Aida Riyami, Director General**

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