



Importing Food Commercially

Introduction: Several governmental departments and agencies are responsible for enforcing the regulations that govern the entrance of food into Canada, both commercially and non-commercially. These regulations serve to (1) protect Canada's food resources from pests and disease; (2) promote trade and improve Canada's economy; and (3) prevent the sale of dangerous, prohibited, and/or adulterated products.

The responsibility for complying with all applicable legislation is held solely by the importer. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is the primary federal agency responsible for inspection and enforcement of regulations for food safety and nutritional quality, as defined by Health Canada. The CFIA works in conjunction with the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), and Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, to regulate the importation of foods. Other federal departments may be involved, depending on the nature of the product, such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and Environment Canada.

Canadian Food, Animal and Plant Legislation: Any food product imported into Canada should conform to federal (and provincial, where applicable) regulations. The CFIA enforces a number of federal acts and regulations that pertain to the safety, quality, labelling and grading systems of various food items sold in Canada, including meat, poultry and poultry products, fish, dairy products, maple products, organic products, honey, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

For an overview of federal acts that relate to the regulation of food in Canada, please consult the Food Safety Network's fact sheet: [Federal regulation of foods in Canada](#)

For links to all Acts and Regulations under the jurisdiction of the CFIA, visit the following website: <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/reg/rege.shtml>

Additionally, there may be provincial and territorial regulations on food safety, quality, labeling, packaging and grading. The Food Safety Network has a fact sheet on provincial regulations on food safety that may be useful as a starting point: [Provincial food safety regulations in Canada](#)

Alternatively, contact the relevant regulatory authorities in the province or territory in which you wish to distribute your food product.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): The Canadian Wildlife Service, under Environment Canada, is responsible for maintaining Canada's participation in CITES, a United Nations Environment Programme with more than 170 participating countries. CITES protects endangered or protected wildlife species from exploitation through illegal trade. This is enforced federally in Canada by the [Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act \(WARPPRIITA\)](#),

which also regulates the trade of Canadian wildlife out of and within the country. Provincial and territorial governments may have other or supporting legislations pertaining to protection of wildlife within their jurisdiction.

The CITES website (http://www.cites.ec.gc.ca/eng/sct2/index_e.cfm) contains a control list of plant and animal species currently protected. You may require a permit from Environment Canada to import controlled items under CITES. Contact information for the Canadian Wildlife Service and information about permits and inquiries about your product pertaining to CITES and WARPPRIITA, can be found at: http://www.cites.ec.gc.ca/eng/sct0/contact_e.cfm

Requirements for Importation: To import commercially, a business has to be registered with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), to receive a Business Number (BN). BNs are 15-digit identifiers for the purposes of GST, payroll deduction, corporate income tax, and so forth. An import/export account will be issued by the Canada Border Services Agency when a business has a BN and has completed the appropriate applications.

The following forms are available from the Canada Revenue Agency for this purpose:

- To obtain a Business Number and apply for an import/export account:
RC -1 : Request for a Business Number (BN)
 - To apply for an import/export account with a pre-existing Business Number:
RC1C : Business Number – Import/Export account information
- OR**
- Use CRA's Business Registration Online service to obtain a BN and an import/export account.

Business Start-Up Assistant (BSA): Canada Business maintains the online utility “Business Start-Up Assistant (BSA)”, which offers an extensive number of resources for aspiring entrepreneurs. It explains the requirements and procedures for the start-up of any business. The site includes guides on writing a business plan, performing market research, choosing an appropriate business structure, selecting a business name, financing, advertising, and information on hiring employees or contractors. There are links to business registration and Business Number (BN) application forms for the Canada Revenue Agency, and links to provincial requirements for business registration. There are also resources and forms for federal and provincial taxes.

Memorandum D17-1-5: Importing commercial goods

This document outlines the regulations and procedures involved in the Canadian Customs and Revenue Agency's requirements for:

- Business Number (BN) and importer accounts;
- Release of imported goods;
- Accounting for imported goods;
- Payment of associated duties and taxes.



Importing Food Commercially

Tools and Resources: The product identity and composition should be identified to determine specific restrictions of products, required permits, applicable tariff rate quotas and other relevant legislation.

There a variety of tools and resources, in the forms of interactive databases, telephone information services, and other documents, available online by the various federal departments and agencies to aid importers and exporters in retrieving permits, licensing and other requirements specific to their product.

1. The **Automated Import Reference System (AIRS)** was created by the CFIA to assist importers and exporters in determining specific permits, documentation and other customs requirements in regards to food. It is a database updated with the most current CFIA requirements for importations of food, plants and animals, and is recommended by the CFIA as the first reference when considering requirements for imports/exports. However, AIRS is a reference system only, which should complement the review and interpretation of pertinent legislation by the importer. Users are required to enter the type of product, the country of origin and intended end-use of product, whereupon a list of requirements is automatically generated.
2. **Border Information Service (BIS)** is a 24-hour bilingual (English and French) telephone service under the Canada Border Services Agency. It provides complete and up-to-date information on customs requirements and exchange rates for commercial importers and exporters.
BIS telephone # (toll free): 1-800-461-9999 (in Canada);
1-866-335-3237 (TTY, in Canada);
1-204-983 3500 **or** 1-506-636-5064 (outside Canada; long distance charges may apply).
3. The **Import Service Centres (ISC)** are a collaborative effort between the CFIA and the CBSA to facilitate information exchange between the agencies and their clients (i.e. importers). There are three regional ISCs:
Eastern Region - served from Montreal;
Central Region - served from Toronto;
Western Region - served from Vancouver.
Contact information for all three ISCs can be found at the link above.
4. The **Step-by-Step Guide to Importing**. The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) offers this document to provide an overview of the commercial importing process, and guidance to importers.
5. The **Guide to Importing Foods Commercially**. The CFIA offers this document to provide an outline of federal legislation; tariff rate quotas (TRQs); roles of departments and agencies; importer responsibilities; general

and import requirements for foods; and relevant contact information for importers who wish to bring food products into Canada.

6. The **Good Importing Practices for Food – 1st Edition**
Good Importing Practices (GIPs) are guidelines that may be voluntarily undertaken by importers. GIPs serve to enhance the safety of the imported food product by using a HACCP-based model to identify problems throughout the importation process, and establishing controls, monitoring systems, corrections, verifications and recall procedures. GIPs outline the responsibility of the importer to ensure the provision of all necessary documentation for the imported good (i.e. licenses, permits), and tools for traceability (i.e. bar codes). Supplier integrity, and product conformance to applicable legislation including food standards of identity, should be verified by the importer. The CFIA has provided a document that outlines GIPs involved in importing foods, and uses this document to aid in the assessment of product compliance.
7. The part on **Importing Goods into Canada** provides general information for importers on accounting for shipments; shipment examination; business registration; shipment release and reporting; and storage. This website has external links to other importer resources and service providers.
8. The Export and Import Controls Bureau is responsible for administering the *Export and Import Permits Act*. Information on controlled items and import permit can be found on this website:
<http://www.international.gc.ca/eicb/general/general-en.asp>
9. **Related Legislation:**
Memorandum 19-10-2: Export and Import Permits Act (Importations)
The Export and Import Permits Act defines the Import (and Export) Control List, and gives the authority to issue and revoke import/export permits to Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT). This memorandum specifically pertains to importations, and contains a list of agricultural products subject to control (Import Control List (ICL)).

Depending on the nature of the food product to be imported, it may be subject to agricultural tariff rate quotas, and eligible for a tariff rate quota import permit. This enables the payment of “within access” duties if the quota is not full; “within access” duties are significantly lower than the “over access” rate of duty. The “over access” rate of duty is automatically applied to any agricultural product that has not been issued a TRQ import permit. The Memorandum 19-10-2 also includes import permit application forms.

Memorandum D10-18-1: Tariff rate quotas

This document is a general outline of tariff rate quotas and related procedures. Agricultural products subject to tariff rate quotas include:



Importing Food Commercially

- broiler hatching chicks and eggs;
- chicken;
- turkey;
- beef and veal from non-NAFTA countries;
- milk and cream; buttermilk; dairy blends; ice cream;
- eggs and egg products;
- margarine;
- cheeses;
- wheat and wheat products;
- barley and barley products.

Memorandum D10-18-6: First-come, first-served agricultural tariff rate quotas

Some agricultural products are subject to first-come, first-served agricultural tariff rate quotas, specifically barley and barley products, and wheat and wheat products, where these commodities are not subject to specific import permits or prior quota allocation. Instead, two general import permits are available, one for within access imports and one for over access imports; the former is used automatically prior to the fulfillment of the allocated quota for that particular commodity and the latter is used when the quota is filled, according to the decision of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Memorandum D10-18-4: Importation of certain agricultural products and the Import Control List (ICL)

10. Information on quota allocation and obtaining permits for TRQ goods:

Export and Import Controls Bureau
Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
P.O. Box 481, Station A
Ottawa ON K1N 9K6
Telephone: (613) 995-8104
Fax: (613) 996-0612

Information on agricultural products on the Import Control List:

Food and Chemical Products Unit
Nomenclature and Tariff Treatment Policy Division
Revenue Canada
Connaught Building
555 MacKenzie Avenue
Ottawa ON K1A 0L5
Telephone: (613) 954-6949
Fax: (613) 954-9646

Other goods may require additional or other documentation, such as veterinary certificates, depending on the nature of the product.

11. The **Automated Import System – Participant’s Information Document**

In a collaborative effort with the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) system established by the CBSA, the CFIA has formed the Automated Import System (AIS), which facilitates electronic data transmission between the CFIA and CBSA. The importer is able to transmit data electronically, increasing the ease of information exchange during the customs clearance process.

For more information, visit the CBSA’s website for details on available electronic data exchange (EDI) systems, <http://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/eservices/overview-sommaire-eng.html> or call the Border Information Service or the closest Import Service Centre.

Information Sources:

Canadian Association of Importers and Exporters. (2008). *Home*. Retrieved from, <http://www.caie.ca/>

Canada Border Services Agency. (2008). *D memoranda*. Retrieved from, <http://www.cbsa.gc.ca/publications/dm-md/menu-eng.html>

Canada Border Services Agency. (2006). *A step-by-step guide to importing*. Retrieved from, <http://www.cbsa.gc.ca/sme-pme/i-guide-eng.html>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (n.d.). *Automated Import Reference System (AIRS)*. Retrieved from, http://airs-sari.inspection.gc.ca/Airs_External/Default.aspx

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2008). *2003 Guide to food labelling and advertising*. Retrieved from, <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/labeti/guide/toce.shtml>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2008). *Good importing practices for food – first edition*. Retrieved from, <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/imp/goodbonne.shtml>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2008). *Guide to importing food products commercially*. Retrieved from, <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/imp/guide1e.shtml>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2007). *Food recalls: make a plan and action it! Importer’s guide*. Retrieved from, <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/reclarapp/rap/igguide.shtml>



Importing Food Commercially

- Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2006). *Automated import system (AIS) – Participants information document*. Retrieved from, <http://www.cscb.ca/listinfo/aispidfeb06.pdf>
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2006). *Import service centres (ISC)*. Retrieved from, <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/imp/importe.shtml>
- Canada Revenue Agency. (2008). *RC1 – Request for a Business Number (BN)*. Retrieved from, <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pbg/tf/rc1/>
- Canada Revenue Agency. (2008). *RC1C - Business Number (BN) – Import/Export account*. Retrieved from, <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pbg/tf/rc1c/>
- Department of Justice Canada. (2008). *Export and Import Permits Act*. Retrieved from, <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/ShowTdm/cs/e-19///en>
- Environment Canada. (2008). *Convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora (CITES)*. Retrieved from, http://www.cites.ec.gc.ca/eng/sct0/index_e.cfm

For more information on Importing Food Commercially or other Food Safety topics, please call the Food Safety Network toll-free at 1-866-50-FSNET (37638) or visit www.foodsafetynetwork.ca

While we strive to make the information provided in this technical summary helpful and accurate, we make no representation regarding the information, and disclaim liability arising out of errors or omissions, or use or non-use of the information.