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## **Tunisia**

# **Food and Agriculture Import Regulations and Standards**

## **Country Report**

## **2000**

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### **Report Highlights:**

**This report provides information on Tunisia's regulations regarding imports and marketing of food and agricultural products. In addition to import procedures, the report has information on prevailing laws and regulations on labeling, use of additives, pesticides and industrial properties.**

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Includes PSD changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
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DISCLAIMER: This report has been prepared by the Office of Agricultural Affairs of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Tunis, Tunisia for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, information provided may be no longer complete nor precise 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. Please contact this office if you have any comments, corrections or suggestions about the material contained in this report. Our e-Mail address is [agtunis@fas.usda.gov](mailto:agtunis@fas.usda.gov)

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## **A - FOOD AND FOOD INDUSTRY PRODUCTS LAWS**

Tunisian legislation on food and food industry is based on :

- Decree dated October 10, 1919 relating to measures against frauds in commodity trade and adulteration of food, farm or natural products.
- Law No. 82-66 dated August 6, 1986 relating to standardization and quality.
- Law dated December 7, 1992 on consumer protection.
- Decree dated July 29, 1999 issued by the Ministers of Agriculture, Public Health and Trade.

The above laws lay down general rules for better products safety, fair economic dealings and effective consumer protection.

- Products safety :

Under normal conditions of use, products must meet safety requirements and not be prejudicial to consumer's economic interests and health.

- Fairness of economic dealings :

- enhancing consumer awareness and guaranteeing product in view to improving :

- \* product safety
- \* consumer information, guidance and protection
- \* product quality

With regards to frauds, the law provides for such sanctions as fines or even imprisonment.

Product control is performed at approved laboratories on representative samples, as provided for by decree dated 09/18/1993 which supersedes decree dated May 25, 1935 .

Approved laboratories are :

Tunis Central Laboratory  
Nutrition Institute Laboratory  
Pasteur Institute  
E.N.M.V.( National Veterinary Medicine School) Feed Laboratory

## **B - LABELING**

The measuring system in use in Tunisia is the metric system and uses Arabic numerals as in western countries.

The labeling principles are those described in the Minister of National Economy's decree dated July 22, 1985 validating Tunisian standard NT 15-23 (1983) that applies to prepacked food commodities labeling and presentation.

The said standard, which states that no food product can be sold without labeling, applies to all prepacked and stored food commodities, both locally produced or imported, and deliverable as they are to the ultimate consumer

### **1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

- when imported, only products that have not exceeded their time limit for use are allowed entry into Tunisia.
- references to curative or preventive attributes with regard to human or animal diseases, are prohibited, especially through advertising or denomination, as well as any marking that makes it difficult for the buyer to distinguish a given commodity from other similar products.
- sale or even free distribution of food products is prohibited when prepacked after their time limit for use as shown on the label.

### **2. INDICATIONS**

- Name of food commodity
- Net content : to be indicated in Tunisian legal measuring units as stated below :
  - \* volumetric measures for liquid foods
  - \* weight measures for solids foods
  - \* for products sold singly, indicate the number of pieces.
  - \* for commodities processed in a fluid medium not usually consumed, indicate net dried weight.

- Composition

The label must give a full list of ingredients, in decreasing order. The full listing of ingredients is not required by law in any of the following cases :

- \* commodity composition is well-known
- \* absence of ingredients list is not prejudicial to consumer
- \* indications on the label gives consumer adequate information about the nature of the product.

- Country of origin

- Time limit for use or time limit for optimum use

\* Time limit for use

- With regard to food products use, products with a limited conservation period (yogurt, fresh milk, meat, ground meat, semi-preserved or frozen products), the date must be indicated by day, month and year. For products with a conservation period not exceeding three months, the indication of the month and year will suffice.

\* Time limit for optimum use

- With regard to products that are not perishable (other than canned or frozen foods, ice creams, sorbets), indication of a time-limit for optimum use is mandatory and must be preceded with any of the following phrases :

- to be consumed preferably before.....
- to be consumed preferable before end of.....
- to be consumed preferable within a period of.....

- Production date

Production date is to be indicated by day, month and year

- Production lot

The production lot number must be indicated on the label affixed to prepacked food product, with the exception of preserved and semi-preserved fruit, vegetables and fish.

- Conditions of conservation

The words « keep in a cool place, protect from light or from dampness etc. » must be indicated when necessary.

- Other indications

Among other required indications, it must be so stated if and when the food product has been subject to ionizing radiation

- Language  
Arabic shall be one of the languages to be used for product labeling.

## **C - FOOD ADDITIVES**

Food additives are governed by the Ministry of National Economy 's decree dated January 28, 1986 relating to validation of Tunisian NT 117 01 standard.

The purpose of the abovesaid standard is to give an exhaustive listing of authorized additives, their conditions of use as well as respective identification numbers. The same decree also stipulates that :

- additives for each category of foods must not exceed maximum doses and must meet specific conditions of use as indicated in Annex I to the above standard.
- substances to be used for additives dilution are indicated in Annex II to the above standard.
- used additives must be indicated by their identification numbers (E...), such numbers are to be found in Annex III to the above standard.

### **1. COLORANTS**

Colorants must meet specific criteria of purity. Mineral, organic and other specific impurities are subject to regulations.

- \* Mineral impurities : must not contain over 5mg/Kg of arsenic, 20mg/kg of lead and 100mg/kg of copper, zinc, chromium and barium sulphate.
- \* Organic impurities : must contain no beta-naph, benzidine, xenylamine or their by-products
- \* Specific criteria of purity : the above-listed substances must contain no specific aromatic hydrocarbons.

## 2. LABELING

Additives can be put up for sale and sold only in watertight and hermetically sealed containers or packings bearing the following indications :

- denomination : food commodity additives or colorants.
- additive(s) common name(s), colorants identification number(s).
- net weight or volume
- identification of manufacturer, seller, packer or importer
- name of country of origin
- production date and lot
- final date for use
- conservation conditions
- Arabic must be one of the languages used for labelling.

### Remarks :

Under this standard, food products are arranged into 14 groups : unlisted products cannot contain additives. This standard shall be periodically revised and further extended to keep pace with continuing scientific development and relevant international legislation, such as ISO Standards, Codex Alimentarius, etc.

## D - PESTICIDES

Maximum pesticide residues tolerated in food commodities are set in Tunisian standard NT 117-03 and apply to plant and animal products intended for human consumption. The above standard is referred to as Codex Alimentarius.

Foods are arranged by types and groups, each with a specific identification number.

Example:

Type I

Group I : Root and tuber vegetables

Group II : Bulbous vegetables

Etc...

Food products fall into two groups :

Group A : Plant products

Group B : Animal products



Remarks :

Pesticide = a single substance or substance mix used as plant growth regulator, defoliant or exsiccator, exclusive of fertilizers, antibiotics or chemical products applied to animals for other purposes, such as stimulating growth or changing reproductive behavior.

In addition to pesticides, Tunisia also sets admissible maximum limits for contaminants and other undesirable matters in foods intended for human consumption , such as metals, metalloids, aflatoxines (B1, B2, G1, G2, M1 and M2<0.002 mg/kg, ochratoxine and histamine<200mg/kg). These data are contained in Tunisian standard NT 117 02.

According to the Minister of National Economy's decree dated 12/5/94, import, manufacturing, marketing and processing of pesticides for agricultural purposes are subject to a previous authorization obtainable from «Direction Générale de la Production Agricole» of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rue Alain Savary, 1002 Tunis- Belvédère.

Control of pesticides and their residues is done by :

LABORTOIRES DES PESTICIDES  
MINISTERE DE L'AGRICULTURE  
RUE ALAIN SAVARY 1002, TUNIS BELVEDERE

## **E - OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS**

### **1. MILK PRODUCTS**

Milk products are governed by :

Law No.64-49 dated 12/24/64, relating to milk production, processing and marketing control.

The applicable standards are listed below:

- TS 14-01 Milk definition
- TS 14-02 Raw and natural milk
- TS 14-28 Determination of milk density
- TS 14-32 Determination of milk fat content
- TS 14-33 Determination of milk total nitrogen content (Kjeldhal method)
- TS 16-14 Food microbiology – Counting of micro-organisms (colonies counting method at 30 degree C.)
- TS 16-39 Micro-biological specifications, interpretation of analysis results

Tunisian law and standards for milk intended for human consumption,

- whole milk : fat content = 30 g/liter ; red packing.
- semi-skim milk : fat content = 15 g/liter ; blue packing.
- skim milk : fat content not to exceed 1g/liter ; green packing.

Most of the milk being marketed in Tunisia is essentially semi-skimmed (UHT), thus permitting industrialists to recover fats for butter production.

## **1-1. Dry milk**

Import of dry or powdered milk, which is subject to the previous authorization of the Ministries of Agriculture and Trade, shall be effected according to specifications, from a B.S.E-free country. Dry milk is imported essentially by STIL (Société Tunisienne des Industries Laitières) and used for reconstituted milk production or as thickening to make yogurts ; the phrase « RECONSTITUTED MILK » must be written both in Arabic and French on the label affixed to the packing.

Milk powder approaching its final date for use and not utilized for reconstituted milk production shall be used in making suckling products . This is done by further enriching milk powder with plant fats, oligo-elements, vitamins and possibly other food additives.

## **1-2. Milk concentrate**

Milk concentrate is imported or manufactured locally under licensing, with or without sugar. Technical and health control is performed at the time of import by the proper veterinary and economic control divisions (anti-fraud control). Analyses are performed at the Nutrition Institute Laboratory (Ministry of Public Health).

## **1-3. Cheeses**

Tunisia imports cheeses subject to previous licensing and specifications.

## 2. ANIMAL FEEDS

Feeds production and marketing is governed by the Ministers of Agriculture, Public Health and Trade's decree dated 07/29/99.

To import ingredients for feed compounds production, producers are required to maintain a register initialled by a competent court, showing :

- name and quantities of imported ingredients
- name and address of supplier
- date of production of ingredients
- name and address of buyer
- quantities and numbers of lots of ingredients sold or in stock
- analysis certificates giving contents of noxious elements

In addition to the above import procedure, the same decree defines :

- marketing and labeling regulations
- animal feeds quality control

Special provisions concerning the use of certain nitrogenous products, especially those derived from micro-organisms. In this case, a file shall be submitted to the «Direction Generale de la Production Animale » providing the following data :

- nature of micro-organisms, especially in the event of genetic manipulation.
- culture medium and manufacturing processes
- product characteristics
- presentation and conditions of use
- methods of control
- studies of product nutritional properties
- studies of biological consequences of product use for animals feeding
- studies of surrounding environment.

The decree also includes the following annexes :

- 1- Specifications for simple feeds production
- 2- Maximal contents of undesirable matters and products in animal feeds  
Maximal contents of undesirable matters and products in raw materials
- 3- Provisions relating to compound feeds labeling
- 4- Technical standards for compound feeds production for domestic animals :  
The above standards set the optimum composition of certain types of compound feeds, according to species and physiological stages.
- 5- List of nitrogenous products used in animal feeding

6- List of ingredients prohibited in compound feeds composition :

- faeces, urine or digestive system contents, regardless of the mixture made thereof or the way they are processed.
- leather, leather wastes and processed skins
- seeds, plants and other materials for plants multiplication that have been treated, after harvest, with phyto-pharmaceutical products because of their destination, as well as their by-products.
- wood, sawdust and wood by-products
- muds from waste water purification stations
- urban solid wastes such as household rubbish
- unprocessed wastes from public eating houses, save food commodities of plant origin deemed unsuitable for human consumption because not fresh.
- meat flour and bone flour from whatever animal species and however processed, save foods for carnivores.

### 3. FEED ADDITIVES

List, conditions of production and marketing of additives used as feed constituents are set by the Ministers of Public Health, Agriculture and Trade's decree dated 01/04/96.

Additives that may be included in compound feeds are:

- antibiotics
- substances with anti-oxygen effects
- coccidiostats and medicinal substances
- colorants, including pigments
- emulsifying, stabilizing, thickening and jellying matters
- vitamins and provitamins
- oligo-elements
- conservation agents
- binding, coagulating and anti-lumping agents
- growth factors
- aromatic matters
- acid regulators

The above decree also states what indications should appear on labels affixed to the outside packing :

- name of additive and corresponding identification number as shown in Annex I of the said decree.
- net weight or, for liquid products, net volume or weight
- the phrase « Exclusively reserved for animal feeds production »

- name and address of person responsible for indications given on the label (producer, processor, importer, seller or distributor...)

According to the above-mentioned decree, a commission is set up to consider and give its opinion on the list of additives and its up-dating as more technical and scientific progress is achieved. This commission is to be chaired by the Minister of Agriculture or his representative.

Application for entering a new additive on the said list must be addressed to the Minister of Agriculture, together with a file containing the following data :

- name of proposed additive
- product chemical formula
- product group and effect
- product denomination
- name and address of manufacturer
- a certificate from the proper authorities stating that the product is authorized in its country of origin, in the same form and composition.
- animal species for which the product is intended
- instructions for use
- product technical study : content of active substances, residues, production conditions, risk of overdosing, DL50, antidotes, precautions of use.
- reports on performed testings

With regard to feed and food additives quality control and chemical composition, the approved laboratory is :

Laboratoire de Nutrition  
Ecole Nationale de Médecine Vétérinaire  
2020 Sidi-Thabet

## **F- IMPORT PROCEDURES**

### **1. FEED GRAINS**

Feed grains shall be imported in accordance pre-set specifications concerning the physico-chemical composition of the product to be imported.

Example : corn

Import shall be in accordance terms and conditions as approved by the Ministers of Finance, Agriculture and Trade's decree dated 01/11/97.

Wheat, barley and sorgho shall also be imported in accordance specifications.

## **2. MEAT**

Imports of meat are controlled by specifications set for such imports. Meat must come from a BSE-free country (Law dated 01/10/2000). Slaughtered animals must not have been fed on animal meal nor hormone-enriched feed products.

## **3. ANIMAL SEMEN**

Import shall be made according to specifications (to be obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture Zootechny Division ) and in compliance with the provisions of the law relating to BSE and other regulations applicable to diseases legally described as infectious.

## **4. LIVE ANIMALS**

Tunisia annually imports full heifers for milk production and bull-calves for fattening. Import must be according to specifications and in compliance with the provisions of the law relating to BSE and other regulations applicable to diseases legally described as infectious.

## **5. PLANT PRODUCTS**

Import of plants and plant products must meet the requirements listed in the Minister of Agriculture's decree dated 9/15/92 about phyto-sanitary conditions and control procedures for imported plants and plant products.

## **6. FRUIT JUICES, BISCUITS AND HONEY**

Import shall be made according to specifications and in compliance with relevant Tunisian standards.

## **G - IMPORT LAW**

Pursuant to Law No.94-41 dated 03/7/94, imports and exports of products are free, with the exception of products affecting safety, public order, health and ethics.

All imports are subject to technical controls for conformance to national and international standards.

Such technical controls are performed, without prejudice to regulations for other specific controls (especially veterinary and phytosanitary) that are to be carried out by the proper government departments. The above law also describes in its various chapters :

- protection measures against unfair practices (especially dumping and subsidies)
- claim and investigation procedures

The same law also defines steps needed to protect the Tunisian importer and the foreign exporter as well.

### **Seizure and appeal procedures**

According to Law No.92-117 dated December 7, 1992, anti-fraud law enforcement agents may proceed to the seizure of :

- products found to be adulterated, spoiled or toxic.
- products unsuitable for human consumption
- products that may be used for adulteration purposes
- products found to be not in conformity with existing laws and regulations

Minutes of seizure of perishable products must be sent within 48 hours to the competent public prosecutor and the products in question are left in the owner's warehouse.

In the event of legal proceedings, the judge must so advise the respondent who shall be allowed time to take cognizance of documents relating to the case, submit his comments and state whether he is demanding an expert's valuation or survey.

## **H - INDUSTRIAL PROPERTIES**

Tunisia is a member of WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) and has signed most WIPO conventions.

Trade names are protected in Tunisia, and foreign manufacturers must deposit their trade marks with INNORPI (Institut National de la Normalisation et de de la Propriété Industrielle) .

## **APPENDIX I - GOVERNMENT REGULATORY AGENCY CONTACTS**

- 1 - Ministère de l'Agriculture  
Rue Alain Savary  
1002 Tunis Belvédère
- 2 - Ministère de la Santé Publique  
Bab Saadoun  
1001 Tunis
- 3 - Ministère du Commerce  
Avenue Kheireddine Pacha  
1002 Tunis Belvédère
- 4 - Laboratoire Central de Tunis  
Avenue du Sahel  
Tunis Montfleury
- 5 - Institut Pasteur  
Place Pasteur  
1002 Tunis Belvédère
- 6 - INNORPI  
BP 23  
1002 Tunis Belvédère
- 7 - Laboratoire des Pesticides  
Ministry of Agriculture  
Rue Alain Savary  
1002 Tunis Belvédère