

INFORMATION NOTE

Health Regulations for the Import of Food in South Korea

1. Introduction

1.1 This information note aims to provide information on the health regulations for imported general food products, seafood and meat products in South Korea.

2. Regulations and Procedures for the Importation of Food

Background

2.1 South Korea imports about 70% of its food consumption while the remaining 30% is produced within the country. Hence, the safety of imported food is an important priority for the South Korean government and a strict regulatory framework is in place to safeguard the health of the nationals.

Regulatory Body

2.2 The Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW) is the authority responsible for food hygiene policies and procedures in South Korea. The Korea Food and Drug Administration (KFDA) is the authority responsible for enforcing the related laws and regulations to ensure that food products, both domestically produced and imported, are safe, sound and correctly labelled.

2.3 Since 1998, MHW has relinquished most of its control over food regulations to KFDA. Only one division within MHW currently oversees food regulation policies.

Governing Laws

Food Sanitation Act

2.4 The main legislation governing the safety of imported food is the Food Sanitation Act (the Act). The Act aims to promote national health by improving the quality of food nutrition and by preventing sanitary hazards and harm caused by food products. At present, both imported and domestically produced food products are subject to the same governing laws and health and hygiene standards.

Labelling Standards for General Food Products

2.5 Labelling standards for food are set and enforced by KFDA. All imported food products are required to have Korean language labels. Stickers may be used but should not be easily removable and should not cover the original labelling. Labels should contain the following inscriptions printed in letters large enough to be readily legible:

- (a) Product name;
- (b) Product type;
- (c) Importer's name and address, and the address where products may be returned or exchanged in the event of defects;
- (d) Manufacturing date, month, and year;
- (e) Shelf life;
- (f) Contents: weight, volume or number of pieces;
- (g) The five major ingredients or raw materials; and
- (h) Other labelling information including cautions and standards for use or preservation.

Import Procedures for General Food Products

2.6 To ensure the safety of imported food, MHW has introduced a series of measures to establish standards concerning food and food additives. Importers are required to adhere to the following procedures on food importation:

- (a) Before the arrival of cargo in South Korea, importers are required to fill in an "Import Declaration for Food" (Import Declaration) for the Commissioner of KFDA or the Director of National Quarantine Station to review.
- (b) The KFDA Commissioner will conduct a field examination. The method of inspection to be conducted is determined in accordance with the guidelines for inspection of imported food products. These methods can be categorized as follows:
 - (i) Document Inspection;
 - (ii) Organoleptical Inspection;
 - (iii) Laboratory Inspection; and
 - (iv) Random Sampling.

- (c) If a product complies with the Korean standards, KFDA issues a certification for import. The imported food will clear customs and ready for domestic distribution.
- (d) If a product does not comply with the Korean standards, KFDA will notify the importer on the nature of the violation. The importer decides whether to destroy or return shipments to the exporting country. If the violation can be corrected, as with labels, the importer can reapply for inspection after making the corrections.

Import Laws and Procedures for Seafood

2.7 Apart from MHW, the importation of seafood is also regulated by the Ministry of Maritime and Fishery Affairs (MoMFA) which is responsible for making policies and plans for maritime affairs and fisheries. The National Fisheries Products Inspection Station, an agency within MoMFA, is responsible for inspection of both domestically produced and imported fishery products.

2.8 The importation of seafood is subject to the provisions of the Food Sanitation Act.

2.9 The import procedure for seafood is the same as that for general food products stated in paragraph 2.6.¹

2.10 In addition to the labelling standards specified in paragraph 2.5, seafood products are required to be labelled as "pasteurized product", "non-pasteurized product", "sterilized product" or "non-heated product".

Import Laws and Procedures for Meat Products

2.11 Apart from MHW, the importation of meat products is also regulated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) which is responsible for establishing regulations and standards related to agricultural products. The National Veterinary Research and Quarantine Service (NVRQS), an agency within MAF, is responsible for implementing regulations pertaining to both domestic and imported animals and livestock products.

2.12 Similarly, apart from the Food Sanitation Act, the importation of meat products is subject to the provisions of Livestock Product Processing Control Act (Control Act).

¹ Information provided by the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

2.13 For products subject to animal quarantine inspection in addition to food inspection by KFDA, both the animal quarantine certificate issued by NVRQS and the KFDA certificate are required for product clearance. Inspection by NVRQS can take place simultaneously with the KFDA inspection.

2.14 MAF sets its own standards for the labelling of livestock products under the provisions of the Control Act. Labels should contain the following inscriptions:

- (a) Product name;
- (b) Type of processed livestock product;
- (c) Name of business license issuer and the business license number;
- (d) Name and address of company;
- (e) Manufacturing date, month, and year;
- (f) Shelf life;
- (g) Contents; and
- (h) Ingredients or raw materials.

Genetically Modified Products

2.15 While MAF oversees the labelling of non-processed genetically modified (GM) food, KFDA oversees the labelling of processed GM food. Since March 2001, MAF has required mandatory labelling of designated unprocessed food products that contain more than 3% of GM ingredients. For processed food, if it contains an MAF-designated GM commodity as one of the five major ingredients, it must be labelled as containing a GM ingredient.

2.16 Both imported and domestic GM products are governed under the same set of labelling laws and regulations.

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