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United Arab Emirates

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

Country Report

2003

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Report Highlights:

This is an updated version of the FAIRS report which provides extensive information on import and other regulatory issues in the U.A.E. There are some significant changes from the earlier report.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
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**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES:
FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL IMPORT REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS (FAIRS)****Dated: March 2003****Section(s) Updated: All**

Disclaimer: This report has been prepared by the Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, U.A.E. 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 may not be completely accurate either because policies have changed since its preparation or clear and consistent information was not available. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters verify all import requirements with local authorities through their importers, before sales conditions are finalized and goods are shipped. FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS SUBJECT TO THE RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY THE COUNTRY OF IMPORT AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.

Please contact this office, if you have any comments, corrections or suggestions about the material contained in this report. Our e-mail address is: atodubai@fas.usda.gov.

A. FOOD LAW OVERVIEW

The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Other members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The GCC states are collectively working on harmonizing their food related safety standards by 2005. Until then member countries will still exert significant autonomy when it comes to the implementation of domestic and regional requirements.

For the most part, local regulations are based on GCC standards, when available. In the absence of GCC approved standards, U.A.E. food safety regulations are set jointly by the General Secretariat of Municipalities (GSM) and the newly established "Emirates Standards & Measurements Organization" (ESMO). These regulations are usually based on recommendations by the National Food Safety Committee (NFSC). The Veterinary Committee (VC) is involved in the process for meat and poultry products.

The National Food Safety Committee (NFSC) consists of:

- Two representatives each from Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah municipalities;
- One representative each from the remaining municipalities of the U.A.E.;
- One representative each from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economy & Industry, Agriculture & Fisheries (Agriculture Section) and Health;
- The Secretary General of the GSM;
- One representative from ESMO; and
- One representative from Al Ain University.

The Veterinary Committee (VC) consists of:

- One representative from the veterinary section of each of the eight municipalities of the U.A.E.;
- One representative from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The health department of each municipality is responsible for enforcing food safety standards on locally produced and imported foods through its food control division. While information is shared between municipalities, they operate independently. The municipalities of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah are the major entry points for imported food products, in descending order of importance.

Food products are regularly inspected at time of import and at point-of-sale. Fines are levied and products destroyed for severe violations. Imported and locally produced food products are subject to the same food safety regulations and labeling requirements. At present there are no environmental laws regulating food product packaging.

The U.A.E. is a growing market for high value food products with foods imported from more than 90 countries. The country is free trade oriented with few non-tariff trade barriers. It is very active in the re-export of food products to neighboring countries with more than 60 percent estimated eventually re-exported. The major regulatory barriers facing U.S. suppliers include: (1) shelf-life standards that are not science-based, (2) labeling of production and expiry dates on most food products, (3) labeling of dates in a day/month/year or month/year format only, and (4) the requirement of at least one-half a product's shelf-life is remaining at time of import.

Because of changing regulations and the enforcement autonomy of member countries, exporters are strongly encouraged to work closely with their importers to obtain pre-export label and product clearance.

B. LABELING REQUIREMENTS

For the most part, the U.A.E. enforces the GCC regional "Gulf Standard" (GS) 9/1995 which regulates labeling of food. A major exception to this standard is that the U.A.E., so far, accepts English-only labels and does not require Arabic labeling on food products. Since this is an Arab country, however, and many products are re-exported to neighboring countries, suppliers are encouraged to provide bilingual labels (e.g., Arabic/English) or Arabic stickers containing crucial label information. Once a unified GCC food standard is adopted, all products imported into a GCC member country would require a bilingual label.

In general, a standard U.S. label meets most local labeling requirements. The production date requirement is a key difference. Under current U.A.E. regulations, a food label must contain the following information:

- Product and brand name;
- Ingredients in descending order of proportion;
- Additives using their "E" number (group names are accepted, see appendix B.);

- The origin of all animal fats (should be of Halal origin) 1/;
- Net content in metric units;
- Production and expiry dates (see below for details);
- Country of origin;
- Manufacturer's/exporter's name and address;
- Special storage and preparation instructions, if any.

1/ Note: usage of pork fat, as with all pork related products as ingredients, is very restricted. Also, non-Halal imported meats will only be permitted, under certain restrictions and exemptions are granted by the heads of the food control sections to be sold to non-Moslems in designated areas.

In general, products shipped in bulk and institutional-sized containers must comply with all labeling regulations. For example, bulk cartons of fresh fruits and vegetables must contain most label information, but need not carry production/expiry dates.

Labels for specialty foods such as diet, health and baby foods must contain detailed information about the product's vitamin and mineral content, nutritive value per 100 grams and proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable and there are no RDA label requirements. In general, U.S. nutritional labeling is acceptable and may eventually be the basis for local nutritional labeling standards.

The importation and sale of pork and pork containing products are permitted, but strictly regulated. Labels for such products must comply with the general labeling requirements and clearly state that the product contains pork. No food labels can contain pictures of, nor recipes listing pork or alcohol. Alcoholic beverages and alcohol containing products are also permitted, yet restricted through authorized importers and retail shops.

Similar to food products, labels for pet foods must be printed in Arabic. Arabic/English labels are permitted, as are Arabic stickers in lieu of Arabic labels. English only labels are still permitted. In all cases, the label must contain the statement, "Not fit for human consumption." Production/expiry dates are required for pet foods as well.

The U.A.E. enforces the GCC GS 150/1993, Part I, which regulates the shelf-life durations for approximately 118 food products. Under GS 150, production/expiry dates for selected products 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 accepted in lieu of P/E dates and a label may not carry more than one set of P/E dates. P/E dates must be printed in the following fashion, depending upon the shelf-life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of six months or less;
- Month/year for products with a shelf-life longer than six months.

Under the month/year format, the last day of the month is considered the expiry date. The month may be printed in numbers or letters. For example, both 3/03 and March 03 are acceptable formats.

The production date must be preceded by the word "Production" or the letter "P." The expiry date must be preceded by one of the following statements: "Expiration (date)"; "Use by (date)"; "Use before (date)"; "Sell by (date)"; "Valid until (date) from the date of production"; or the letter "E."

With few exceptions, a product must have at least one-half of its shelf-life remaining at the time of import. Frozen meat and poultry products must be imported within four months of their date of production, regardless of the length of their shelf-life.

The following products are specifically exempt from expiration dates: salt, white sugar, dry and dried legumes, dried vegetables, spices and other condiments, tea and rice.

Most major municipalities offer the following services to facilitate food product imports:

- Pre-shipment inspection of food labels: Copies of labels can be sent (fax copies are acceptable) directly to inspection officials for review, free-of-charge. If approved, a notice will be issued to accompany the product and facilitate inspection at the time of arrival.

- Pre-shipment inspection of ingredients: Officials will analyze a product to determine compliance with food ingredient standards. Costs involve vary, depending on type of product and ingredients.

Occasionally, local health officials will permit the importation of food products with minor labeling infractions. Exemptions are granted on a one-time basis and the sale of such products usually is limited to institutional end users.

C. FOOD ADDITIVE REGULATIONS

The U.A.E. has begun to enforce U.A.E. 23/2000 (GS 23/1998), which regulates use of food coloring additives, and U.A.E. 356/1995, which regulates use of food preservatives. In the absence of a GCC or U.A.E. standard, the U.A.E. recognizes international standards (e.g., Codex Alimentarius) or European standards. Rarely is an illegal food additive or ingredient detected in U.S. origin products. Nevertheless, exporters are encouraged to work closely with their importers to ensure their products meet all U.A.E. food additive requirements. U.A.E. health authorities always warn importers/local producers that "The addition of food coloring, preservatives, antioxidants and non-nutritive sweeteners is restricted." The quantity used of each item is subject to specific limits. Food Control Sections must be contacted for further details."

D. PESTICIDE AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS

In absence of a GCC or U.A.E. standard, the U.A.E. will recognize the Codex Alimentarius Volume 2 B standard that governs pesticide and other contaminant residue levels. Chemical contamination is a growing concern between U.A.E. authorities and efforts are underway to update local guidelines and improve testing procedures. Food products meeting U.S. residue standards will most likely meet future U.A.E. standards. It is very rare that U.S. origin products are rejected due to pesticide or other

contaminant residues.

E. OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

All imported food products must be accompanied by:

- ' A health certificate issued by the appropriate government agency in the United States, attesting to the product's fitness for human consumption;
- ' All meat and poultry products must be accompanied by an Islamic (Halal) slaughter certificate issued by an U.A.E.-approved Islamic center in the United States
- ' Bill of Entry or Airway Bill;
- ' Packing list.

The health and Halal slaughtering certificates must be notarized by the Arab-American Chamber of Commerce and the U.A.E. Embassy or Consulate in the United States.

There are no special packaging or container size requirements for food products. The U.A.E. does not allow the importation of irradiated food products. A radiation-free certificate is required for food products from Europe and Asia. U.S. products are exempt from this requirement.

There are no specific requirements for imported food samples. Samples for food shows and other promotional events are routinely exempt from local labeling and shelf-life requirements. Product samples must be clearly marked as samples and accompanied by a statement claiming that they are not for sale.

Since 1998 the U.A.E. has levied a commercial invoice legalization fee (equivalent to 1 percent of the consignment value) on all imported products. These fees can be paid at the U.A.E. Embassy/Consulate in the United States or in the U.A.E. upon arrival. Products will not be released from Customs until the fees are paid.

F. OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS

Other than U.A.E. standard (254/1995) for "baby food based on milk," there are no special standards for specialty food products, such diet or health foods.

Inspection officials routinely check for salmonella in poultry products. If salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of tested samples, the shipment will be rejected.

Imports of alcoholic beverages are strictly controlled. Only a few local companies are licensed to import and sell alcoholic beverages. These products are exempt from local labeling requirements. The import of non-alcoholic beverages is permitted, but these products cannot contain more than 0.05 percent of alcohol by volume. These products are also exempt from local labeling requirements.

The sale of pork products is strictly regulated and confined to well-marked areas of supermarkets. Restaurants must clearly identify products on the menu which contain pork. Only selected retail outlets and hotels are permitted to sell pork.

The U.A.E. Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) is responsible for regulating the importation of live animals and plants.

G. COPYRIGHT OR TRADEMARK LAWS

The U.A.E. has significantly tightened protection of trademarks and brand names. Trade Mark registration is not required but protection may be limited unless a brand is officially registered. Trademark infringements are rare in the food sector.

Trademark registration is the responsibility of the Trademark Section, Ministry of Economy and Commerce. A foreign company may contact the Ministry directly to register a product/brand. To speed the process, however, it is recommended that a local law firm be retained.

The U.A.E. no longer permits sole agency agreements for food brand names. This means that a local company can no longer register itself with the government as the exclusive importer/distributor of a specific brand. Agencies registered prior to June 1996, however, will continue to be recognized.

H. IMPORT PROCEDURE

The U.A.E. boasts some of the most modern air and sea port facilities in the world. Food shipments usually are off loaded, cleared through customs and inspected by health officials within hours of arrival in any major port. (Dubai ports are the primary entry points for most food products.)

Every food shipment is subject to visual inspection upon arrival to ensure compliance with labeling and shelf-life regulations. Shipments are also subject to random laboratory analysis, except baby foods and edible oils which are subject to 100 percent sampling. Other food products are sampled in accordance with the sampling policy manual, which sets out the frequency of sampling based on food type, brand and country of origin. A consignment selected for laboratory analysis is usually permitted to be stored under a bond in a warehouse selected by the importer, within the same emirate of arrival. Laboratory results are generally known within 5-10 days. New-to-market food products are subject to thorough laboratory analysis. Once cleared, they are subject to random sampling as other food products.

Products would be rejected for either being found unfit for human consumption or the noncompliance with labeling requirements. In either case, the product would be destroyed by the local municipality or re-exported to the country of origin within 30 days, at the importers discretion. Products not conforming to labeling requirements may be permitted to be re-exported to a third country (non-GCC). Fines may be imposed depending on the severity of the violation.

A product rejection may be appealed to the Health Department having jurisdiction over that port. A

special committee within the municipality will review the petition and normally issues a final decision within a few days to one week. The committee's decision is final.

In case of a minor infraction, a shipment may be permitted entry on a one-time basis for limited sale, i.e., to institutional end-users only. A major infraction, such as improper labeling of products containing pork or tampering with P/E dates, is severely punished, particularly those infractions discovered after import. Such products are automatically banned from import, usually for several months, and the brand name and importer is often reported in the press.

In sum, with the exception of shelf-life standards, production/expiry regulations for selected products and the one-half rule regarding product shelf-life at importation, U.A.E. food safety requirements are based on international standards and do not appear to vary significantly from U.S. standards.

I. APPENDIX A - MAJOR REGULATORY AGENCIES

Federal Government Contacts:

' H. E. Jassim M. Darwish, Secretary General
' Mr. Obeid Bin Essa Ahmed, Assistant Sec. General
Oversight of National Food Safety
Committee
General Secretariat of U.A.E. Municipalities
P.O. Box 5665
Dubai, U.A.E.
Tel: (9714) 223-7785; Fax: (9714)223-6136

' Mr. Waleed Bin Falah, Director General
' Dr. Rashid Ahmed Bin Fahad
Standards and specification issues
Assistant Director General
Emirates Authority for Standards & Metrology
P.O. Box 2166
Abu Dhabi,
Tel: 9712/671-1110; Fax: 9712/671-5999

Mr. Abdullah Sultan
Director, Animal Wealth Department
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
Live animal imports
P.O. Box 1509
Dubai, U.A.E.
Tel: 9714/295-8161; Fax: 9714/223-2781

Mr. Mohammed M. Abdullah
Head, Plant Quarantine Division
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
Plant imports
P.O. Box 1509
Dubai, U.A.E.
Tel: 9714/266-2781; Fax: 9714/265-4787

Municipality Contacts: Recommend as first point of contact for food import requirements and pre-export certification of labels and ingredients.

Mr. Khalid M. Sharif
Head, Food Control Section
Dubai Municipality
P.O. Box 67
Dubai, U.A.E.
Tel: 9714/206-4201; Fax: 9714/223-1905

Dr. Amin M. Yousuf
Director, Food and Environment
Control Center
Abu Dhabi Municipality
P.O. Box 3111
Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.
Tel: 9712/672-5008; Fax: 9712/678-5961

Dr. Abdul K. Ahmed
Head, Central Food Control Laboratory
Sharjah Municipality
P.O. Box 22
Sharjah, U.A.E.
Tel: 9716/552-4017; Fax: 9716/552-3612

APPENDIX B. LIST OF PERMITTED FOOD COLORS

The following is a list of food colors, natural and artificial, permitted in the U.A.E.:

A. Natural Food Colors

Color/Description	International Number	Other Names
Red to Yellow Colors		
Carmine	120	Cochineal, Carminic Acid
Annato extracts	160B	Bixin, Norbixin
Beta Carotene	160A	Carotene blend
Lycobine	160D	
Beta-Apo-8-carotenal	160E	
Beta-Apo-8-carotenoid acid	160F	
Lutein	161B	
Carrot oil	None	
Beet root red	162	Betanine
Red to Purple Shade		
Anthocyanins	163(i)	
Grape skin extract	163(ii)	
Blackcurrant extract	163(iii)	Enocianina
Beet powder	None	
Paprika	None	
Paprika oleoresin	160C	
Orange and Yellow Colors		
Saffron	None	Natural yellow 6
Turmeric powder	100(ii)	
Curcumin	100(i)	
Turmeric oleoresin	None	
Riboflavin	101(i)	
Riboflavin-5-Sodium Phosphate	101(ii)	

Green Colors

Chlorophylls	140	Chlorophyllins
Chlorophyll copper complex	141(i)	
Sodium and potassium salts of chlorophyll copper complex	141(ii)	

Brown Colors

Plain caramel	150A
Caustic sulphite caramel	150B
Ammonia caramel	150C
Ammonia sulphite caramel	150D

Black Color

Activated vegetable carbon	153
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Inorganic Colors

Titanium dioxide	171	Food white 6
Iron oxides	172	

B. Artificial Food Colors**Red Colors**

Azorubine	122	Carmosine, Food red 3
Allura Red 17	129	Food red 40

Yellow Colors

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 Color

Chocolate brown HT	155	Food brown 3
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Green Color

Fast green FCF	143	Food green 3, Green 3 for food, drugs and cosmetics
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Blue Colors

Indigotine	132	Carmines 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 Color

Brilliant black BN	151	Food black 1, Black PN
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C. Coloring Matters Allowed for Use in Selected Foods

International Number	Color	Food	Maximum Limit
127	Erythrosine	Cherry and 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
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Parts per million = ppm

D. Recently Prohibited Colors

International Number	Color	Remarks
104	Quinolin yellow	Prohibited in all food products
124	Ponceau 4R	Prohibited in all food products