

# EU import conditions for fresh meat and meat products

**The European Union (EU) is by far the biggest importer of food worldwide. Import rules for meat and meat products are fully harmonised. On behalf of all EU Member States, the European 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 Food Safety establishes import rules for meat and meat products. By following these rules non-EU countries can guarantee that their exports of meat and meat products to the EU 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.

Non-EU countries which are interested in exporting meat and meat products to the EU must be aware of the fundamental principles and philosophy of European Food Law, which forms the basis for our import conditions.

## Principles of European Food Law

EU 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 EU has undertaken a fundamental overhaul of its food safety legislation. This reform process is now largely finalised.

The new food law of the EU put strong emphasis on management of quality and process controls - throughout the food chain, from farm to fork. 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 EU 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 Food Safety. This formal recognition of the reliability of the competent authority is a pre-requisite for the country to be eligible and authorised to export such products to the EU. Legally

legitimate and adequately empowered authorities in the exporting country must ensure credible inspection and controls throughout the production 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 wishing to export to the EU should contact their competent authority which in turn will communicate with the European Commission.

## 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 main criteria for the non-EU country to be listed and therefore eligible to export to the EU are:

- Exporting countries must have a **competent authority** which is responsible throughout the food chain. The authority must be empowered structured and resourced to implement effective inspection and guarantee credible public health and animal health attestations in the health certificate to accompany meat and meat products that are destined for the EU.
- 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. The competent authority (veterinary service) in the country must ensure effective enforcement of all necessary animal health controls.
- The competent authority 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 that food is produced safely and that contamination of the product during processing is prevented.
- A residue **monitoring plan for live animals and animal products which includes testing for residues of veterinary drugs, pesticides, heavy metals and contaminants**, must be in place to verify compliance with EU requirements. The plan (and results from the previous year's monitoring) must be submitted to the European Commission annually for approval. Countries with approved plans are listed.

- 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. When it signs the export health certificate, the authority is certifying that it provides the necessary guarantees, carries out regular inspections of establishments and takes corrective action, if necessary. A list of approved establishments is maintained by the European Commission.
- For the export of meat from bovine, ovine or caprine animal species (cattle, sheep and goats) to the EU, exporting countries have to apply for a determination of their Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (**BSE**) status. This status is based on a risk assessment and is linked to specific BSE-related import conditions.
- Audits by the EU Commission's **Health and Food Audits and Analysis Directorate** are carried out to verify compliance with the above requirements. Audits establish confidence between the Commission and the competent authority of the exporting country.

## Inspection of meat and meat products at the EU border

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 in the EU Member State in question.

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 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: [https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/animalproducts/personal\\_imports\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/animalproducts/personal_imports_en)

## Training and 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 facilitates institutional capacity building to help developing countries 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.

## Country listing – the process

The process by which a non-EU country can export meat and meat products to the EU is as follows:

1. The competent authority of a non-EU country must submit a written request to the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety 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 Food Safety sends a general and/or product-specific questionnaire to the competent authority which should be completed and returned. The completed questionnaire(s) will provide information on relevant national legislation on animal health and food hygiene, structure of the competent authorities etc.
3. A residue monitoring plan of the exporting country must also be submitted to the Commission. The plan should cover those species from which meat and meat products are intended to be exported to the EU. If the plan is not approved by the Commission, meat and meat products may not be imported into the EU regardless of the non-EU country's compliance with other public health or animal health requirements.
4. After the evaluation of the information provided, an audit by the Commission's Health and Food Audits and Analysis Directorate may be carried out to assess the situation on the spot.
5. If the results of the evaluation / audit, and the guarantees given by the exporting country are deemed to be sufficient, the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety proposes the listing of the non-EU country and any specific conditions under which imports from that country will be authorised. In parallel it will draft a 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 will list both the non-EU country and any specific import conditions which apply. Lists of eligible establishments can be amended at the request of the exporting country and are made available for the public on the internet: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/sanco/traces/output/non\\_eu\\_listsPerActivity\\_en.htm](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/sanco/traces/output/non_eu_listsPerActivity_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 & Food Safety:**

[https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety_en)

**Detailed information on import conditions for animals and animal products:**

[https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/international\\_affairs/trade\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/international_affairs/trade_en)

**Key questions on the new rules on food hygiene and official food controls:**

[https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/biosafety\\_fh\\_legis\\_guidance\\_interpretation\\_imports.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/biosafety_fh_legis_guidance_interpretation_imports.pdf)

**EU Trade Helpdesk:** <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/tradehelp/>