

General Labeling Requirements for GCC Countries

Contents

General Labeling requirements for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries	2
Labeling Requirements:	2
The standard also deals with labeling of irradiated food as well as the language to be used.	3
Requirements Specific to Nutritional Labeling.....	3
Country Specificities.....	4
UAE	4
Bahrein:.....	5
OMAN	6
KSA	9
KUWAIT	13
QATAR.....	15
Packaging and Container Regulations:	18
KSA	18
KUWAIT, QATAR, OMAN	19
BAHREIN.....	19
UAE	19

General Labeling requirements for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries

Labeling Requirements:

GCC countries namely adopted the newly developed standards GSO (09/2013) Amd 2016 and GSO (150-2/2013) for labeling of pre-packaged foods and shelf life. According to this GCC-wide standard, prepackaged food product labels should be in Arabic or include an Arabic language translation of the label. Labels must contain at a minimum: product name, packer's name, country of origin or manufacture, listing of ingredients, instructions where applicable, for the end use of the product, and the shelf-life of the product.

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 shall be engraved or in relief, printed to stamp with permanent ink directly on all packages or on their original label by the producer only. Adding stickers for production and expiration dates is not permissible. There shall be not more than one date of production or of expiration on the same package. Both dates shall not be subject to deletion, change or deceit.

Products with No Specific Expiration Date: Products with no specified shelf life such as salt, spices, milled rice, etc. only the date of production or processing would be shown as: mm/yy. Recommend to also consult, with the buyer prior to shipping.

Product name (name of the food) in a prominent position on the label;

- Ingredients in descending order of proportion;

Update April 2017

- Additives. Using their "E" number and group names are acceptable
- The source of the animal fats (beef, buffalo, etc...) 1/;
- The foodstuff and ingredients which are known to cause hypersensitivity shall always be declared;
- Net content in metric units;
- Production and expiry dates 2/;
- Country of origin;
- The name and address of the manufacturer, producer, distributor, importer, exporter or vendor shall be declared on the label;
- Special storage and preparation instructions, if any;
- Lot identification.
- Nutritional declaration

The standard also deals with labeling of irradiated food as well as the language to be used.

Requirements Specific to Nutritional Labeling

The revised GSO nutritional standard was issued as TR 2233/2012. According to the standard, the following nutritional information shall be declared on the labels of prepackaged food intended for direct consumption or after heating:

- The nutritive value of the prepackaged foodstuff to including the essential elements such as carbohydrates, fats, protein, dietary fibers, energy;
- In case of adding vitamins, mineral salts or any other dietary elements as an ingredient, the value of each dietary element shall be separately declared in the nutritional information accompanying the prepackaged food;
- All nutritional information and/or net content shall be set forth as percentage by weight if it is less than 100 grams or 100 ml or by food serving specified by the manufacturer.
- The information shall be declared in international units (gram, mg, ug, IU) and kilocalories for energy values.
- Health claims on packaged foods must be true and accompanied by certificates confirming the claim.

There is no RDA labeling requirement. In general, U.S and EU . nutritional labeling is acceptable.

The GCC also developed technical regulations to address genetically engineered food products. The regulations require that labels of food products containing GMO ingredients should clearly state that. Until now, the regulations are not strictly enforced in the GCC-4.

Nutritional labeling Labels for specialty foods, such as diet, health and baby foods, must contain detailed information about the product's vitamin and mineral contents, nutritive value per 100 grams and proper use and storage.

Technical regulation GSO 2333/2013 **“Requirements for nutrition and health claim in the food”** has been approved on October 2nd, 2013

Country Specificities

UAE

Gulf Standard GSO 9/2013 is the updated GCC labeling standard. While the UAE has accepted English-only labels in the past, bilingual labels are now required. Arabic stickers and labels should be legible. Products intended for institutional use may be exempt from this Arabic labeling requirement, but the “mechanism” is designed to eventually provide greater clarity on this point. Exporters should work closely with their importers to ensure that their products will meet the needs of retailers.

Labeling regulations apply to all products shipped in bulk and in institutional-sized containers. Bulk cartons of fresh fruits and vegetables must contain most label information, but need not carry production/expiry dates. In general, the contents of standard Lebanese labels (Codex) satisfy most UAE label requirements. However, production dating continues to be a key difference from past requirements. In addition to the GCC labeling requirements, a food label must contain information on the following:

- Foods making health claims must be labeled accordingly and require pre-approval by the Ministry of Health
- Animal fats and ingredients should be sourced from animals that are Halal slaughtered. The use of pork fat, as with all pork related products as ingredients, is prohibited, unless the products are retailed with all pork products in restricted sections of the retail stores which are clearly marked for non-Moslems. Labels for pork and pork containing products must comply with the general labeling requirements and must clearly state that the product contains pork. Food labels may not include pictures of pork, nor may recipes list pork. It is recommended for exporters to remove product with names traditionally associated with pork or non-pork products such as turkey ham or beef bacon.

Update April 2017

- Production/expiry (P/E) dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. P/E dates printed on stickers are not an acceptable alternative, as well as bar coding in lieu of P/E dates. Only one set of P/E dates on the label is permitted. P/E dates must be printed in the following fashion, depending upon the shelf life of the product:
 - Day/month/year for products with a shelf life of three (3) months or less
 - Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than three (3) months

Under the month/year format, the last day of the month is considered the expiry date. Exporters who list the first day of the month following the expiry date have run into issues when trying to clear shipments. The month may be printed in numbers or letters. For example, both 3/08 and March 08 are acceptable formats.

The word "Production" or the letter "P" must precede the production date. The expiry date must be preceded by one of the following statements: "Expiration (date);" "Fit for.....from the date of production;" "Use by (date);" "Use before (date);" "Sell by (date);" "Valid until (date) from the date of production;" or the letter "E."

- Alcoholic beverages and alcohol containing products can be imported but only through authorized importers.

Bahrein:

Original labels should be printed in Arabic, but exceptions do exist for small lots and ethnic foods.

Bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g., Arabic/English). In

addition, Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of Arabic or bilingual labels provided the sticker:

- is extremely difficult to remove
- includes the following essential information

- Product name
- Ingredients.
- Net weight.
- Country of origin.

-the dates of production & expiry, if they are part of the original sticker and not being stamped over, does not cover the original label

Update April 2017

- it does not contradict information on the original label
- the production and expiration dates are engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. U.S. bar coding is not accepted in lieu of the expiration date. The expiration date must be printed in the following order, depending on the shelf life of the product:
 - Day/month/year for products with a shelf life of less than 3 months.
 - Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than 3 months.

Dates, written in digit format or in words such as "September 24, 2005," are acceptable. American dating (month/day/year) is not acceptable and if utilized could lead to the rejection of the products. Bahrain will pre-approve food labels prior to import. Pre-import approval is strongly encouraged since it can significantly speed clearance of food products, particularly for new-to-market products and brands. Consignments with minor labeling infractions may be granted a one-time waiver, if petitioned, provided the products are found to be safe for human consumption. Small consignments of 20 or less cartons, as well as ethnic food products, may be exempt from Arabic label requirements, provided prior authorization is obtained from the PHD/MOH.

Ministerial Order No. 2/1989 governs the importation of specialty food products, such as certain diet and health foods and foods for diabetics and infants. Under this order, all specialty foods must be pre-registered with the Directorate of Pharmacies and Drug Control, Ministry of Health, prior to their importation. Specialty food labels must contain detailed information regarding ingredients (e.g., vitamins, supplements, minerals, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams and instructions for use and proper storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable. There are no Recommended Daily Allowance label requirements.

Products shipped in bulk or institutional-sized containers destined specifically for the HRI sector are subject to all labeling requirements. However, officials may be willing to grant certain exceptions. Exporters should consult with their importers before shipping.

OMAN

Labeling Requirements:

Oman adopted the newly developed standards GSO (9/2013) and GSO (150/2013) for labeling and shelf life.

- Animal fat should be sourced only from Halal-slaughtered animals.
- Products shipped in bulk must meet GSO labeling requirements and must be accompanied by small, easy-to-handle samples for possible laboratory verification. For example, edible oils imported in bulk must be accompanied by a small (one liter) sample of the product. The sample container must contain a label that meets all labeling requirements.
- Bilingual labels are required, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g., Arabic/English). Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of the original Arabic or bilingual label provided the sticker:
 - complies with all labeling requirements and is applied by the manufacturer
 - does not conceal required information on the original label
 - does not contradict information on the original label
 - is extremely difficult to remove.
- If a consignment arrives without an Arabic label, the Ministry of Commerce may waive this requirement on a one-time basis or it may request that the importer add Arabic language stickers on the package before releasing the product. Products imported specifically for the hotel, restaurant and institutional sectors may be exempted from the Arabic label. Always confirm with your import agent before shipping.
- Perishable products such as eggs and dairy products that have a shelf life of three months or less must carry both dates of production and expiry. Minimally processed products such as rice, dry beans, and grain with shelf lives greater than three months are allowed to only carry a production date. Dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at time of production, using indelible ink. "Sell by," "best before" or "use by date..." are also acceptable formats in lieu of expiry date. Stickers with date stamps imprinted are not accepted. While technically these dates must be printed in Arabic, dates printed in English or English/Arabic are accepted. If printed in multiple languages, the date must be the same. Any discrepancy in the date will lead to rejection of the product/shipment.
- Bar coding is not permitted in lieu of expiry dates. Dates must be printed in the following order, as determined by the shelf-life of the product, in either digit or text format:
 - Day/month/year for products with a shelf life of 3 months or less
 - Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than 3 months.

- Specialty food product labels, for items such as diet, health and infant foods, must contain detailed ingredient information (vitamins, minerals, supplements, additives including food colorings, preservatives, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams, health warnings if any and instructions for proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is permitted. Baby foods must be inspected and approved by the Medicine Control Section, MOH. U.S. suppliers should verify with the importer's agent if an import permit is required for the particular specialty food shipment.

Bulk or institutional-sized containers must comply with labeling requirements. P/E dates are not required for certain products, including fresh fruits and vegetables as indicated by OS 246/1993. However, importers will often request that production date information be included on the product. Expiry dates are not required for products deemed to be extremely shelf-stable such as salt and sugar. Products arriving clearly marked as samples not intended for sale are exempt from label regulations.

KUWAIT

Animal fat should be sourced only from Halal slaughtered animals. Pork products and ingredients are banned in Kuwait. Bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g., Arabic/English). Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of original Arabic or bilingual labels, provided the sticker: 1) Is extremely difficult to remove; 2) Includes all required label information; 3) Does not cover required information on the original label; and 4) Does not contradict information on the original label.

Production and expiry (P/E) dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. These dates may be printed in English only, Arabic only or English/Arabic. These dates may not be printed on a sticker. U.S. bar coding is not permitted in lieu of P/E dates and a label may not contain more than one set of P/E dates. The dates must be printed in digit form (text is permitted only if the name of the month is written in full) in the following order, depending on the shelf-life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of 3 months or less
- Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than 3 months

Kuwait has also issued an explanatory local order asking exporters to refrain from printing the date of production and expiration as the same date a year apart. (i.e. production is Jan 10, 2008 and expiry is

Jan 10, 2009). KUM stated that printing dates in such fashion means that the shelf life exceeds a single year. In this case dates should show P July 10, 2008 and E is July 9, 2009.

Kuwait officials are willing to work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural imports are not unduly disrupted. For example, Kuwait offers a pre-approval program for food labels. Pre export approval can significantly speed import clearance, particularly for new-to-market products and brands. To facilitate entry, suppliers are strongly encouraged to work closely with their local importers to obtain pre-export approval for labels, particularly for new-to-market products, and to ensure that their products meet all local import regulations.

All special food products, such as diet KS 874/2004 (GS 1058/2002), health (and infant foods (KS 877/1997, 696/1995 and 878/1997) and artificial sweeteners KS 1176/1999 (GS 995/1998) must be pre-registered with the Nutrition Unit of the Ministry of Public Health. Labels for these products must contain detailed information about ingredients (e.g., vitamins, minerals, supplements, food colors, preservatives, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams, health warnings if any, and instructions for proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is permitted.

Products shipped in bulk or institutional-sized containers must comply with all label requirements, as required by GSO standards for labeling and shelf life. Also, newly adopted standard clearly indentify products that are exempt from carrying dates of production and expiry such as fresh fruits, as well as products that are exempt from carrying only expiry dates, such as spices and salt.

KSA

Processed Foodstuffs Labeling Requirements

General Requirements

Regulations for labeling of prepackaged foodstuffs are found in Gulf Standard 9/1995. The prepackaged food product labels should be in Arabic or include an Arabic language translation of the label. Labels must contain at a minimum: the product name, packer's name, country of origin or manufacture, listing of ingredients, instructions, where applicable, for the end use of the product, the shelf-life of the product. GCC 9/1995 is a document of 10 pages. The labeling requirements are as follows: Labels of prepackaged foodstuffs and the attached labeling shall be in Arabic language. When one language or

Update April 2017

more is used in addition to Arabic language, all information in the other languages shall be the same as the information written in the Arabic language.

In case of food products containing animal fats, meat and meat derivatives, excretions and their products such as gelatin and rennet, the kind of animal from which they are taken shall be declared taking into consideration to declare on the label that they are legally permitted.

In case of prepackaged foodstuffs prepared for feeding animals, the statement "Unfit for human consumption" or "Special for animal feeding only" shall be clearly and prominently declared on the label.

Name of foodstuff: Specific, not generic, name of the prepackaged food. Names and phrases provocative to Islamic religious feelings such as "made of pork flesh or its derivatives," "Alcoholic beverages," or any doctrinally forbidden symbols and marks in Islamic countries such as the sign of the Cross, etc. should not be used.

List of Ingredients: Complete list of ingredients in descending order of proportion, including additives permitted for use according to Saudi or International Standards and Legislation such as preservative, coloring matters, etc.

Net contents in metric units (volume in case of liquids).

Name and address of the manufacturer, packer, distributor, importer, exporter or vendor.

Special Storage, transportation and preparation instructions, if any.

Additives

Country of Origin

Shelf life: 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.

The Expiration Date (DD/MM/YY)

Use by..... (Date)

Fit for.....from the date of production,

Use before..... (Date),

Sell by..... (Date).

It is understood that the date of production is the first day of the month shown and the expiration date the last day of the month shown, e.g., a one-year shelf would be shown as Jan. 99 - Dec. 99.

Over-prints, erasable printing or stamping of any of the foregoing shelf life information are not permitted. However, **only one** "sticker" providing all information in Arabic as provided in the original label is allowed on a packaged product provided that the sticker does not cover and/or conceal the details on the original label. Packaging materials and methods should be suitable to the packaged material to avoid reaction with the contents.

Products with No Specific Expiration Date: Products with no specified shelf life such as salt, spices, milled rice, etc. only the date of production or processing would be shown as: dd/mm/yy.

We recommend that when putting together an order for a Saudi importer, a Lebanese exporter should cross check information contained on his/her food label, including Production/Expiration dates, with the Saudi buyer.

Additional Labeling Requirements

In addition to requirements per GCC 9/1995, the following labeling information must be declared for food additives and antioxidants used in foodstuffs: For coloring matters, their mixtures, preparations and diluents used in foodstuffs, 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 common name and code number (if found) must be declared on food products containers contained flavors. For preservatives permitted for use in food products, common name or EEC number and a statement "Preservative for Use in Food Products" in case of preservatives 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 sweeteners matter, mg/liter or kg in case of using combination of sweeteners, the amount of each in combination shall be declared. The following warning must be declared:
4. In case of aspartame, "Not to be used by persons who have phenylketonuria."
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.

Requirements Specific to Nutritional Labeling

In addition to the general labeling requirements as stated in GS 9/1995, further information must be declared for prepackaged foods for special dietary use per Gulf Standard No. 654/1996 (General Requirements for Prepackaged Foods for Special Dietary Use). Following is some of the labeling information to be stated.

1. Name of the product followed by the characterizing essential features indicating that it is a food for special dietary use.
2. The amount of energy expressed in kilojoules and kilocalories per 100 grams or 100 ml of the food product and where appropriate per the specified quantity of food as suggested for consumption.
3. Its content of protein, carbohydrates, fat, dietary, fiber and each vitamin and mineral per 100 grams or 100 ml of the food (as sold) product and where appropriate per specified quantity of food as suggested for consumption.
4. The total quantity of the specific nutrients, which provide the characterizing essential features per 100 grams or 100 ml of the food product and where appropriate per specified quantity of food as suggested for consumption.
5. The special cases in which the food is used and the suitable amount permissible for daily consumption.
6. Storage conditions before and after opening of the package.
7. The procedures of preparation and use and in the case of baby and infant foods the procedures shall be indicated according to the age of child.
8. The following cautionary statement shall be declared: "To be Used under Medical Supervision," wherever applicable to certain food.
9. The amount of added sweeteners accompanied by the following cautionary statements:
 - a) In the case of aspartame: "Not to be used by persons who have phenylketonuria," "The maximum intake shall not exceed 40mg/kg of body weight."
 - b) In the case of saccharin: "Use of this product may be hazardous to your health, because it contains saccharin which has been determined to cause cancer to laboratory animals."
 - c) In the case of Mannitol: "Excess of consumed quantity of Mannitol over 20g per day may cause diarrhea."
 - d) In the case of Sorbitol or Xylitol: Excess of consumed quantity of sorbitol or xylitol over 40g per day may cause diarrhea.
10. Not to be described or marked in such a manner that misleads the consumer.

Biotech Labeling

KUWAIT

Kuwait adopted the revised GSO standards for labeling (GSO 9/2007) and shelf life (GSO 150/2007) in October 2008. The Department of Standards and Metrology, Public Authority for Industry (PAI), in

cooperation with other concerned departments, including the Kuwait Municipality (KUM), the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI), the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAFR), the Consumer Protection of the Ministry of Commerce, Customs and the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) constitute the “National Food Safety Committee” which is responsible for establishing local food safety regulations. Regulatory enforcement is divided between the KUM, MOPH and PAAFR. The Imported Food Department within KUM has responsibility for the initial inspection of imported food products, including verification of compliance with label requirements and collection of samples for laboratory analysis by either MOPH or KUM. In general, new-to-market products and products that have failed previous inspection are subject to thorough inspection.

Labeling Requirements:

Food labels must include the following information in Arabic on the original label or primary packaging:

- Product and brand name
- Country of origin
- Ingredients, in descending order of proportion
- Additives, if any
- Origin of animal fat (e.g., beef fat), if applicable ^{1/}
- Net content in metric units (volume in case of liquids)
- Production and expiry dates
- The name and address of the manufacturer, producer, distributor, importer, exporter or vendor shall be declared on the label.
- Special storage, transportation and preparation instructions, if any.

^{1/} Animal fat should be sourced only from Halal slaughtered animals. Pork products and ingredients are banned in Kuwait. Bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g., Arabic/English). Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of original Arabic or bilingual labels, provided the sticker: 1) Is extremely difficult to remove; 2) Includes all required label information; 3) Does not cover required information on the original label; and 4) Does not contradict information on the original label.

Production and expiry (P/E) dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. These dates may be printed in English only, Arabic only or English/Arabic. These dates may not be printed on a sticker. U.S.

bar coding is not permitted in lieu of P/E dates and a label may not contain more than one set of P/E dates. The dates must be printed in digit form (text is permitted only if the name of the month is written in full) in the following order, depending on the shelf-life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of 3 months or less.
- Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than 3 months

Kuwait has also issued an explanatory local order asking exporters to refrain from printing the date of production and expiration as the same date a year apart. (I.e., if production is Jan 10, 2008 and expiry is Jan 10, 2009). KUM stated that printing dates in such fashion means that the shelf life exceeds a single year. In this case dates should show (P July 10, 2008 and E is July 9, 2009).

Kuwait has also issued an explanatory local order asking exporters to refrain from printing the date of production and expiration as the same date a year apart. (I.e., if production is Jan 10, 2008 and expiry is Jan 10, 2009). KUM stated that printing dates in such fashion means that the shelf life exceeds a single year. In this case dates should show P July 10, 2008 and E is July 9, 2009.

Kuwait officials are willing to work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural imports are not unduly disrupted. For example, Kuwait offers a pre-approval program for food labels. Pre export approval can significantly speed import clearance, particularly for new-to-market products and brands. To facilitate entry, suppliers are strongly encouraged to work closely with their local importers to obtain pre-export approval for labels, particularly for new-to-market products, and to ensure that their products meet all local import regulations.

QATAR

Qatar, which chairs the GSO Food Standards committee, adopted the new labeling and shelf life standards (GSO 9/2007) and GSO (150/2007) respectively on March 13, 2008. The standards simplified labeling and shelf life requirements.

Qatar currently requests that food products marked with shelf life longer than that recommended in the "voluntary shelf life section" of GSO 150/2007 be accompanied by a proof confirming that the extended shelf life is supported by either a government office, accredited laboratory, university study, food processing association or any similar organization. This request was initiated by the Qatari health

authority effective April 1, 2010. The requirement was initiated to curb the unrealistic long shelf life of some products that started to enter the Qatari market.

Qatari officials, for the most part, will work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural imports are not unduly disrupted or delayed at port of entry. Food labels can be approved through a pre-approval process prior to import. Pre-import approval is strongly encouraged, particularly for new-to-market products.

The National Health Authority (NHA), part of the Ministry of Health, carries out most functions related to food imports and safety. The National Health Authority (NHA), in coordination with the General Organization for Standards and Metrology and the Ministry of Economy & Commerce, (MOEC), is responsible for establishing food safety regulations. The Food Control Committee (FCC), an interagency committee, headed by the Assistant Undersecretary of NHA for Technical Affairs, which includes representatives from NHA, Doha Municipality and the Agricultural Development Department, decides on all food safety and control issues, including import bans.

The Department of Commercial Affairs, MOEC, is responsible for trademark and agency laws. The Customs and Ports Authority is responsible for enforcement of agency laws at the time of import. The Food Safety Department is responsible for the enforcement of food safety regulations. Health inspectors visually inspect all imported food products, verify compliance with label regulations and, if necessary, draw samples for analysis by the NHA Central Laboratories.

Food labels must include the following information in Arabic on the original label or primary packaging:

- Product and brand name
- Country of origin
- Ingredients, in descending order of proportion
- Additives, if any
- Origin of animal fat (e.g., beef fat), if applicable 1/
- Net content in metric units (volume in case of liquids)
- Production and expiry dates
- The name and address of the manufacturer, producer, distributor, importer, exporter or vendor shall be declared on the label
- Special storage, transportation and preparation instructions, if any.

1/ Animal fat should be sourced only from Halal slaughtered animals. Pork products are banned in Qatar.

Original labels should be printed in Arabic. However, bilingual labels are permitted, provided Arabic is one of the languages (e.g., Arabic/English) and all the required information printed in the foreign language is also printed in Arabic. Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of original Arabic or bilingual labels provided the sticker: 1. Is extremely difficult to remove. 2. Includes all required label information. 3. Does not cover required information on the original label. 4. Does not contradict information on the original label. In fact, local officials consider such stickers to be labels.

Labels/stickers must be applied prior to importation. No change to label information is permitted after importation.

Labeling of nutritional value is voluntary. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable. Labeling of recommended daily intake RDI is not required. Labels for specialty foods, such as diet and health foods, foods for diabetics and infants, must contain detailed information about the product's vitamin and mineral content, nutritive value per 100 grams, proper use and storage. The NHA must approve and register these foods prior to import. Labeling regulations apply to products shipped in institutional-size containers for direct consumption in hotels, restaurants and institutions (HRI). However, if products are imported directly by the HRI end-user, Arabic labeling is not necessary. Labeling requirements are waived for food products that are imported in bulk form for further processing. Production and expiry (P/E) dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. Neither stickers nor U.S. bar codes are permitted as substitutes.

Multiple P/E dates on the label are not acceptable. Under the month/year format, the last day of the month will be considered the expiry date. The month may be printed in numbers or letters. For example, 4/2004 and April 2004 are both acceptable formats. P/E dates in English digits alone are acceptable, but it is preferable to have the dates in both languages for the Qatari market:

Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of 3 months or less, Month/year for products with a shelf-life longer than 3 months

The expiration date may be printed in one of the following formats: - Expiration date: (date) - Use by: (date) - Use before: (date) - Sell by: (date) - Fit for: (duration) from the date of production. P/E dates are

not required for certain products, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, and fresh bakery items.

Production dates alone are sufficient for products deemed to have extremely long shelf-life durations, such as salt, white sugar, spices and condiments, tea, rice and dried pulses.

Packaging and Container Regulations:

General requirements for packaged special foods are covered under GS 654/1996, GS 839/97, and GS 1024/2000. Boxing for fresh fruits and vegetables is regulated under GS 124/1990.

KSA

In 1997, Saudi Arabia issued standard No. SSA 1149/1997 entitled Food Packages-part 1-General Requirements. Some of 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 probabilities 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 cases of products that requires it. They shall be impermeable to moisture in the cases 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 be in an intact appearance during handling. They shall not affect the container as a result 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. Saudi standard No. SASO 1301/1997 deals with specifications for the general requirements of plastic packages used for packaging food materials. The three page regulations require limits among other things that the concentration of a vinyl chloride monomer not to exceed 1 mg per kg of the 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 foodstuffs: 1. Type of plastic material, 2. Weight, capacity, number, or dimensions based on the type of packages, 3. Statement of food grade, 4. Purpose and type of application, 5. Directions for usage, 6. Warnings if applicable.

KUWAIT, QATAR, OMAN

General requirements for packaged special foods are covered under KS 859/1997 (GS 654/1996), KS 1034/1998 (GS 839/97), KS 170/1984 and KS 1028 (GS 1024/2000). Boxing for fresh fruits and vegetables is regulated under KS 65/1992 (GS 124/1990).

BAHREIN

General requirements for packaged special foods are covered under GS 654/1996, GS 839/97, and GS 1024/2000.

UAE

There are no special packaging or container size requirements for food products.

GS 839/1999, adopted as UAE Standard #839/2000, addresses "General Requirements for Food Packages – Part I. The standard stresses the need to use suitable materials that protect the integrity of the food, its wholesomeness and characteristics. GSO 1683/2008 Food Packages Part II was issued to address general requirements for plastic packaging.

Useful links

<http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/standards/list-of-standards/en/>