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Import Requirements for Food Supplements in Bulgaria

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Approved By:

Jonn Slette

Prepared By:

Mila Boshnakova

Report Highlights:

Bulgaria is a growing market for U.S. food supplements, mostly consisting of protein powders. In 2017, U.S. food-supplement exports to Bulgaria totaled \$5.3 million, of which \$3.8 million were directly exported to Bulgaria from the United States, with the remaining \$1.5 million transshipments through the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. During the first quarter of calendar year 2018, direct U.S. exports reached \$1.2 million, a 32-percent increase over the first quarter of 2017.

As import requirements for these products changed in mid-2016 (Decision (EU) 1196/2016) and became more complex, the number of problems U.S. shipper experienced have also increased. Discussions between FAS Sofia and local trade representatives revealed that most detained/rejected consignments were because both U.S. exporters and Bulgarian importers did not fully understand EU import requirements. This following report aims to provide updated information to stakeholders and to facilitate smoother market entry. This report should be read in conjunction with [FAS USEU Report Exporting Food Supplements to the European Union](#), as well as information provided by the U.S. Mission to the EU [here](#).

General Information:

Bulgaria is a growing market for food preparations and nutritional supplements. Bulgaria's market for these products has shown consistent growth in recent years, as consumer incomes and lifestyles have changed. In the last five years, total imports of these products grew from \$89 million in 2013 to \$115 million in 2017, a 29-percent increase. Growth during the first quarter of 2018 was 26 percent over the corresponding period in 2017.

U.S. products, mostly protein powders, are successfully competing in the Bulgarian market. In 2017, U.S. food supplement exports to Bulgaria reached \$5.3 million, of which \$3.8 million were shipped directly to Bulgaria from the United States, with the remaining \$1.5 million transshipped mainly from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Intrastat data). During the first quarter of 2018, direct U.S. exports reached \$1.2 million, a 32-percent increase over the same period in 2017.

Beginning in 2017 and increasing throughout 2018, the number of shipments facing at the border increased. During the first five months of 2018, one Border Inspection Point (BIP) (out of eight total BIPs in Bulgaria) reported 13 nutritional-supplement shipment rejections. These rejections included commercial shipments, as well as consumer-sized packages purchased online by private individuals.

As U.S. authorities do not issue certificates once products have shipped, importers can either return the consignment to the exporter, or agree to have the product destroyed. Often when the volume is small, importers opt to destroy the shipment due to the lower cost. In both cases, however, it causes burdensome losses to trading partners.

In some cases, importers and final customers report that shippers sometimes include additional samples as charge promotional items in the consignments. These items are not usually accompanied by the necessary certificates and shipments can lead to rejection by border officials and/or destruction.

Import Requirements – Certificates

FAS Sofia conducted outreach with the competent Bulgarian authorities to clarify the main reasons for recent rejections. Three following categories were identified by the authorities and trade as challenges for entering the market:

Recent EU Regulatory Changes for Ingredients of Animal Origin:

Per the Border Control of the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency, the main challenge comes from the amended EU import requirements [Decision \(EU\) 1196/2016](#). Before these changes, most food preparations were not under veterinary control. However, this decision restricts the lists of products that are exempt from veterinary inspection. As of January 01, 2017, the exemption from veterinary inspection applies only to food supplements falling under CN codes 2106 10 and 2106 90, packaged for the final consumer, containing small amounts (in total less than 20 percent) of processed animal products (including glucosamine, chondroitin and/or chitosan) other than meat products (Chapter 99, Sub-chapter II, Annex II, List of composite products and foodstuffs not subject to veterinary checks as referred to in Article 6(1)(b)).

Reportedly, in most cases, food supplements contain more than total 20 percent of such ingredients and

the product should be accompanied by the respective veterinary certificates for each of these products signed by a competent veterinary authority. Such products are subject of mandatory veterinary checks upon entry in the market. Most frequently found ingredients of animal origin are reported to be made from fish and/or poultry collagen/cartilage (glucosamine, chondroitin, hyaluronic acid and fish oil (Omega 3)). EU requirements for import certificates for gelatin, collagen, chondroitin, hyaluronic acid and other cartilage products, chitosan and glucosamine for human consumption are set in [Commission Implementing Regulation 2016/759](#), Annex I, parts III, IV and VIII.

U.S. fish oil shipments to the EU must be produced in EU-approved establishments and accompanied by the same public health certificate as the certificate for fishery products.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration can issue a fishery product certificate for flavored fish oil and fish oil containing plant-based antioxidants for human consumption. These products must come from EU approved establishments. For a complete overview of fish oil import requirements into the EU, see this [link](#). A [report](#) describing detailed information how to export U.S. seafood and fish products to the EU can be found [here](#).

It is not always possible to obtain the necessary certifications from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service or the Food Safety and Inspection Service. Products of animal origin that require health certification often also need to be sourced from U.S. establishments that have been approved by the EU.

Composite Products Certification:

Certain food supplements which contain more than 50 percent of animal origin products fall in the category of "composite" products. "Composite products" per the EU legal definition are foodstuffs that contain both processed products of animal origin and ingredients of plant origin. Composite products that contain more than 50 percent of animal origin products require a certificate and there are certification requirements concerning the heat treatment for all dairy products. [Commission Decision 2007/275/EC](#) provides clarification on which "composite products" are subject to veterinary checks. All composite products containing a processed meat product are subject to a veterinary check.

Whey Protein Certification:

One of the most frequently imported U.S. protein supplements is whey protein powder. Common reason for problematic consignments is use of incorrect certificate due to complex EU import requirements and the choice between composite products or dairy products certificate depending on the product and establishment. [Certification and Labeling for EU Whey Protein Supplements report](#) provides detailed guidance on this issue.

Due to complex EU import regulations, U.S. exporters are advised to consult with FAS Sofia before undertaking exports to clarify all necessary import certificates, labeling and other required import documents.

Post Contact Information

FAS Sofia, U.S. Embassy, Sofia, Bulgaria

agsofia@fas.usda.gov

tel: +359 2 939 5720, 939 57 74

