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## **Bahrain**

### **ATO ACTIVITIES reports**

## **Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards**

**1998**

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#### **Report Highlights:**

**Bahrain enforces GCC shelf-life standard 150 Part I for food products, but since 1995 recognizes longer shelf life durations for 17 food products. Arabic labels are required, although original labels for ethnic foods and small shipments are accepted. Import duties on most food products is 5 percent ad valorem.**

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Includes PSD changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Unscheduled Report  
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**BAHRAIN: FOOD IMPORT REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS**

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Section(s) Last Updated: NEW

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 may 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**

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 jointly working to harmonize food import standards, including label and shelf life regulations.

A significant step towards regulatory harmonization came with the issuance of Gulf Standard 150/1993, Part I, under which a number of regional food shelf life standards were established.

In April 1995, however, Bahrain became the first GCC state to announce exceptions to GS-150. Under Ministerial Order No. 8/1995, as of November 1, 1995, shelf life durations for a variety of food products were lengthened. Local officials believe that these changes will prevent serious disruption to Bahrain's food imports, while fully protecting the integrity and safety of food products. (See Appendix II for a list of Bahrain's food shelf life durations).

Trade contacts report that Bahraini officials are willing to work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural imports are not unduly disrupted. For example, officials widely announce new import regulations well in advance (often up to six months or more) of the date of enforcement.

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

Furthermore, Bahrain officials seem to be keen to abide by WTO regulations governing food trade, including the SPS and TBT agreements. Bahrain joined WTO in January 1995.

Bahrain's food regulations are formulated by the Ministry of Health (MOH) in conjunction with the Directorate of Standards and Metrology, Ministry of Commerce (MOC). The Directorate of Agencies and Industrial Property within the MOC handles trademark and agency law formulation and enforcement. The Directorate of Customs & Ports within the Ministry of Finance and National Economy is responsible for enforcing local agency laws.

The Directorate of Public Health, Food Hygiene Division (FHD) within the MOH is responsible for enforcing food safety regulations. For example, the FHD is responsible for visually inspecting all imported fresh and processed food products, verifying compliance with label regulations and, if deemed necessary, drawing samples for laboratory testing by the MOH.

Not all shipments are subject to laboratory analysis. In general, new-to-market products and products that failed previous inspections are targeted for thorough examination at the time of import.

The MOH handles all food safety compliance disputes. Trade contacts report that consignments with minor labeling infractions may be granted a one-time waiver, provided the products are found to be completely safe for human consumption. In addition, 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 MOH/FHD.

Live animals and plants, feedstuffs and horticultural products are inspected at the port of entry by the Ministry of Works and Agriculture, Agricultural Affairs Department.

As noted earlier, suppliers are strongly encouraged to work closely with their local importers to obtain pre-export approval for labels, particularly for new-to-market products, and to ensure that their products meet other import regulations.

## 2. LABELING REQUIREMENTS

Bahraini food labeling regulations are governed by Ministerial Order No. 12/1985, which is based on Gulf Standard 9/1984. Under these regulations, food labels must include 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 storage, transportation and preparation 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 there are exceptions. 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: 1) is extremely difficult to remove; 2) includes all label information; 3) does not cover the original label; and 4) does not contradict information on the original label. (In fact, local officials consider such stickers to be labels.)

Pork products or products containing pork or pork lard should be clearly identified as such on the label. Products found to contain traces of pork and not so labeled will be confiscated and possibly banned from future import for a specified period of time.

Production and 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 P/E dates. The dates 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 6 months or less;
- Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than 6 months.

Both dates must be printed in digit form; text is not permitted. For example, for September 24, 1996, 24/9/96 is acceptable; 24/Sep/96 is not.

As noted above, Bahrain established new food shelf life requirements effective November 1, 1995. These requirements are contained in GS-150/ Part I, with modifications issued under local Ministerial Order No. 8/1995.

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

Specialty food labels must contain detailed information regarding ingredients (e.g., vitamins, supplements, minerals, etc.), as well as, 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 must comply with all label requirements. As noted earlier, small shipments and ethnic foods may be exempt from Arabic label requirements. Fresh produce cartons are exempted from Arabic labeling requirements.

### 3. FOOD ADDITIVES

Bahrain follows CODEX Alimentarius regulations for the use of food additives, 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 follows CODEX Alimentarius regulations 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 name of their supplier or country of origin.

There is an unofficial 20 percent tolerance for salmonella in poultry products. Inspection officials routinely test for salmonella and will reject a shipment if salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of the tested samples.

There are no special packaging or container size requirements for food products.

Bahrain allows the importation of irradiated food products. Labels must include the international irradiated foods logo. A certificate of the irradiation type and level is also 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

There are no special requirements regulating the import of sample consignments. Samples destined for food shows and other types of promotional events are exempt from local label and shelf life regulations. Such shipments, however, must still be accompanied by a health certificate, as well as an invoice noting that the product is not for sale and has no commercial value.

As noted in Section 2, the importation of specialty food products is governed by Ministerial Order No. 2/1989. All specialty foods must be pre-registered with the Ministry of Health, Directorate of Pharmacies and Drug Control.

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

Only four companies are allowed to import and sell alcoholic beverages, which they may either retail in their own liquor stores or sell to institutional end users, such as hotels and licensed restaurants. Supermarkets are prohibited from selling alcoholic beverages. Also, media advertizing of alcoholic products is prohibited, although in-house promotions in liquor stores and licensed restaurants are allowed.

## 7. COPYRIGHT/TRADEMARK LAWS

Legislative Decree No. 10/1992 amended by Legislative Decree No. 8 of 1998 governs commercial agencies. The 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 of maximum 5 percent. A committee of the Ministry of Commerce may reduce or even exempt the payment of any commission. Also, a principal may terminate an existing agency agreement. It is up to the agent in this case to prove to a grievance committee that his activities resulted in an apparent success in promoting the products of the principal. 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 a commission of maximum 5 percent, if applicable. MOC may waive this commission to certain products if in the public 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, a local, specialized accounting firm usually is retained to do this work.

## 8. IMPORT PROCEDURE

Nearly all of Bahrain's food imports enter the country via the main port of Mina Sulman, 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 Fahad 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 products.

Fresh products are usually cleared within 24 hours of arrival and all other food products within as little as two to three days.

The following are required documents 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. certificate of origin must be notarized by a U.S./Arab chamber of commerce and the Bahrain Embassy, or one of its consulates, in the United States. 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. The certificate of origin, however, must still be notarized by a U.S./Arab chamber of commerce.

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

Products denied entry due to labeling infractions may later be cleared upon appeal, provided the infraction was minor. Trade contacts report that new-to-market and ethnic food products with minor labeling infractions are usually cleared for import on a one-time basis.

Serious labeling infractions will result in rejection of a shipment with little chance of a successful appeal. Major labeling infractions include label tampering and missing or incorrectly printed production/ expiry dates or dates printed on stickers rather than original labels/packaging. Finally, with few exceptions, Bahrain levies a five percent ad valorem duty on all imported food products. The import duty on alcoholic beverages is 125 percent, while imports of corn oil and other cooking oils in retail-size containers are subject to a 20 percent duty. GCC-origin products are exempt from all import duties.

#### 9. APPENDIX I -REGULATORY AGENCIES/USEFUL CONTACTS

Mr. Zakariya A. Khunji	All food products
Food Hygiene Supervisor	
Ministry of Health	
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Tel: (973) 273-683	Fax:(973) 252-569

Mr. Faisal Daif Head, Ports Food Control Ministry of Health P.O. Box 12 Manama Bahrain Tel: (973) 727-115 Fax:(973) 252-569	All food products
Mrs. Leila Abdul Rahman Director of Pharmacies & Drug Control Ministry of Health P.O. Box 12 Manama, Bahrain Tel: (973) 258-668 Fax: (973) 259-357	Health foods
Dr. Khalid A. Hassan Head of Veterinary Services Section Directorate of Agriculture Ministry of Works & Agriculture P.O. Box 251 Manama, Bahrain Tel: (973) 691-256 Fax:(973) 694-673	Live animals and pets
Dr. Hamdi Nasr Plant Protection Advisor Ministry of Works & Agriculture P.O. Box 251 Manama, Bahrain Tel: (973) 691-251 Fax:(973)695-527	Live plants/Seeds
Mr. Mohamed Ali Ajoor Acting Director of Standards & Metrology Ministry of Commerce P.O.Box 5479 Manama, Bahrain Tel: (973) 530-100 Fax: (973) 530-730	All standards
Mohammad D. Al-Shaer Acting Director of Agencies and Industrial Property Ministry of Commerce P.O. Box 5479 Manama, Bahrain Tel: (973) 531-531 Fax: (973) 530-455	Trademark and agency regulations
Mr. Mansoor A. Al-Fardan Head of Commercial Agencies Directorate of Agencies and Industrial Property Ministry of Commerce	Commercial agencies



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Mr. Jassim Jamsheer  
 Director General of Customs  
 Directorate of Customs & Ports  
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Customs/Duties

Mr. Abdulhadi A. Marhoon  
 Director, Public Relations Department  
 Bahrain Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
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Trade regulations  
 and data

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

## A. Exceptions to Gulf Standard 150/93

Table 1. Frozen Foodstuffs

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

Product	Packing	Shelf Life	
		Bahrain	GCC
Sausages	Plastic packs	12 months	9 months
Prawns & Crustaceans	Plastic or cardboard packs	12 months	8 months
Eggs	Suitable packs	12 months	9 months

Table 2. Packaged Foodstuffs

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

Product	Packing	Shelf Life	
		Bahrain	GCC

Seafood, canned	Cans, metallic sterilized	18 months	24 months
Milk, sterilized	Non-metallic packs	12 months	6 months
Milk, sterilized flavored	Tetra packs	9 months	6 months
Cheese, processed	Cans, metallic	24 months	18 months
Fruit juices, dried	Suitable packs	24 months	18 months
Raisins	Paper or plastic packs	24 months	12 months
Tomato sauce	Cans metallic	24 months	12 months
	Glass containers	24 months	18 months
Dry baby foods, milk based	Tightly sealed metallic containers or vacuum packed and sterilized	24 months	18 months
Strained baby foods	Tightly sealed glass containers, sterilized	18 months	12 months
Baby fruit juices	Tightly sealed glass containers, sterilized	18 months	12 months
Artificial beverage powders	Suitable packs	24 months	18 months
Biscuits, sweetened or salted	Paper packs or wrapped in special paper or cellophane or aluminum foil	12 months	9 months
	Cans, metallic	18 months	12 months
Brown sugar	Paper or plastic bags	No shelf life	18 months
Tehineh (Sesame oil emulsion)	Suitable packs	12 months	9 months

Table 3. Foodstuffs Requiring Special Storage

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

## B. Standards Unchanged From Gulf Standard 150/93

Table 1. Frozen Foodstuffs

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

Product	Packing	Shelf Life	Remarks
Minced meat, burger meat and liver	Plastic packs	9 months	
Beef, buffalo, sheep, and goat meat	Suitable containers	12 months from slaughter date	Must arrive within 4 months of slaughter
Chickens, rabbits turkey, duck and geese	Plastic packs	12 months from slaughter date	Must arrive within 4 months of slaughter
Fatty fish 1/	Plastic or cardboard packs	6 months	
Lean fish 1/	Plastic or cardboard packs	12 months	
Eviscerated fish	Plastic or cardboard packs	9 months	
Ice cream	Suitable containers	12 months	
Butter	Suitable containers	12 months	

Margarine	Plastic or paper foil	12 months
Fruits	Suitable containers	12 months
Fruit juices	Suitable containers	18 months
Fried potato chips	Plastic bags	18 months
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 Remarks	Packing	Shelf Life
Yoghurt and flavored yoghurt	Suitable, tightly sealed packs	10 days
Yoghurt, heat treated	Suitable packs	6 weeks
Yoghurt drink (laban) pasteurized	Suitable, tightly sealed packs	7 days
Cheeses, processed	Non-metallic packs	18 months
Cheeses, hard	Suitable packs	12 months
Butter	Suitable packs	2 months
Margarine	Plastic foil packs	3 months

Table 3. Packaged Foodstuffs

These products must be stored at suitable temperatures, in

well ventilated stores.

Product	Packing	Shelf Life
Canned meats	Cans, metallic	24 months
Evaporated milk	Cans, metallic	12 months
Dried milk, skimmed	In moisture proof packaging	12 months
" "	Cans, metallic under inert gaz or vacuum packed	18 months
Dried milk, full cream	Cans, metallic under inert gaz or vacuum packed	18 months
Milk, condensed, sweetened	Cans, metallic	12 months
Milk, sterilized flavored	Cans, metallic	12 months
	Other packs	6 months
Margarine	Cans, metallic	12 months
Canned vegetables and fruits	Cans, metallic	18 months
	Glass containers	24 months
Jams, jellies and marmalades	Cans, metallic or glass jars	24 months
" " "	Plastic or aluminum foil packs, tightly sealed	12 months
Dried fruits, such as figs, prunes, etc.	paper or plastic packs	12 months
Hot sauces, all types	Glass containers	24 months

Pickles	Glass containers tightly sealed	18 months
"	Cans, metallic plastic lined	12 months
Tomato sauces, spiced	Cans, metallic	12 months
" " "	Glass containers	18 months
Tomato puree (pulp) and catsup	Cans, metallic	12 months
	Glass containers	18 months
Potato chips and popcorn	Plastic bags	6 months
	Aluminum foil bags under inert gaz or tin coated cardboard packs or in metal cans	9 months
Breakfast cereals such as corn, wheat or rice flakes, etc.	Paper/ aluminum foil packs	12 months
Baby foods in powder or pellet form, prepared from cereals pulses, vegetables, fruits, etc.	Cardboard packs, aluminum coated	12 months
	Cans, metallic packed under inert gaz or vacuum, tightly sealed	18 months
Beverages, carbonated	Cans, metallic	9 months
" "	Glass containers	12 months
Cocoa powder	Metal, glass or aluminum sheet packs, under inert gaz or vacuum	24 months
" "	Other packs such as paper/plastic	12 months
Coffee, roasted ground	Metal or aluminum foil packs, packed	18 months

	under vacuum or inert gaz	
Coffee, instant	Cans, metallic or glass containers	24 months
" "	Aluminum foil or special paper packs	12 months
Cake mixes	Paper or aluminum foil packs	18 months
Flour	Bags, cloth	6 months
Macaroni	Cardboard packs or plastic bags	4 months
Starch, all types	Paper or plastic packs	24 months
Jelly powder	Paper or plastic packs	18 months
Plain hard candy	Suitable packs	24 months
Enriched hard candy	Suitable packs	12 months
Soup powder	Paper, plastic or aluminum foil packs	18 months
Soup, partially dehydrated in cubic form, etc	Paper, plastic or aluminum foil packs	12 months
Vinegar, all types	Glass containers	24 months
Halawa Tahiniya	Metallic or plastic packs	12 months
" "	Wrapped in paper or aluminum foil	6 months

Table 4. Foodstuffs Requiring Special Storage

Product	Packing	Storage Condition	Shelf Life
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Beef and Buffalo meat	Suitable containers	Temperature 0 C to(-2 C)	21 days from slaughtering date
Mutton and goat meat	Suitable containers	Temperature 0 C to(-2 C)	14 days from slaughtering date
Meat packed under vacuum	Plastic containers	Temperature 0 C to(-2 C)	10 weeks from slaughtering date. (To arrive within 40 days from slaughtering)
Stuffed or covered biscuits	Metallic containers	Temperature not exceeding 25 C, in well ventilated stores, far from moisture and contamination sources	12 months
Flour	Paper or plastic bags	Temp. not to exceed 21 C in well ventilated stores, far from moisture and contamination sources	12 months
Mayonnaise	Glass or metallic containers	Temp. not to exceed 25 C, in well ventilated stores, far from moisture and contamination sources	12 months
All types of chocolate	Paper, aluminum foil or plastic packs	Temperature not to exceed 25 C in well ventilated stores, far from moisture and contamination sources	12 months



Fresh eggs                      Suitable                      Temperatures                      1 month  
(Table eggs)                      containers                      from 11-15 C

END OF REPORT