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Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

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Report Highlights:

This report should be read in conjunction with the EU-28 Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards (FAIRS) report written by the U.S. Mission to the EU (GAIN report E16060). This report focuses on the import regulations and standards that are not harmonized in the EU or where Belgium varies.

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DISCLAIMER: This report was prepared by the Office of Agricultural Affairs of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Brussels, Belgium, for U.S. exporters of domestically produced food and agricultural products. **This report should be read in conjunction with the Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards (FAIRS) – Country Report written by the U.S. Mission to the EU (GAIN Report E16060).** The EU FAIRS report can be downloaded from <http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/fairs-reports/>.

While every possible care was taken in the preparations of this report, information provided may not be completely accurate either because policies have changed since its preparation, or because clear and consistent information about these policies was not available. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters verify the full set of import requirements with their foreign buyers, who are in the best position to research such matters with local authorities, before any goods are shipped. Final approval of any product is subject to the importing country’s rules and regulations as interpreted by border officials at the time of product entry.

Section I. General Food Laws

General principles such as the precautionary principle are set out in the European Union (EU)’s General Food Law Regulation 178/2002. Although around 98 percent of food legislation is harmonized at the EU- level, national Member State rules may exist in addition to EU rules or in cases where EU-harmonization is not yet finalized. U.S. exporters should be aware that in such cases different rules may apply in different Member States. National measures exist, for example, for certain food contact materials, botanical ingredients in food supplements, minimum and maximum levels for vitamins and minerals and for official control fees.

Belgium

Enforcement of EU food legislation is done by Member State officials. Auditing oversight of Member State performance is done by European Commission officials. The European Commission has the authority to initiate legal action in the European Court of Justice against Member States that are not complying with EU Directives and Regulations. “Directives” define the result that must be achieved but leave to each Member State the choice of form and methods to transpose the directive into national laws. Regulations are binding in their entirety and automatically enter into force on a set date in all Member States. Belgium, as a member of the EU, conforms to all EU regulations and directives. There may be some variation among Member States in applying EU harmonized legislation.

The Belgian Food and Drugs Law is called “de Wet betreffende de bescherming van de gezondheid van de gebruikers op het stuk van de voedingsmiddelen en andere produkten / Loi relative à la protection de la santé des consommateurs en ce qui concerne les denrées alimentaires et les autres produits”. This law from 1977 provides the Belgian regulatory framework for all food products. It applies to domestically produced and imported food and other products including tobacco and cosmetic products. The main objective of this law is (1) health protection, (2) product safety, (3) ensuring that consumers have adequate and correct information and (4) promotion of fair trade. All amendments and supplementary food laws are published in “Het Belgisch Staatsblad/Le Moniteur Belge”, which can be consulted on www.staatsblad.be (not available in English).

Belgium has a federal political structure. Food policy and safety are regulated at the federal level while agriculture policy is regulated at the regional level (Flanders and Wallonia). The Directorate-General for control of the Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV/AFSCA) has the responsibility for food controls. Laying down implementing and enforcing measures related to food safety, animal health and plant protection are within the domain of the FAVV/AFSCA. In May 2016, the European Commission’s Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) published a [report on an audit of the Belgian official control system](#). The Federal Public Service (FPS) Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment is in charge of policy and legislation on food product standards, contaminants and animal and plant health. Quality schemes such as geographical indications (GIs) and traditional specialties guaranteed fall under the competence of the FPS Economy, SMEs, Self-Employed and Energy. The Belgian Minister of Agriculture is responsible for the FAVV/AFSCA, the Animal, Plant and Food Directorate General of the FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment and for the FPS Economy, SMEs, Self-Employed and Energy. For more information see www.federal-government.be/en.

Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV)

Administratief Centrum Kruidtuin
Food Safety Center
Kruidtuinlaan 55 – 5th floor
B-1000 Brussel, Belgium

Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

Rijksadministratief Centrum
Victor Hortaplein 40 bus 10
B-1060 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 524.9797

Phone: +32 (0)2 211 8211
Email: info@favv.be
Website: <http://www.favv-afscab.be/>

Email: info@health.fgov.be
Website: <http://www.health.belgium.be/en>

Section II. Food Additive Regulations

For detailed information see <http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/food-additives/>

C. Enzymes

The existing national provisions on the marketing of food enzymes will continue to apply until the adoption of an EU positive list of authorized enzymes. Guidance documents on the use of enzymes can be found on the European Commission's website

http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food_improvement_agents/enzymes/eu_rules_en.

D. Processing Aids

EU harmonized rules exist only for certain categories of processing aids: a list of extraction solvents allowed in the production of foodstuffs and food ingredients, along with their conditions of use has been established in Council Directive 2009/32/EC. Processing aids are subject to Member States national legislation, for Belgium this is the 'Koninklijk besluit van 14 juli 1997 betreffende zuiverheidseisen voor additieven die in voedingsmiddelen mogen worden gebruikt / Arrêté royal du 14 juillet 1997 relatif aux critères de pureté des additifs pouvant être utilisés dans les denrées”.

Point of contact in Belgium:

Federal Public Service (FPS) Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment
Eurostation, blok II
Victor Hortaplein 40 bus 10
1060 Brussel, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 524 73 51/52
Email: apf.food@health.fgov.be

Section III. Pesticides and Contaminants

For detailed information see <http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/pesticides/>.

A. Pesticides

[EU Regulation 1107/2009](#) sets out rules for the authorization of plant protection products. For the authorization/withdrawal of plant protection products, the EU is divided into three zones. Belgium together with The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom fall in Zone B – Centre (see Annex I to

regulation 1107/2009). The authorization of plant protection products fall within the competence of the FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment.

For the renewal of active substances whose approval expires by December 31, 2108 at the latest, the Commission allocates for each active substance a “rapporteur” and “co-rapporteur” Member State responsible for the evaluation of the substance. An updated list is published in [Commission Implementing Regulation 2016/183](#).

Section IV. Packaging and Container Requirements

B. Packaging Waste Management

Member States are required to take measures to reduce packaging waste and must introduce systems for reuse, recovery and recycling of packaging materials (Council Directive 94/62/EC). More information can be found on <https://www.fostplus.be/> and <http://www.pro-e.org/>.

Fostplus
Olympiadenlaan 2
BE-1140 Brussel, Belgium
T: +32 2 775 03 50
E-mail: fostplus@fostplus.be

C. Material in Contact with Food Stuffs

For detailed information see <https://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/food-contact-materials/>

A summary of EU and national legislation as well as guidance documents and contact information with regard to the submission of applications for authorization can be downloaded from the European Commission website at https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/chemical_safety/food_contact_materials/non_harmonised_en.

Point of contact in Belgium:
FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment
Directorate-General Animals, Plants and Food
Office Food, Feed and Other consumption Products
Mr. Carl Berthot
Eurostation- Bloc II, 7eme étage
Place Victor Horta, 40 Boite 10
B-1060 Brussel, Belgium
Tel.: +32 2 524 73 69
E-mail: carl.berthot@health.belgium.be

Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain
Ms. Caroline De Praeter
CA Botanique - Food Safety Center

Boulevard du Jardin Botanique 55
B-1000 Brussel, Belgium
Tel.: +32 2 211 87 09
Email: caroline.depraeter@favv.be

Belgian Scientific Institute for Public Health
Mr. Fabien Bolle
Rue Juliette Wytsmanstraat 14
B-1050 Brussel, Belgium
Tel.: +32 2 642 52 07
Email: fabien.bolle@wiv-isp.be

Several EU Member States have introduced national bans on the use of Bisphenol-A (BPA) in plastic food contact materials and other materials such as coatings. In September 2012, Belgium passed a ban on the use of Bisphenol-A, or BPA, in the packaging of food products for children less than three years old and also in plastic articles like spoons and plates for the same age group. The ban went into force on January 1st of 2013. Diverging laws in some EU Member States have created uncertainty and confusion as to what products that use or contain BPA can be placed on the market.

In November 2015, the European Commission published a [“roadmap”](#) to assess whether a new measure on BPA at EU level should be proposed, taking into account [the European Food Safety Authority’s \(EFSA\) updated scientific opinion published on January 21, 2015](#). In its [press release](#), EFSA stated that the comprehensive re-evaluation of BPA exposure and toxicity concludes that BPA poses no health risk to consumers of any age group (including unborn children, infants and adolescents) at current exposure levels. Exposure from the diet or from a combination of sources (diet, dust, cosmetics and thermal paper) is considerably under the safe level (the “tolerable daily intake” or TDI).

Section V. Labeling Requirements

For detailed information see <http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/eu-labeling-requirements/>

A. General requirements

The standard U.S. label fails to comply with EU labeling requirements. On December 13, 2014, the EU’s new “Food Information to Consumers (FIC)” regulation 1169/2011 became applicable to all pre-packaged food and drink products marketed in the EU, including those imported from non-EU countries. The mandatory nutrition declaration requirement introduced by the new FIC regulation became applicable on December 13, 2016.

4. Language requirements

There are 3 official languages in Belgium: Dutch, French and German. Belgium covers 4 language areas. The Dutch language area is located in the Northern part of Belgium whereas the French language

area is located in the South. Brussels, the capital of Belgium, is bi-lingual. Finally there is a small German language area which is located in the east and borders with Germany. Language has been a very sensitive issue for many decades. This language sensitivity is reflected in the labeling requirements. The label has to be in the language or languages of the language area where the product is being marketed.

Considering the size of the market, most food companies only use bi-lingual Dutch/French or tri-lingual Dutch/French/German labels. FAS/Brussels recommends that U.S. exporters adopt the latter option, as it will allow for products to be marketed not only in Belgium but also in France, Germany, The Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg, or roughly a third of all EU consumers.

7. Minimum Durability

Annex X to the “Food Information to Consumers (FIC)” regulation 1169/2011 sets out rules for the indication of the date of minimum durability, use-by date and date of freezing. The use-by date must be indicated on individual pre-packed portions. The durability date AND the date of (first) freezing preceded by the words “frozen on” is required on labels of frozen meat, frozen meat preparations and frozen unprocessed fishery products. :

-The date shall be preceded by the words:

‘Best before’

‘Best before end’

In Belgium:

‘Tenminste houdbaar tot’

‘Tenminste houdbaar tot einde’

‘A consommer de préférence avant le’

‘A consommer de préférence avant fin’

‘Mindestens haltbar bis’

‘Mindestens haltbar bis Ende’

-The ‘use by’ date shall be preceded by the words:

‘Use by’

‘Te gebruiken tot’

‘A consommer jusqu’au’

‘Zu verbrauchen bis’

-The date of freezing or the date of first freezing shall be preceded by the words:

‘Frozen on’

‘Ingevroren op’

‘Produit congele le’

‘Eingefroren am’

13. Stick-on labels

It is allowed in Belgium to use stick-on labels on pre-packed consumer products.

14. Samples

Samples of products, which are not approved to export to the EU, for research purposes or to be handed out at trade shows can in some cases, be shipped to Belgium. This process can be expensive and burdensome. An application form to ask for an exemption can be requested at the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV) by sending an email to import.export@favv.be.

Exceptions

The FIC regulation allows Member States to deviate from EU rules. Article 39 of the FIC regulation sets conditions for Member States to adopt additional mandatory national measures such as for example country of origin labeling requirements.

B. Other Specific Labeling Requirements

For detailed information see <http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/eu-labeling-requirements/dietetic-foods/>

6. Special Use Foods

The EU's new [dietetic foods regulation 609/2013](#) became applicable on July 20, 2016. The scope of this regulation is limited to infant formula and follow-on formula, processed cereal-based food and baby food, food for special medical purposes and total diet replacement for weight control. Rules on foods and beverages for athletes or on foods intended for diabetics are still subject to Member State legislation. The marketing of dietetic foods for which no specific EU rules have been established must be notified to the Member State where the food is sold. Labeling food as "suitable for diabetics" is no longer allowed in Belgium. Claims that refer to the sugar content must comply with the EU's Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation 1924/2006.

Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment
Animal, Plant and Food Directorate-General
Service Food, Feed, Other Consumption Products
Eurostation - Place Victor Horta, 40/10
B - 1060 Brussel, Belgium

Mr. Jean Pottier
Regulatory Expert Food Labelling, Nutrition and Health Claims
Eurostation- Bloc II, 7eme étage
Place Victor Horta, 40 Boite 10
B-1060 Brussel, Belgium
Tel: +32 (0)2.524 7362
E-mail: jean.pottier@health.belgium.be

Section VI. Other Specific Standards

A. Novel Foods

For detailed information see <http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/novel-foods/>

Novel foods as defined in the [EU's Novel Food Regulation 2015/2883](#) need a pre-market authorization.

Point of contact in Belgium:

FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

Department for Foods, Animal Foods

and Other Consumption Products (DG for Animals, Plants and Foodstuffs)

Tel: +32 (0)2 524 73 51/52

E-mail: novelfood@health.belgium.be

For more information see

<http://www.health.belgium.be/eportal/foodsafety/foodstuffs/novelfoods/index.htm>.

D. Fortified Foods

EU Regulation 1925/2006 sets out harmonized rules on the addition of vitamins and minerals to food. However, maximum permitted levels of vitamins and minerals are not yet harmonized and still subject to Member States' national rules. In November 2016, Belgium notified a [draft royal decree](#) to the European Commission setting maximum levels for vitamins, minerals and trace minerals that may be added to fortified foods and food supplements.

Point of contact in Belgium:

FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

Department for Foods, Animal Foods

and Other Consumption Products (DG for Animals, Plants and Foodstuffs)

Tel: +32 (0)2 524 7351/52

E-mail: apf.food@health.fgov.be

F. Irradiated Foodstuffs

Harmonization of EU rules on food irradiation has been slow and only a few products have so far received EU-wide approval. Until the EU positive list is expanded, national authorizations continue to apply.

Point of contact in Belgium:

FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

Mr. Carl Berthot

Eurostation- Bloc II, 7eme étage

Place Victor Horta, 40 Boite 10

B-1060 Brussel, Belgium

Phone: +32 (0)2524 7369

carl.berthot@health.fgov.be

Any foodstuff which has been treated with ionising radiation must bear one of the following indications:

In Dutch:

- "doorstraald";
- "door straling behandeld";
- "met ioniserende straling behandeld";

In French:

- "traité par rayonnements ionisants";
- "traité par ionization";

In German:

- "bestrahlt";
- "mit ionisierenden Strahlen behandelt";

Section VII. Facility and Product Registration

B. Product Registration

The introduction of special use foods needs to be notified to the Member State where the food is sold. Exporters of vitamin-enriched foods or nutritional supplements are especially advised to check for the existence of specific Member State registration or notification requirements.

The competent authority for Belgium:

FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment
Department for Foods, Animal Foods
and Other Consumption Products (DG for Animals, Plants and Foodstuffs)
Place Victor Horta, 40 Boîte 10
Bloc II - 7^o étage
B-1060 Bruxelles
Tel: +32(0)2.5247351-52
E-mail: apf.food@health.fgov.be

Section VIII. Other Certification and Testing Requirements

B. Inspections

In Belgium the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV/AFSCA) is responsible for the inspections. Criteria for laboratories conducting food controls have been harmonized but it is the

Member States' responsibility to designate laboratories that are allowed to perform analyses. A list of authorized laboratories can be found on FAVV's website at <http://www.favv-afsca.be/laboratoria/>.

Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV/AFSCA)

DG Laboratories

Director General Mr. Geert De Poorter

Phone: +32 (0)2 211.8726/27

CA-Botanique - Food Safety Center, 4th Floor

Boulevard du Jardin botanique 55

1000 Brussels, Belgium

Section IX. Import Procedures

C. Import duties

Information on Belgium's customs authorities can be found at <http://fiscus.fgov.be/interfdan/>.

It is possible to obtain Binding Tariff Information (BTI) from a member state's customs authority to get the proper product classification. Through this system, traders know in advance the tariff classification of the goods they intend to import. BTI is legally binding in all the member states. Information on how to obtain a BTI can be downloaded from the European Commission's Taxation & Custom's website at https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/business/union-customs-code/ucc-guidance-documents_en#binding_tariff_information.

Customs authorities designated for the purpose of receiving applications and issuing Binding Tariff Information:

Centrale administratie der douane en accijnzen Dienst Nomenclatuur (Tarief),

Landbouw en Waarde Cel BTI North Galaxy – Building A – 8th Floor

Koning Albert II-laan 33

1030 Brussel, Belgium

The Import Process:

- **Pre announcement:** by Common (Veterinary) Entry Document, issued by agent. [Commission Decision 2009/821/EC](#) establishes a list of border inspection posts approved to carry out veterinary checks;
- **Documentary Check:** examination of the original required documents that accompany the consignment based on model certificate according to EU legislation, carried out by Customs based on an agreement between Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance;
- **Identity Check:** to ascertain that the products correspond to the information given in the accompanying certificates or documents;
- **Physical Check:** check on the product itself to verify compliance with food or feed law.

Section X. Copyright and/or Trademark Laws

A. Trademarks

In the EU, trademarks can be registered at the national, regional or EU level. Trademarks registered at the national level are protected in the EU Member State of registration only. Applications must be submitted directly to the relevant national Intellectual Property (IP)-office ([full list of national offices](#)). Currently, there is only one regional-level IP office in the EU, i.e. the Benelux Office which registers trademarks for three Member States: Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Detailed information on the registration of trademarks is available on the [website of the European Union Intellectual Property Office \(EUIPO\)](#).

Applications for trademark registration in the Benelux can be sent to:

Benelux Merkenbureau (Benelux Trademark Office)
Bordewijklaan 15
2591 XR The Hague, the Netherlands
Phone: +31-(0)70-349 1111.

Appendix I. Government Regulatory Agency Contacts

All Belgian legislation is published in the Belgian official journal "Het Belgisch Staatsblad"/"Le Moniteur Belge". This journal is edited by the Federal Public Service Justice and can be consulted on-line in Dutch and French at www.staatsblad.be or www.moniteur.be.

Federal Public Service Justice
Information officer:
Waterloolaan 115,
B-1000 Brussels
Tel: +32-(0)2-5427164
E-mail: info@just.fgov.be
<http://justitie.belgium.be/nl/>

European legislation can be found at:
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>

Belgian food legislation is updated by the Federal Public Service Public Health
Federal Public Service Public Health
DG Animals, Plants and Food
Victor Hortaplein, 40 bus 10
B-1060 Brussels

Tel: +32-(0)2-5248502
Email: apf.dg@health.fgov.be
<http://www.health.belgium.be/en>

Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV)
AC-Kruidtuin
Food Safety Center
Kruidtuinlaan 55 – 5th floor
B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 211 8622
Email: info@favv.be
<http://www.favv-afsca.be/>

Belgian Customs
Administratie der douane en accijnzen
North Galaxy
Koning Albert II laan 33
B - 1030 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0) 257 62111

Appendix II. Other Import Specialist Contacts

1) Comeos: The Belgian Federation for Commerce and Services
Sint-Bernardusstraat 60,
B-1010 Brussels
Tel: +32-(0)2-5373060
Email: info@comeos.be
www.comeos.be

2) The Belgian federation of food distribution BELGAFOOD (Member of Comeos)
Sint-Bernardusstraat 60,
B-1010 Brussels
Tel: +32-(0)2-5373060
Email: belga@fedis.be
www.comeos.be

3) Federation of Belgian Enterprises
Rue Ravenstein 4
B-1000 Brussels
<http://www.vbo-feb.be/en/>

