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Saudi Arabia

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards Report

FAIRS Annual Country Report

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Report Highlights:

A range of regulatory changes threatens U.S. exports of packaged foods to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's voluntary Front of Pack Nutritional Labeling (FoPNL) requirement is expected to become mandatory in 2021, and threatens most packaged food trade with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is also implementing biodegradable packaging requirements that are widely regarded as unworkable, threaten most non-commodity trade, and are currently being reviewed. Saudi food additive, contaminant, and residue standards are sometimes based on the most restrictive international standard available, even when it is a default standard. These measures block trade in some products. In addition, a ban on poultry produced using stunning has halted U.S. poultry meat exports to Saudi Arabia. This report is

supplemented by the 2018 FAIRS Export Certificate report for Saudi Arabia.

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SECTION I. GENERAL FOOD LAWS

The Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) is the Saudi government agency responsible for establishing regulations and standards concerning food, unprocessed and processed animal feed products. It is also responsible for the inspection of locally produced and imported food products. SFDA determines if these products meet all the standards and regulations established by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Standardization Organization (GSO), which is quality regulations and standards setting agency of the Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

SFDA is an autonomous entity controlled by a Board of Directors that is chaired by the Minister of Health. The Board of Directors reports directly to the King of Saudi Arabia, and includes the Ministers of Health; Commerce; Environment, Water and Agriculture; Finance; Municipal and Rural Affairs; and Energy, Industry, and Mineral Resources. The Board of Directors also includes the Executive President of SFDA and members from other organizations, such as the Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO), the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry, as well as food and drug experts.

The SFDA's Saudi Food and Animal Feed Acts were issued and implemented in 2016. The Saudi Food Act covers all stages of the food chain to ensure food safety, quality improvement, and the protection of consumer health by minimizing food-related risks. The Saudi Feed Act applies to all stages of the feed chain to guarantee animal feed safety. Its purpose is to safeguard human health from harmful substances resulting from feeding animals unsafe feed. Both imported and locally produced food and feed products are subject to the same food safety regulations and labeling requirements. The SFDA's Executive Departments of Imported Food Control and Animal Feed inspect imported foods and processed feed products, respectively, at the ports of entry. The SFDA mostly conducts tests on imported as well as domestically produced foods, processed feed, and animal products at its own laboratories. However, it uses other government agencies' laboratories or accredited domestic private laboratories when needed.

SFDA's regulation, "Requirements and Conditions for Importing Food", which was implemented in mid-2018, requests that competent authorities in exporting countries verify that exporters comply with the regulations adopted in the Kingdom for the health of humans, animals and plants. This would mean that U.S. officials that issue export certificates would have to know all SFDA or GSO issued regulations and standards. As SFDA has more than a thousand regulations and standards, and the mandate of U.S. authorities is to ensure food and animal feed meets U.S. regulations and standards, it is not practical for US. authorities to certify to SFDA regulations. The United States has been attempting to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with SFDA to ensure that Saudi Arabia continues to accept existing U.S. export certificates.

All foods, drinks, and edible agricultural products are required to comply with regulations and standards set by the SFDA or the GSO - this includes food ingredients and processed animal feed, whether locally produced or imported to Saudi Arabia. Two SFDA "sectors", Regulations and Operations, affect trade in food. Among the major duties of the Regulations\Risk Assessment sector is issuing food and animal feed regulations and standards. The Operations Sector inspects both imported and domestically produced food and animal feed products for compliance with existing SFDA or GSO regulations and standards. Each sector has several departments.

The SFDA is the most influential member of the GSO, which is made up of the national standards bodies of Yemen and the six GCC countries - The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Yemen. As a group, the GSO's main role is to create a common set of regulations and standards. The GSO's Food Standards Committee (FSC) is responsible for drafting all new food regulations and standards and updating existing ones. The Chairmanship of the FSC rotates among member states. All GSO draft standards are submitted for review and approval to the GSO Board of Directors (BOD), which is composed of the ministers responsible for standardization in each member state and meets twice a year to deliberate on standards and other related issues. GSO draft regulations and standards are notified to the WTO by the seven member countries and they are open for public comments for sixty days. Once a new standard is approved by the BOD, it is implemented in each member state, in most cases after a grace period of six months from the date of approval. In practice, GCC countries differ concerning the timing of implementation and the enforcement of new GSO technical regulations.

GSO issues two types of official documents that govern food and agricultural products:

1. GSO Technical Regulations: all technical regulations are approved unanimously by all member countries, they replace existing national standards, and their implementation is mandatory in all member counties.
2. GSO Standards: GSO standards are adopted by a majority vote of member states and their implementation is voluntary in all member countries.

GSO standards are typically based on Codex Alimentarius regulations and to some extent on European and U.S. standards, but are modified to reflect local religious, cultural, and climatic conditions. The GSO often adopts existing member countries' standards after updating them and making sure that they

conform to Codex Alimentarius guidelines and/or International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards. The GSO Ministerial Board has authorized the GSO to adopt international standards in their original language as a fast track measure to develop and increase the total number of Gulf standards. As such, the GSO has adopted several ISO and Codex technical regulations and standards.

Some of SFDA's regulations are not compatible with U.S. regulations or are costly to enforce or implement. Examples of this include the ban on animal protein in animal feed, and the ban on poultry stunning/immobilization.

Animal Protein Free Feeding

The SFDA regulations for livestock and poultry meat products require that health certificates accompanying shipments of livestock and poultry meat clearly indicate that the animals slaughtered have not been fed animal-based protein. In order for FSIS to issue the required animal protein free certification, U.S. exporters of beef, poultry and related products to the Kingdom must come from slaughter facilities that participate in the Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Export Verification (EV) Programs; or the USDA Bovine Export Verification (EV) Program for beef or the Animal Protein Free Verification Program for poultry (APFV).

Ban of Poultry Stunning/Immobilization

At the end of May 2018, SFDA implemented a two-decade-old Islamic religious edict that banned poultry stunning/immobilization in the poultry slaughtering process. The edict, which was issued on July 3, 1997 by the Makkah-based International Islamic Fiqh Academy (religious scholars of the Muslim World League), banned electrical stunning of poultry before slaughtering. According to SFDA, the Fiqh Academy issued the edict to ban poultry stunning after it conducted experiments at major poultry slaughtering houses in Latin America and observed that electrical stunning led to the death of a significant number of chickens before their throats were cut. This requirement has stopped exports of U.S. poultry meat and products to Saudi Arabia. Analysts that follow the Saudi poultry industry question why it took Saudi Arabia 21 years to implement the edict. The ban can be viewed as a halal issue or a non-tariff measure to assist the competitiveness of local poultry producers.

The SFDA strictly enforces Saudi and GSO food import regulations and standards, particularly those related to allowable limits for food additives and labeling requirements. The main SFDA requirements that are negatively affecting agricultural trade with the U.S. are as follows:

SECTION II. FOOD ADDITIVE REGULATIONS

The six GCC countries and Yemen issued GSO 2500/2015 “Additives Permitted for Use in Food Stuffs” in November 2015 and implemented it in 2016. The 215 page long technical regulation has a list of allowed additives in 112 categories. GSO is open to add other food additives to this regulation under the following conditions:

1. Food additives that have been allotted an Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) or calculated, on the basis of other criteria, to be safe for human consumption by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)
2. The additives have Codex designated an International Numbering System (INS)

The comprehensive technical regulation replaces and supersedes the following technical regulations:

- GSO 19-Permitted Food Additives in Edible Oils and Fats
- GSO 23-Coloring Matter Used in Food Stuffs
- GSO 172-Benzoic Acid, Sodium Benzoate and Potassium Benzoate Used in Preservation Of Foodstuffs
- GSO 175-Salts of Sulphurous Acid Used in Preservation of Foodstuffs
- GSO 356-Preservatives Permitted for Use in Food Products
- GSO 357-Antioxidants Permitted for Use in Food Products
- GSO 381-Emulsifiers, Stabilizers and Thickeners Permitted for Use in Food Stuffs
- GSO 1059-Maximum Limits of Antioxidants Permitted For Use in Food Products
- In addition to all the items related to food additive in all Gulf food technical regulations and standards, already adopted

1. Pesticide Residue

The SFDA has established 1 Part Per Million (PPM) as the maximum allowable aggregate pesticide residue limit for foodstuffs and strictly enforces the limit.

SECTION III. PESTICIDES AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS

Regulation number SFDA-FD 382/2018, “Maximum Limits of Pesticide Residues in Agricultural and Food Products”, currently sets maximum limits for pesticide residues. If an existing Saudi or GSO regulation does not provide a pesticide residue limit for a particular food product, Codex Alimentarius regulations are referenced. If Codex Alimentarius does not have an established limit for a particular food product, SFDA references the EU and U.S. regulations and implements the lowest limit from the two sources even if the limit is a default limit. In some cases, Saudi Arabia has adopted an EU default limit, which are established without a risk assessment, instead of a higher U.S. limit that was established based on a scientific assessment. Two examples of this follow:

SFDA does not have a tolerance for ochratoxin in paprika, and is using an EU specification that sets the maximum level of ochratoxin content in paprika at 20 ug/kg. This requirement is preventing some U.S. producers from shipping to Saudi Arabia.

In the summer of 2018, SFDA rejected several containers of U.S. grape leaves for levels of pesticide residue higher than the maximum allowable level. SFDA has not established maximum residue limits (MRL) for grape leaves and is using default standards.

Saudi Arabia and other members of the GSO countries have developed positive pesticide and other contaminants lists. Per SFDA the lists were mainly adapted from Codex standards. The following are the major GSO standards enforced in the Kingdom:

- Gulf Standard No. GSO 2481:2015 regulates the MRLS of veterinary drugs in food.
- Gulf Standard No. GSO 2532:2016 regulates the maximum limits of pesticides residues and contaminants in organic food.
- Gulf Standard No. GSO 1016:2015: regulates microbiological criteria for foodstuffs
- Gulf Standard No. GSO 1995:2015: regulates sweeteners permitted in food
- Gulf Standard No. GSO 988:1998 is concerned with limits of radioactivity levels (gamma rays, cesium 134, 137) permitted in foodstuffs, drinking water, and animal feeding stuffs.
- Gulf Standard No. GSO 2512:2016 is concerned with dairy products with added probiotics.

SECTION IV. PACKAGING AND CONTAINER REQUIREMENTS

The Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO) is implementing a regulation requiring biodegradable plastic products (M.A-156-16-03-03). Issued at the end of 2016, the regulation applies to all disposable products produced from polypropylene and polyethylene plastics. It makes it mandatory that all plastic packaging, packing, and wrapping materials that are not in direct contact with food - including outer wrap for shipment as well as plastic inner wrapping used in imports of food (stretch-wrap and shrink wrap (stretch film) - are OXO degradable then bio-degradable. The plastic products must be preregistered with SASO and apply the SASO logo before they are used as wrapping for imported products. Manufacturers of biodegradable plastic products must use additives licensed by SASO in manufacturing them. The additives used for biodegradable plastic products that come in contact with food should be safe for food according to relevant Saudi standards. These regulations threaten most exports to Saudi Arabia and are currently being reviewed.

SASO recently told FAS Riyadh that the OXO-biodegradable plastic regulation only applies to items made of polypropylene and polyethylene that is less than or equal to 250 microns, that all other forms of plastic (PLA etc.) are exempted, and that any plastic in direct contact with food is exempted. SASO said that plastic shrink wrap or any exterior packaging would need to be registered or the importer would need to commit to collecting and recycling it. The organization has indicated flexibility on the SASO logo. It apparently can be on shipping documents, boxes, and a variety of other places, but the importer would have to be able to document that any polypropylene or polyethylene packaging was OXO-

biodegradable. SASO's recent clarification appears to largely be good news, but FAS Riyadh does not know how much food will be affected by these restrictions.

SASO's OXO-biodegradable regulation has a three-phase implementation period:

Phase 1. April 14, 2017:

Shopping bags, garbage bags, clothing bags, and disposable table covers

Phase 2: February 1, 2019:

Bubble wrap and cushioning packaging; flower wraps, stretch film, overwraps, shrink films, cling films, packaging bags used for bread, nuts, sweets and all bakery products and disposable tableware.

Phase 3: August 1, 2019:

Food packaging bags, plastic bags used for seedlings, diaper wraps, plastic liners used for cartons and personal care products.

For more information SASO's technical regulation for biodegradable plastic products visit www.saso.gov.sa or write r.abdan@saso.gov.sa

The following additional regulations and standards are implemented in Saudi Arabia regarding food packaging and container requirements:

- The standard GSO 839:1997 (entitled Food Packages-part 1-General Requirements) is concerned with the general requirements of food packaging. The main requirements are listed below:
 - All packaging materials used in fabricating, forming, or treating packages shall be of food grade for contact with foods and in compliance with relevant Saudi standards.
 - They shall be clean and in a condition that does not allow any contamination of the contained material.
 - They shall maintain the properties of the packaged material and protect it from gaining undesirable odors, flavors and tastes.
 - They shall offer protection to the product against contamination with microorganisms, insect, rodents, and dirt in the case of products that requires it.
 - They shall be impermeable to moisture in the case of food products that require it.

- They shall offer necessary protection against environmental conditions and mechanical hazards such as impacts, vibration, static stresses, and they shall remain intact during handling.
- They shall not affect the container because of migration of some of their constituents that may react or be mixed with the food materials.
- It shall not be in a pharmaceutical shape.

The standard GSO 1863:2013 (entitled Food packages - Part 2: Plastic Package) deals with the requirements and specifications for plastic packages used for packaging food materials. The regulations specify limits on, among other things, concentration of a vinyl chloride monomer of less than 1 mg per kg of plastic material, or 0.01 mg per kg of the packaged food material if the packages are made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC).

Per the standard, the following labeling information should be written on labels of plastic packages used to package foodstuff:

- a) Type of plastic material
- b) Weight, capacity, number, or dimensions based on the type of packages
- c) Statement of food grade
- d) Purpose and type of application
- e) Directions for usage
- f) Warnings if applicable

Saudi Standard number SASO 2173/2003 (entitled, Food Packages Made of Aluminum Foil) deals with the general requirements for food packages made of aluminum foil. Below are the main requirements specified in SASO 2173:

- a) Purity of aluminum metal shall not be less than 99% aluminum.
- b) Each package shall be made of one piece of aluminum foil without any connection and free from holes and scratches.
- c) Shall be made from foil with regular thickness not exceeding 200 micrometers according to the agreement between the user and manufacturer of these packages regarding the strength with relation to the nature of application.
- d) In case of aluminum foil coated with a protection layer, the coating material shall not transfer any health hazard material to the food product or impart the odor or flavor of the food material.
- e) Shall be impermeable to water, odors, and gases.
- f) Shall be impermeable to light to protect fatty foods from light.
- g) Shall provide enough protection to the food product from losing or gaining heat.

SECTION V. LABELING REQUIREMENTS

In September of 2017, SFDA began work on a health food program aimed at (1) the implementation of a healthy food strategy, (2) developing health food regulations and policy, (3) innovative initiatives to promote healthier lifestyles and (4) improving the quality of food products.

The healthy food program's goals are:

- reduce the sugar, salt and fat (SSF) content of food products
- encourage a culture of calculating calories to stay healthy
- promote healthier lifestyles
- improve public awareness of healthy diets

In September 2018, SFDA announced a voluntary Front of Pack Nutritional Labeling (FoPNL) traffic light system (blue, yellow and red). The International Food & Beverage Alliance (IFBA) and major local food producers signed a pledge to reduce sugar, salt, saturated and trans-fats in their products, and implement the traffic light system. The current voluntary FOPNL program is expected to be made mandatory in 2021. The plan threatens most of U.S. packaged food exports to Saudi Arabia, as a large percentage are consolidated and exported by U.S. based consolidators. Only a few Saudi importers source U.S. food products under their own brand names directly from U.S. food manufacturers. U.S. packaged food product exports are generally consolidated shipments as the volume of trade is too small to justify individual production runs.

SFDA has also issued a new technical regulation that requires calorie counts on menus starting in 2019. Officials are hopeful that this initiative will help address Saudi Arabia's problems with obesity and diabetes.

SFDA is committed to issuing several regulations in 2019 as part of its health food initiative:

- ✓ establish an upper limit of salt in bread
- ✓ establish an upper limit of salt in cheese
- ✓ guidelines on the maximum amount of salt in other food products

SFDA encourages food producers and consumers to use unsaturated fat in place of saturated fat and has a plan to ban partially hydrogenated oils on January 1, 2020.

General Labeling Requirements

As a member of the GCC, Saudi Arabia has implemented Gulf standard GSO 9 in 2013.

All imported and locally produced prepackaged food products must meet the labeling requirements indicated in GSO 9:2013. Prepackaged food product labels should be in Arabic or include an Arabic language translation of the label. Labels must contain: product name, packer's name, country of origin or manufacture, listing of ingredients, instructions for the end use of the product (where applicable), and the shelf-life of the product.

Other labeling requirements:

1) Requirements for Nutritional Labeling

The SFDA enforces GCC regulations regarding mandatory disclosure of nutritional information on labels of imported as well as locally produced and prepackaged food products. GSO regulation number 2233, which was issued in 2012, requires mandatory disclosure of nutritional information such as the amount of calories, carbohydrates, proteins, fats, and other components that may affect the product's nutritional value or consumers' health or safety.

The SFDA requires that food product importers and domestic producers strictly follow pertinent regulations such as GSO 9:2013 "Labeling of Prepackaged Food Products" and GSO 2233:2012 "Requirements of Nutritional Labeling" when disclosing the required nutritional information.

2) Requirement for two dates (production and expiration) on labels

GSO member countries including Saudi Arabia require that labels of prepackaged food products include both production and expiry dates. Since most U.S. food processors only include "use by" dates, U.S. exporters interested in exporting to the Gulf countries and Yemen have to incur the additional cost of purchasing a machine that is capable of printing both production and expiry dates ("use by" dates) to meet the GSO food labeling requirements. The following are GSO-issued regulations that govern shelf life for food products:

- GSO 150-1-2013 "Expiration Dates for Food Products -Part 1: Mandatory Expiration Dates". This standard requires mandatory expiration periods for perishable foods such as fresh or chilled meat and poultry; fresh milk and fresh milk-based products; margarine; fresh fruit juice; table eggs, and baby foods.
- GSO 150-2-2013 "Expiration Dates for Food Products -Part 2: Voluntary Expiration Dates" lists suggested expiry periods for nonperishable food products but allows manufacturers to determine science-based use-by dates.

Shelf life can only be shown by clear and unambiguous production and expiration dates. The use of any of the following statements for expressing expiration date is permissible.

- Expiration Date
- Use by (date)
- Fit for (from the day of production)
- Use Before (date)
- Sell by date (for food products having an expiration period exceeding 3 months).

The production and expiration dates should be declared on the label of the package in uncoded manner as follows:

- Day-Month-Year: for foodstuffs with an expiration period less than three months.
- Month-Year: for foodstuffs with expiration exceeding three months.

Dates must be engraved or in relief –and printed by stamp with permanent ink directly on all packages, or on their original labels by the producer. Adding stickers for production and expiration dates is not permissible. There may not be more than one date of production or expiration on the same package. The dates may not be deleted, changed, or deceitful.

Only the date of production or processing needs to be shown (mm/yy) for products with no specific expiration date. Examples of these products include: salt, spices, milled rice, etc.

U.S. exporters should cross check information on the food label, including Production/Expiration dates, with the Saudi buyer before putting together an order.

3) Additional Labeling Requirements

In addition to requirements per GSO 9:2013, the following labeling information must be declared for food additives and antioxidants used in foodstuffs:

- For colorings used in foodstuffs, their mixtures, preparations, and diluents, the following additional information must be declared:
 1. Common name
 2. Color index number
 3. Name of solvent or diluent
 4. Production and expiration dates in a non-coded manner (day-month-year)
 5. Dye purity
 6. The statement “Free from alcohol”
 7. The statement “Color matter for use in foodstuffs.”
- For flavors permitted for use in foodstuffs, the common name and code number (if found) must be declared on food product containers containing flavors.
- For preservatives permitted for use in food products, the common name or EEC number and a statement “Preservative for Use in Food Products” in case of preservative containers.
- For emulsifiers, stabilizers, and thickeners permitted for use in foodstuffs, the following additional information must be declared:
 1. Common name or EEC no.
 2. In case of gelatin, lecithin, and mono and diglycerides the source shall be

mentioned.

- For Sweeteners Permitted for Use in Food Products:
 1. The name of sweeteners or INS numbers
 2. Food products formulated specifically for use by diabetics or for other special nutritional uses shall contain the statement “Food for special dietary use or food for diabetic.”
 3. The amount of sweetener, mg/liter or in kgs. For combinations of sweeteners, the amount of each in combination shall be declared.

- The following warnings must be declared:
 4. In case of aspartame, “Not to be used by persons who have phenyl ketonuria.”
 5. In case of saccharine, “Use of this product may be hazardous to your health because it contains saccharin, which has, been determined to cause cancer in laboratory animals.”
 6. In the case of sugar alcohol "Excess of consumed quantity may cause diarrhea.”

- The following additional labeling information must be declared for antioxidants permitted for use in foodstuffs:
 1. Common name or EEC number.
 2. A statement “Antioxidants permitted for use in foodstuffs” in case of antioxidant containers.

4) Labeling Requirements for Prepackaged Foods for Special Dietary Uses

Definition of Dietary Foods: GSO standard number 654:1996 defines dietary foods as food products specially prepared or formulated to satisfy particular dietary requirements, which exist because of a particular physical or physiological conditions and/or specific diseases and disorders. These foodstuffs differ significantly in composition from the ordinary products of comparable nature, if such ordinary foods exist. The following requirements need to be met by prepackaged foods for special dietary uses:

- The product must be completely free from pork products or their derivatives.

- It must be registered by the Saudi Ministry of Health (MOH). Note that infant formulas and baby foods such as Similac, ready-made soft and wet foods, breakfast cereals, dry finger foods including biscuits, and snacks are not considered foods for special dietary uses and there are registration requirements for them. All imported baby foods and formulas are inspected by SFDA at Saudi ports of entry and must comply with pertinent GSO or Saudi quality regulations and standards.

- It should not be pharmaceutically packaged in a way suggesting that it is a drug.

- It must be offered for sale in places separated from the ordinary foods in supermarkets. Foods for special dietary uses for infants and children shall be dispensed only by pharmacies, hospitals, and child care centers.
- Artificial sweeteners are not permitted to be used in any baby and infant foods.

In addition to the general labeling requirements as stated in GSO 9:2013, further information must be declared for prepackaged foods for special dietary use per the following GSO Standards:

- GSO 654:2014: This standard is concerned with the general requirements for prepackaged foods for special dietary uses. It includes foods for infants and children sold only in pharmacies. It does not apply to foods sold in supermarkets and other retailers.
- GSO 2233:2012: This regulation states the procedures for the nutrition labelling of foods. It applies to the nutrition labelling of all prepackaged food products except for raw products such as fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, and fish.
- GSO 2333:2013: This standard contains guidelines related to the use of nutrition and health claims in food labelling.
- GSO 2392:2014: This standard applies to refined iodized soft edible salt prepared for human consumption.
- GSO CAC / GL 10:2009: This standard contains advisory lists of nutrient compounds for use in foods for special dietary uses intended for infants and young children.

5) Food Allergen Labeling

On October 29, 2011, the SFDA issued a circular requiring the declaration of allergenic ingredients and their derived contents or extracts in food products. The purpose of this requirement is to inform consumers who are allergic to the ingredients. The SFDA requires the following to be declared on prepackaged food labels:

- As per article 5/2/4 and 5/27 of Saudi Standard No 1/2007, the label should indicate the raw materials used in the processing of food products and their allergenic ingredients. These include cereals (wheat, barley, oat and rye), products containing gelatin whether natural or halogenated and their products (such as bread, rusk, and cake), crustaceans and their products (such as shrimps, crabs, lobsters, and oysters), eggs and their products (such as pies, cakes, biscuits, custards, and noodles), fish and their products, nuts (peanuts, soybeans, walnuts) and their products (such as peanut butter, sauces, and creams), milk and its products [because of their protein contents (such as yogurt, cheese, chocolate, creams, pudding, milk sauce, and custard)], sulphites when added at a concentration of less than 10 ppm (example: raisin, dried fruit, and beverages).

- If a product is obtained by means of biotechnology, that fact must be clearly stated on the label. The concern on the part of local regulatory authorities is that the technology might allow the transfer of allergens to the products mentioned above.

6) Biotech Labeling General

On April 12, 2011, GSO issued two mandatory agricultural biotechnology regulations, GSO 2141:2011 (General Requirements for Genetically Modified Unprocessed Agricultural Products) and GSO 2142:2011 (General Requirements for Genetically Modified Processed Agricultural Products). GSO 2141:2011 deals with general requirements for genetically modified unprocessed agricultural products, while GSO 2142:2011 specifies the general requirements for genetically modified processed food and feed products. The two technical regulations require positive biotech labeling if the unprocessed agricultural products, processed food products, feed products, or seed contains more than one percent GE ingredients.

Saudi Arabia, which was the GCC lead country in preparing the draft standards for the two GSO biotech regulations, became the first GSO member country to implement these regulations in October 2011. With more than a decade of experience implementing similar regulations for dealing with both processed food and feed products, it was relatively easy for Saudi Arabia to implement the GSO technical GE regulations. These technical regulations replaced the old Saudi agricultural biotech labeling decrees by increasing the biotech threshold level from 0.9 percent to one percent and rescinded the ban on imports of biotech planting seeds according to specifications outlined in GSO 2141:2011. However, no biotech planting seeds have been imported thus far into Saudi Arabia. Similar to the Saudi biotech regulations, GSO 2141:2011 prohibits the importation of any genetically modified animals, birds, fish, and their products.

Below is a summary of GSO biotech labeling requirements:

a. Positive Labeling

If a product contains one or more GE plant ingredients with more than one percent GE content, the words (genetically modified) or (produced from genetically modified, name of the ingredients) shall appear clearly and easily to read in parentheses immediately following the ingredient(s) concerned, with same font size and different color. The GSO biotech regulations do not allow imports of foodstuffs that contain GE animal products. According to the SFDA, local food producers must also abide by the biotech labeling requirements.

b. Bilingual Labeling

Labeling and adjoining explanatory statements shall be in Arabic and, where another language is used, it shall be alongside the Arabic. All information that is provided in another language shall be identical with those written in Arabic. The biotech statement must be clearly written in easy to read font in both Arabic and English (upper case), with a different color from the main product label.

If the GE food product is different from its conventional counterpart, the labeling shall mention any characteristic or property concerning the following:

- Composition
- Mode of storage and packing
- Nutritional value or nutritional effects.
- Intended use of product.
- Any implication on certain group of people, or certain animals or the environment.
- Physical characteristic (color, taste, odor, and feel).
- Methods for the safe handling, storage, transport, and use.

If the food product does not have a conventional counterpart, the labeling shall contain appropriate information about the nature and characteristics of the food product concerned.

If the mode of storage, preparation or cooking of the product is no longer equivalent to or differs significantly from the corresponding conventional food, clear instructions as to how to use must be given on the label of the product.

c. Health Certificate

Biotech agricultural products exported to Saudi Arabia and GCC countries must have been approved in the country of origin for human or animal consumption, or for use as planting seeds, and meet all relevant Saudi and GSO-approved regulations and standards. Each shipment must be accompanied by an official health certificate issued by a competent government agency stating that the GE ingredient(s) used in the foodstuff, grains or seed exported is/are approved in the country of origin for human or animal consumption or for planting seeds. The SFDA accepts health certificates issued by the FDA and federal or state departments of agriculture for high value and processed food products. Health certificates issued by exporting companies or other private organizations, including notary public statements are not recognized.

For U.S. biotech feed grains, the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture (MEWA) accepts the biotech grains certification statement that was provided in 2003 by the USDA's Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA). The statement certified that the exported transgenic feed grains and oilseeds (corn and soybean, and soybean meal) are the same as those consumed in the United States. The approved statement eliminates the need for a shipment-by-shipment positive biotech certification for unprocessed agricultural products that is required by section 4.1.5. of the GSO 2141:2011.

d. Real Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Method

Saudi Arabia implements PCR Real Time Method for GE testing. Samples for laboratory analysis are taken according to GSO ISO standards numbers 21098, 21569, 21570, 21571, 21572 and 24276.

7) Rejection of Misleading Health Benefit Statements on Food Labels

In 2015, the SFDA started to strictly implement its 2011 regulation number 255, which bans putting “misleading health benefits claims” on the labels of prepackaged food products. This has resulted in Saudi Customs refusal to clear several shipments of U.S. breakfast cereal containing health claims such as “May help to reduce cholesterol”. The SFDA said that these nutritional or health benefit claims are unverifiable, thus misleading for consumers. Products with packages containing the logo of the American Heart Association have been refused Customs clearance for similar reasons. The SFDA also bans imports of prepackaged food products containing alcoholic connotations such as “cocoa liqueur” as an ingredient. This requirement has practically prevented the imports of some high-quality U.S. chocolate products.

The SFDA indicated that its decision to ban “misleading health benefits claims” is based on the following three articles of GSO 9:2007 which was replaced by GSO 9:2013 “Labeling of prepackaged food stuffs “

- Article 7/1/5: legally or forbidden names, symbols, marks or photos shall not be used.
- Article 8/1: information written on the label of food products shall not contain any statements having drug or treatment characteristics.

Article 4/2: any foodstuff shall not be described or offered for sale with any label which may be deceptive, misleading or false or is likely to create an erroneous impression regarding its nature or characteristics in any aspect.

Accordingly, the SFDA will not allow Customs clearance of prepackaged food products with the following statements on their labels:

Table I. Claims Referring to Reduction of Diseases Risk

	Food Product	Claim
1	Supplement containing berry-blend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces blood cholesterol levels. • Reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases.
2	Supplement containing cranberry extract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminates the adhesion of harmful bacteria to the bladder wall. • For a healthy urinary tract

3	Lycopene-whey complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevents oxidation of lipoproteins in blood. • Reduces the risk of heart disease.
4	Mix of prebiotics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular consumption of prebiotics helps to protect against the bad bacteria in the intestines.
5	Product containing dehydrated leaves of the prickly pear cactus (<i>Opuntia ficus-indica</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to improve blood lipid parameters and HDL-cholesterol.
6	Lactobacillus helveticus fermented low-fat milk products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the risk of arterial stiffness and heart diseases.
7	Sparkling or mineral water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The regular consumption of mineral water reduces body hyperglycemic levels.
8	Green Tea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficial for diabetics • Reduces the risk of developing cancer • Reduces the risk of stroke. • Slows down aging signs • Prevents tooth decay • Contains flavonoids that help detoxify your body. • Protects you from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) • Boosts the immune system. • Dissolves cholesterol and increases vitality • Helps to maintain a perfect body weight • Healthy

Table II-1. Claims Referring to Children’s Development and Health-continued

	Food Product	Claim
1	Mixture of the n-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUF As) [eicosaentaenoic acid (EPA) and decosahexaenoic acid (DHA)] and the n-6 PUFA gamma-linolenic acid (GLA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides the nourishments that support healthy central nervous system development. • Provides the nourishments that help children to maintain healthy brain functions. • Provides the nourishments that help children to maintain concentration levels.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May help maintain coordination. • May help maintain concentration. • May help supporting the development of brain functions and maintaining such functions. • May help maintain learning ability. • May help support the development of eyes functions and maintaining such functions.
2	Mixture of the polyunsaturated fatty acids [Docosahexenoic Acid (DHA) and Arachidonic Acid (ARN)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DHA & ARA support neural development of the brain and eyes.
3	Dairy products (milk, cheese and yoghurt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help promote a healthy body weight during childhood and adolescence.
4	Dairy Products (milk and cheese)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote dental health in children. • Stabilize calcium and help to maintain stronger bones and teeth.
5	Food supplement containing Lactobacillus plantarum, Lactobacillus rhamnosus and Bifidobacterium longum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps maintain the normal functioning of the alimentary tract. • Improves the general immunity by maintaining the microbiological balance. • Helps protect the alimentary system against enteric pathogens because of its strong antagonistic properties. • Helps building the natural intestinal barrier. • Helps to maintain natural intestinal microflora during travel, changing the climatic zone or a diet, especially in poor hygiene conditions. • Contains living probiotic bacteria with strong ability to colonize the intestinal tract. These bacteria are isolated from naturally fed-infant.
6	Chocolate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps you grow. • Aids digestion.
7	Follow-on formulae with a fixed combination of short-chain galacto-oligosaccharides, acidified milk, nucleotides and beta-palmitate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aids minor intestinal ailments (as colic, constipation, digestive symptoms).

Table III-1 Other Claims

	Food Product	Claim
1	Food supplement containing fish oil [Docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA) and Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution to the reduction of hot flushes resulting from the increase of temperature.
2	Immune balance Drink, containing vitamin C, green tea extract, grape skin extract, grape seed extract, and shiitake mushroom extract.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boosts the immune system.
3	Lactobacillus plantarum 299v (DSM 98443)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves iron absorption.
4	Milk product, rich in fiber and protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces the sense of hunger
5	Mix of prebiotics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to maintain a healthy gastrointestinal (GI) function. • Supports your natural defenses.
6	Tablets and chewing gum containing prebiotics bacteria [Lactobacillus reuteri (L. Reuteri) strains DSM 17938 and ATCC PTA 5289]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps re-balancing and improving oral health.
7	Food products containing Conjugated Linoleic Acid (CLA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to build and re-shape the body.

8	Food products containing cocoa extract.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to build and re-shape the body.
9	Mix of probiotics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to reduce gastrointestinal discomfort. • Boosts the immune system.
10	Milk and dairy products enriched with milk peptide and magnesium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to moderate signs of anxiety in mildly stress-sensitive adults due to its milk peptide and magnesium content.
11	Black tea extracted from Camellia sinensis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to promote attentiveness and concentration
12	Using Docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA) as a raw material for foods/food supplements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes antioxidants in the cells of the human body.
13	Tea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich natural source of flavonoids (Antioxidants). • Stimulates mental clarity. • Increase vitality. • Rich in antioxidants and thiamine that helps protecting the body. • Helps stimulating the mind and the body. • Considered one of healthiest types of tea. • Healthy.
14	Products of potassium salts and ammonium salts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used for diet. • Does not cause high blood pressure.
15	Coffee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For mental clarity and mood-altering • Stimulates vitality
16	Peanut butter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy, strength and smartness
17	Wheat germ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength, agility and vitality

Table III-2 Other Claims-continued

	Food Product	Claim
18	Vegetable oils and their derivatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free of cholesterol • Healthy • Healthy heart • Picture indicating a healthy heart • Rice in omega-3 • Omega-3 protection • Provides a healthy food for your heart • Maintain a healthy heart • Helps development and growth
19	Cornflakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to maintain a strong body and to fight diseases • Helps transport oxygen which sustain the function of the blood cells and the body
20	Honey and its derivatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthens the heart • Boosts the immune system of the body

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cures intractable wounds • Reduces blood lipids • Cures skin diseases • Cures gingivitis (inflammation of the gum tissues) • Cures cancer and fights viruses • A solution for stomach and intestine problems
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Note: The SFDA has stated that it will periodically update the list of rejected “misleading health benefits claims” on its website. It pointed out that the examples of rejected health claims listed on tables I to III are not exclusive and any claim with similar meaning will be rejected and any unlisted claims should undergo scientific review by an SFDA expert panel.

SECTION VI. OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS

1. Novel Foods

Prior to the importation of a novel food items to Saudi Arabia, the following documents must be presented:

- Reliable scientific evidence authenticated by recognized official bodies to confirm the safety of the food for human consumption including: Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI), possible warnings in case of intake by a high-risk population and also warnings if a food ingredient has exceeded its Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA).
- Ingredient analysis results from accredited labs confirming that the product is fit for human consumption and free from any health hazards.
- A Free Sale Certificate testifying that the product with its components and ingredients is freely sold in one of the countries, which apply Codex standards or EU legislations.
- A pledge of full responsibility towards the product after its entry to the market and commitment to follow any relevant circulars, standards or regulations that SFDA officially publishes in the future.

2. Baby Foods

The GSO standards that establish quality specification for baby foods are GSO 355:2011 and GSO 354:1994.

- GSO 355:2011 entitled “Canned Baby Foods” provides specifications for baby foods, which are intended primarily for use during an infant's normal weaning period (from 6 months), and also for the progressive adaptation of infants and children to ordinary food. They may be either in ready-to-eat form or in dry form requiring reconstitution with water only.
- GSO 354:1994 Infant foods based on milk: This standard is concerned with infant foods based on milk in liquid or powdered form intended for use as substitutes for human milk.

3. Requirements for Government Subsidized Baby Food

Breast Milk Substitutes (BMS) or infant formulas: in addition to the general requirements specified in established GSO standards, they must meet the following specifications:

- Age group: from birth until three years of age
- The percentage of milk protein: (11%)
- Percentage of milk fat: (8%)
- No flavor, only plain.

Animal Quarantine Regulations

Saudi Arabia has periodically banned cattle, meat, and meat products imports for health reasons. Cattle imports from countries affected by Mad Cow disease, or Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), Foot and Mouth, and Cattle Plaque diseases are banned until the affected countries are declared free of the diseases by OIE. Cattle imports from countries not affected by the diseases are subjected to strict quarantine regulations on arrival at Saudi ports of entry. Saudi Arabia also bans meat and meat derivatives from countries affected by BSE and other cattle diseases. It also bans transshipment of livestock meat through countries banned from exporting meat and meat products because of BSE, FMD, and other animal diseases. In addition, it requests additional statements on the health certificate accompanying livestock and poultry meat shipments to indicate that the animals slaughtered for export to the Kingdom were not fed animal protein, fats, and were not treated with growth hormones. Imports of live poultry, poultry meat, and hatching eggs are banned from countries affected by bird flu. Imports of live poultry are also banned from countries with the West Nile Virus epidemic.

SECTION VII. FACILITY AND PRODUCT REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Foreign Establishment Registration

The SFDA has a voluntary registration system for foreign establishments that export food and feed products to Saudi Arabia. The SFDA system: “Foreign Establishment Registration Service” aims to ease the process of registration and accreditation of exporters, slaughterhouses, and factories of meat, chicken, and fish and all other food related producers. The registration process consists of nine steps for all types of establishments with the exception of slaughterhouses. The requirements may include SFDA site inspections and approval as additional registration conditions. In any case, foreign establishments must first create individual electronic accounts (E-Account) with SFDA by logging into ([Foreign Establishments](#)) and completing the electronic form. Once the form is completed, the system will send an activation code to the registered company’s email address. After receiving the activation code, the firm can choose one of the two options to active its E-Account: by clicking on the link sent in the SFDA’s e-mail or by opening this link ([Login](#)).

Once the E-Account is created, the following steps are needed to register a foreign establishment:

Establishment Information

- Name, both in Arabic and English, including establishment's short name and approval number.
- Address and contact information.
- Authorized persons: full names in Arabic and English, responsibilities and contact information.
- Headquarters address and contact information
- Official inspectors or competent authority name, address and contact information.
- Business Activities: primary products, manufacturing, wholesales, storage, transportation, retailers, food service, manufacturers selling mainly direct to final consumer, and slaughter houses.
- Production Information: production capacity, actual production, percentage of products sold in the local market and percentage of exported.
- Food Safety & Hygiene Control System: upload available certificates such as ISO 9001, ISO 22000, and HACCP.
- Specific Requirements: upload documents into the system to satisfy the following requirements.
- Production of foods in line with Islamic Halal requirements (specify)
- The animals slaughtered meet GSO slaughter requirements as specified in GSO Slaughter Procedures standard number GSO 993:1998
- Specify disposable transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) risk material
- Islamic organizations that attest Halal slaughtering procedures
- Supporting Documents: upload any additional supporting documents that are not listed by SFDA
- Declaration (Ratification) and Submission
- To approve registration and qualify them to export to Saudi Arabia, the SFDA may decide to inspect foreign slaughterhouses and processing facilities of meat, poultry, fish and their products.

Electronic Customs Clearance of Food Products and Animal Feed

SFDA implements a mandatory electronic customs clearance system (E-Clearance) for all food and processed feed products imported into the Kingdom. The mandatory E-Clearance covers all food imports, including packaged products and raw materials for the food processing industry and processed animal feed. The SFDA does not process any requests for customs clearance of imported food and processed feed products unless it is submitted through the E-Clearance system. To qualify for E-Clearance, all food and feed products importers as well as their customs brokers should create individual

E-Accounts with the SFDA and complete the online registration process for all imported food and feed products.

Imported Food Products

Registration of imported food products is the responsibility of local importers or agents. Each importer or agent is required to open an E-Account and set up an individual user name and password at SFDA's Executive Department for Imported Food Control (EDIFC) E-Services at [E-Services](#). Once the E-Account is created, importers can upload information about their products, including the harmonized code (HS Code), bar code, item code, and listed ingredients in English and Arabic, a picture of each product as well as copy of the product label. The label must contain all information required by the Gulf Standard Organization regulation number GSO 9:2013 "Labeling of Prepackaged Food Stuffs". The importer is also required to register the address of their warehouses, the names of their staff members authorized to deal with SFDA - including customs brokers contracted in each Saudi port of entry. Individual importers are required to register all food products they intend to import, even if some or all of the products they intend to import have been already registered by another importer. The electronic registration is free of charge and there is no expiry date for the registration. Importers, however, are required to re-register their products when there are changes in products formulations or labels. The registration process seems to be simple and can be quickly completed if needed information is readily available and required documents are uploaded. It is important to know that SFDA does not allow the importation of food products that are not registered in its E-Account database.

Animal Feed National Registry (AFNR)

The SFDA's Executive Department for Animal Feed uses an electronic Animal Feed National Registry (AFNR) system for registering and licensing local feed importers and producers. Each domestic feed importer and producer must open individual E-Account with AFNR and register all imported feed materials including raw feed, compound feeds, and non-medicated feed additives in order to obtain an import license and Customs clearance of the products electronically upon arrival at Saudi ports of entry. The SFDA allows foreign feed producers to voluntarily register the facilities and feed products they intend to export to Saudi Arabia in AFNR. To link to the SFDA's National Feed Registration System please click here: [AFNR](#).

Herbal Preparations Registration

Herbal preparations, health and supplementary foods must be registered with the General Directorate of Medical and Pharmaceutical Licenses of the Ministry of Health (MOH) in order to be marketed in the Kingdom. Registration is done through a local agent by submitting sample products and product brochures, which are studied and tested by the ministry's central laboratory. It takes about six months for the ministry to approve and license a product. The ministry charges about \$300 as a registration fee.

Exporters need to submit the following documents through their local agent to the MOH in order to initiate the product registration and licensing process:

1. Table of contents

2. An authenticated copy of the agency registration certificate at the Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Investment.
3. When registering for herbal products, a copy of pharmaceutical wholesale license should be submitted by the local agent.
4. Certificate (s) issued by the health authorities in the country of origin clearly stating that:
 - a. The company is licensed to manufacture the products in the country of origin (state license number and date).
 - b. The company is permitted to sell the product in the country of origin (certificate of free sale)
 - c. The company follows good manufacturing practice.
 - d. Coloring agents, diluents and other substances in the product formula are permitted in the country of origin (if the free sale certificate states such information it will be sufficient).
 - e. Package insert and applicable information stated on the package must be the same as that approved and currently marketed in the country of origin. The package insert must be in Arabic and English languages. The company is obliged to add and/or delete any information required for handling the product in the Kingdom as determined by the registration committee.
5. A certificate issued by the company and authenticated by the relevant authorities in the country of origin clearly stating the following information about the product:
 - a. Registration number and date and date of marketing in the country of origin.
 - b. Trade and/or generic name.
 - c. Full composition (the scientific name of active and inactive ingredients and their quantities)
 - d. Therapeutic category (if any).
 - e. The composition of the product to be exported to the kingdom is the same as that marketed in the country of origin.
 - f. Names of countries where the product is currently marketed.
 - g. A certificate of analysis indicating the results of completed analyses for the submitted samples.

- h. If the product contains ingredients of animal source, the kind of animal must be specified.
- i. Percentage of alcohol in the finished product, if present, should be indicated with justification of that percentage.
- j. Full specifications and methods of analyses of the finished product, as well as stability study and data including storage conditions.
- k. Six samples of the product as well as samples of the outer package and product's label.
- l. Abstracts of scientific references, brochures, and international scientific periodicals testifying to the efficacy and safety of the product.

SECTION VIII. OTHER CERTIFICATION AND TESTING REQUIREMENTS

1. General Standards for Food Products Imports

The SFDA strictly applies GSO regulations and standards on imported foods products. If GSO regulations and standards are not available, the SFDA applies its own issued regulations and standards. In the absence of GSO and Saudi-issued regulations and standards, the SFDA applies Codex or exporting countries' standards such as the U.S. (FDA), EU, and other developed countries' standards. The table below lists the main GSO and Saudi standards that all U.S. food products exporters should take into consideration when exporting to Saudi Arabia.

U.S. exporters are encouraged to consult closely with their Saudi importers on detailed product requirements prior to shipment.

Standard Title	Standard No
Conditions of storage facilities for dry and canned foodstuffs	GSO 168
Maximum limits for pesticide residues in agriculture food products part 2	GSO 383
The two pieces aluminum round cans used for canning food, beverages & food stuff	GSO 1793
Round, metal, installation, used for canning stuffs : determinations, dimensions and capacities	GSO 1797
Edible casein and caseinates	GSO 1374
Sweeteners permitted for use in food	SASO 1548
Flavoring permitted for use in food stuffs	GSO 707
Additives permitted for use in food stuffs	GSO 2500
Labeling of prepackaged food stuffs	GSO 9
Limits of radioactivity levels permitted in foods stuff part -1	GSO 988
Refrigerated cabinets for the sale and/or display of food products, part 1: general requirement	GSO 1686

Code of practice for the prevention and reduction of lead contamination in foods	GSO CAC RCP56
Food packages - Part1 : General Requirements	GSO 839
Food packages - Part 2: Plastic package - General requirements	GSO 1863
Food packages made of aluminum foil	SASO-2173
Expiration periods of food products	GSO 150
Principles for food import and export inspection and certification	GSO CAC:GL 20

The above standards are copyrighted documents and can be purchased by logging into GSO webpage at the [GSO Standards Store](#).

2. Certificate of Animal Slaughtering Requirements According To Islamic Law

Poultry and livestock slaughtering has to take place in an officially licensed slaughterhouse and in accordance with Islamic slaughtering procedures prescribed in GSO number 993:1998 “Animal Slaughtering Requirements According to Islamic Law”. Per the standard, a Certificate of Islamic Slaughter must be issued for all meat and poultry products entering the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries. This certificate is issued by Islamic institutions recognized by the Saudi Embassy or Consulates in the United States. Information related to the approved Islamic institutions may be obtained from the Saudi Embassy in Washington or the nearest Saudi Consulate (New York, Houston, or Los Angeles). Such certificates contain language certifying Islamic slaughter. The following language was taken from a recently issued Islamic Slaughtering certificate issued in the United States:

“This is to certify that an Islamic representative inspected the above slaughter facility. The healthy animals and/or poultry were inspected within 12 hours previous to slaughter by the United States Department of Agriculture official veterinarian. After processing, inspection was made and approved by the USDA Government Health inspector. Further, the animals and /or poultry were slaughtered under the following statement, “slaughtered and processed in the name of God, the Almighty, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, and God is Greatest.” Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim-Allahu Akbar. The animals and /or poultry covered by this certificate were slaughtered by means of a sharp knife, cutting through the skin, jugular vein, and trachea, to result in thorough bleeding of the carcass in preparation for dressing and evisceration.”

3. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP)

On February 9, 2003, the Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Investment issued Ministerial decree number 2436 to all Chambers of Commerce in the country requiring the insertion of a new clause in health certificates accompanying imported meat and meat products to make sure that the abattoirs used to produce meat & meat products exported to the Kingdom implement the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system of production process control.

Following is the summary of unofficial translation of a copy of the decree number 2436:

Reference is made to the Ministerial decree number 123 of April 10, 2001, which spelled out the rules and regulations to be followed when importing all types of meat: chilled, frozen or canned beef, veal, mutton, goat meat and poultry meat and their by-products from safe origins to Saudi Arabia.

Based on the need to protect consumer safety and health, it is required to implement the HACCP regime in all abattoirs producing meat and meat products. To facilitate this, a further Ministerial decree number 2436 was issued on February 8, 2003. The decision requires the insertion of a new clause, referred to as number 13, to the general regulations and condition to be followed when meat and meat products are imported to Saudi Arabia. The text of the clause # 13 should read as follows: “The abattoir (s) implements HACCP procedures in all stages of meat and meat production”

SECTION IX. IMPORT PROCEDURES

1. Import Procedures

Below are the SFDA’s procedures for importing food products into Saudi Arabia:

- Importers must have a Commercial Register, which includes imports and distribution of food products.
- Importers should have already created an E-Account with the SFDA and registered all of their imported food products.
- Required Documents: The following documents must be submitted to the SFDA in order to commence the required product inspections process:
 - Original invoice certified by a chamber of commerce where the exporting company is located.
 - Some of the following certificates (depending on the food item) shall be made available:
 - i. Certificate of origin (Copy)
 - ii. Halal Certificate (original)
 - iii. Certificate of slaughtering for meat and poultry (original)
 - iv. Any other documents or certificates required by the SFDA
 - v. In addition to the general requirements listed above, there may be special requirements specified by SFDA according to the nature of imported food products.

2. Inspection Procedures at Border Inspection Posts (BIPs)

With the exception of herbal preparations, health and supplementary foods (inspected by the Ministry of Health) and live animals, plants, seeds, and grains (inspected by MEWA), all imported foodstuffs are inspected by the SFDA’s Executive Department of Imported Food Control (EDIFC) at Saudi ports of entry or Border Inspection Posts (BIPs). Imported processed feed and feed ingredients are inspected by the SFDA’s Executive Department of Animal Feed (EDAF).

Imported foods are inspected independently by EDIFC's inspectors at one of Saudi Arabia's BIPs without any interference from the SFDA headquarters in Riyadh. Laboratory officials pull random samples from full consignments and testing is done fairly quickly. If an imported consignment is in compliance with pertinent GSO or Saudi regulations and standards, it is cleared; otherwise, it is rejected. The domestic importer has no access to SFDA's internal reports during the process. The SFDA informs the importer its final decision whether to clear the product for sale in Saudi Arabia or reject it due to lack of compliance with established regulations and standards. Rejected products have to be re-exported or destroyed domestically under SFDA's supervision. Importers may appeal the decision to reject a shipment in certain circumstances (see below).

EDIFC inspectors perform the following mandatory four-stage verification process when food consignments arrive at BIPs:

- **Documentation Check:** all certificates and documents accompanying a consignment are checked and presence of all required documentation is verified.
- **Identity Check:** the identities of all food items imported in the consignment are verified against information in accompanying documents.
- **Physical Examination:** all food items contained in the consignment are physically verified to ascertain conformity with the technical regulations and standards, and that the labeling requirements are met as specified by the pertinent technical regulations and standards. The inner temperature level of the container is checked to ensure it meets the established pertinent regulations and standards.
- **Laboratory Test:** if the food inspector has reasons to believe that a laboratory test is needed to take a final decision about the food consignment, he may take random sample and send it for analysis at an authorized laboratory.

If the imported food product meets the established pertinent regulations and standards, it is released by EDIFC on the same day and referred to Customs for final clearance. Failure to comply with pertinent regulations at any of the above stages may result in a rejection of the imported food product and prevent its entry to the Saudi market.

If a product is rejected by one of BIPs inspectors for alleged lack of adherence to established specifications at any of the above four stages, the local importer has the right to appeal the decision in writing to EDIFC at the SFDA headquarters and ask for reconsideration of the inspection results. In such cases, EDIFC forwards the appeal to the SFDA's special committee that studies shipment documentation and the BIPs test results to verify compliance with established rules and regulations. If the BIP action was found to be in compliance with the rules and regulations pertaining to the rejected product, then EDIFC considers the BIP findings and decision as final. If, for any reason, there was a misjudgment by the BIP inspectors, EDIFC repeals the decision and informs the importer to clear the consignment from Customs. Containers can be cleared in less than five working days provided all required documents are in order and imported products meet Saudi Arabian/Gulf specifications.

3. Customs Clearance

As mentioned earlier, shipments of food products must be accompanied by a commercial invoice, health certificate, and other pertinent documents. It should be noted that the Saudi Customs Authority requires that commercial invoices to be issued on CIF basis (cost, insurance and freight). If products are sold on FOB (free on board) basis, the Saudi importers will have to pay for freight and insurance costs and submit the invoices to the Saudi Customs along with commercial invoices when the consignment arrives at the Saudi port of entry. The Saudi Customs requires the CIF information for imported food products to assess and levy import duties. Containers are normally cleared within five working days provided all documents are in order and imported products meet Saudi standards and specifications.

4. Clearance of Food Stuff Purchased via the Internet

The SFDA allows imports of food products purchased via the internet for personal or commercial purposes without going through the required online pre-registration and import authorization requirements. However, the imported food products will be subjected to inspection at the port of entry to ensure that they comply with SFDA's regulations and requirements to ascertain they are fit for human consumption.

5. Imports of Product Samples

Samples destined to potential Saudi buyers or for display in Food Shows are exempt from Saudi labeling and shelf life regulations, but are subject to inspection at ports of entry. A commercial invoice specifying that the product is not for sale and has no commercial value must accompany samples, which are usually sent to Saudi Arabia by D.H.L. and similar carriers.

6. Foodstuff Monitoring

The Environmental Protection Department at the Ministry of Municipality and Rural Affairs is responsible for establishing nationwide food sanitation laws and guidelines. Inspectors at the municipal levels monitor products already in the market. The authorities inspect retailers, wholesalers, restaurants, bakeries, fast food chains, vegetable and meat markets for expiration dates, sanitary and storage conditions as well as product handling. Outlets found selling unhygienic or expired products are exposed to stiff financial fines, temporary closure, or both.

The majority of Saudi food imports enter the country via Jeddah port on the Red Sea or Dammam port on the Arabian Gulf. About 70 percent of all foodstuffs enter through Jeddah port. Imports from Jordan, Syria, and other nearby countries enter the Kingdom by truck.

King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh and King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah also receive significant quantities of food items, particularly fresh fruits, vegetables, and chilled meat. Fresh and chilled products are usually cleared within 24 hours of arrival.

SECTION X. COPYRIGHT AND/OR TRADEMARK LAWS

Royal Decree No. M/5 and Resolution of Council of Ministers No. 75 dated 1984 regulate trademark registration laws in the Kingdom. According to the decree, trademarks are registered with the Trademark Registration Department of the Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Investment through a local agent or lawyer.

Once the registration application is received, the Trademark Registration Department will require one month to study the presented documents to decide on the request. If an application is approved, the department will publish the trademark in the official government Arabic language newspaper (Hum Al-Qura) with the cost of publication paid by the agent or owner of the trademark. The total registration cost is estimated at about \$2,000. Registered trademarks are protected for 10 years and can be renewed for another similar period or periods without any new inspection after republishing it in the official paper.

APPENDIX I. GOVERNMENT REGULATORY KEY AGENCY CONTACTS

The SFDA sets food and feed products standards. Contact information for the SFDA, and other ministries involved in food and agricultural products safety and inspection, is as follows.

Mr. Sami Al-Sager
Vice President for Operations
Food Sector
Saudi Food & Drug Authority (Inspects imported food and processed feed products)
Tel: 966-11-203-8222 Ext: 5800
Fax: 966-11-275-7238
www.sfda.gov.sa

Dr. Osama Al-Saleh
Director General
Plant and Animal Quarantine Department
MEWA (inspection of live animals, plants, fruit, vegetables and animal feed)
Tel: 966-11-417-2000
Fax: 966-11-401-1323

APPENDIX II. OTHER IMPORT SPECIALIST CONTACTS

Saudi Arabia does not have any relevant import specialists that are not affiliated with the government.

Note: GSO issued standards are implemented in the seven member countries: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and Yemen. English copies of GSO standards mentioned in this report and other food/agricultural related are available and can be purchased from the GSO headquarters in Riyadh by clicking on this link: [GSO Standards Store](#)