

EU import conditions for fresh meat and meat products

The European Union is by far the biggest importer of food worldwide. Import rules for meat and meat products are fully harmonised and the European Commission acts as the competent authority on behalf of the 25 Member States. The EU Commission is the sole negotiating partner for all non-EU countries in questions related to import conditions for meat and meat products.



The European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection is responsible for food safety in the European Union. Our import rules for meat and meat products seek to guarantee that all imports fulfil the same high standards as products from EU Member States - not only with respect to hygiene and all aspects of consumer safety but also regarding their animal health status.

To ensure that imports can take place smoothly and efficiently, interested countries and businesses should understand the fundamental principles and philosophy of the European Food Law, which form the basis for our import rules.

Principles of the European Food Law

Our citizens have legitimate, high expectations regarding the safety and quality of their food. Modern production systems and trade structures are now capable of providing full transparency, not only on animal health and food safety issues but also on environmental standards of production and animal welfare. To meet these expectations and take account of the technical progress made during the past years, the European Union has undertaken a fundamental overhaul of its food safety legislation. This reform process is now largely finalised.

The new food law of the European Union put strong emphasis on process controls - throughout the food chain, from farm to fork. The general food law supports the flow of information and the management of quality. This philosophy reflects the demands of the consumer and exploits the opportunities opened by technical progress. Checks on the end product alone would clearly not be capable of providing the same level of safety, quality and transparency to the consumer.

General Rules for Meat and Meat Products

Imports of fresh meat and meat products into the European Union are subject to veterinary certification – which is based on the recognition of the competent authority of the non-EU country by the Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection. This formal recognition of the reliability of the competent authority is a pre-requisite for the country to be eligible and authorized for export to the European Union. Legally legitimate and adequately empowered authorities in the exporting country must ensure credible inspection and controls throughout the production



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chain, which cover all relevant aspects of hygiene, animal health and public health.

All bilateral negotiations and other relevant dialogue concerning imports of meat and meat products must be undertaken by the national competent veterinary authority. All other interested parties and private businesses should contact their competent authority and communicate with the European Union via this channel.

Specific Key Elements

For meat and meat products from all species, countries of origin must be on a **positive list of eligible countries** for the relevant product. The eligibility criteria are:

- Exporting countries must have a **competent veterinary authority** which is responsible throughout the food chain. The Authorities must be empowered, structured and resourced to implement effective inspection and guarantee credible certification of the relevant veterinary and general hygiene conditions.
- The country or region of origin must fulfil the relevant **animal health** standards. This implies that the country should be a member of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and should meet that organisation's standards and reporting obligations. Adequate veterinary services must ensure effective enforcement of all necessary health controls.
- The national authorities must also guarantee that the relevant **hygiene and public health** requirements are met. The hygiene legislation contains specific requirements on the structure of establishments, equipment and operational processes for slaughter, cutting, storage and handling of meat. These provisions are aimed at ensuring high standards and at preventing any contamination of the product during processing.
- A **monitoring system** must be in place to verify compliance with EU requirements on **residues of veterinary medicines, pesticides and contaminants**.

- A suitable monitoring programme must be designed by the competent authority and submitted to the European Commission for initial approval and yearly renewal.
- Imports are only authorised from **approved establishments** (e.g. slaughterhouses, cutting plants, game handling establishments, cold stores, meat processing plants), which have been inspected by the competent authority of the exporting country and found to meet EU requirements. The authority provides the necessary guarantees and is obliged to carry out regular inspections.
- For the import of meat from bovine, ovine or caprine animal species (cattle, sheep and goats), exporting countries have to apply for determination of their **BSE status**. This status is based on a risk assessment and is linked to specific BSE-related import conditions.
- An inspection by the Commission's **Food and Veterinary Office** is necessary to confirm compliance with the above requirements. Such an inspection mission is the basis of establishing confidence between the EU Commission and the competent authority of the exporting country.

Border Inspection

Imports of meat or meat products must enter the EU via an approved Border Inspection Post of the EU under the authority of an official veterinarian.

Each consignment is subject to a systematic documentary check, identity check and, as appropriate, a physical check. The frequency of physical checks depends on the risk profile of the product and also on the results of previous checks.

Consignments which are found not to be compliant with Community (EU) legislation shall either be destroyed or, under certain conditions, re-dispatched within 60 days.

To protect animal health, there is a general ban on personal imports by passengers or travellers bringing meat or meat products into the EU.

For more information, see:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/animalproducts/personal_imports/index_en.htm

Technical Assistance

In accordance with the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the European Commission provides technical assistance and facilities for institutional capacity building. These instruments can help developing countries to comply with EU import conditions.

In addition to national and regional development programmes, specific horizontal facilities have been established to improve hygiene, safety and animal health in developing countries and to provide training for government officials from authorities worldwide. The delegations of the European Union can provide detailed information on available programmes.

What are the formal steps towards approval for imports?

The EU has designed a multiple-step procedure for the evaluation of the eligibility of third countries for exporting meat and meat products to the EU.

1. The national authority of a third country must submit a formal request to the Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection of the European Commission to export meat or meat products to the EU. The request should contain confirmation that the authority can fulfil all relevant legal provisions to satisfy EU requirements.
2. The Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection sends out a questionnaire which should be completed and returned.
3. The residue monitoring plan of the exporting country must be submitted and approved at this stage (if not already done).
4. If the evaluation of the residue monitoring plan and the questionnaire is positive, an inspection by the Food and Veterinary Office is carried out to assess the situation on the spot.
5. Based on the results of the inspection and the guarantees given by the exporting country, the Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection proposes the listing of the country, the specific conditions under which imports from that country will be authorised and the list of approved establishments in the country. These are then discussed with representatives of all EU Member States.
6. If the Member States have a favourable opinion on the proposal, the European Commission adopts the specific import conditions. Lists of eligible establishments can be amended at the request of the exporting country and are made available for the public on the internet:
http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biosafety/establishments/third_country/index_en.htm

For further information:

As a first step, companies wishing to export meat or meat products to the EU should contact the relevant national authorities in their country to become authorised.

The Food Safety website of DG Health & Consumer Protection:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/index_en.htm

Detailed information on import conditions for animals and animal products:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/international/trade/index_en.htm

Key questions on the new rules on food hygiene and official food controls.

http://ec.europa.eu/food/international/trade/interpretation_imports.pdf

Expanding Exports – online helpdesk managed by DG Trade:

http://exporthelp.europa.eu/index_en.html