

Importing plant products and vegetarian products

Information on importing plant and vegetarian products, including additives, labelling and chemical safety. This doesn't include fruit and vegetables

General information

Imports of Plant products and vegetarian products from third countries must meet the same standards of food hygiene and go through the same procedures as food produced in GB. This page covers plant products like:

- chickpeas
- kidney beans
- tofu
- peas
- beans
- pulses
- mycoproteins such as quorn
- soy products such as textured vegetable protein (TVP)
- millet
- sunflower seeds
- pumpkin seeds

For tea and coffee imports see also [Importing drinks](#) and [Importing fruit and vegetables](#).

Import licences

You may not need a health or hygiene licence to import food, but many foods from third countries require licences for trading purposes and may be subject to quotas.

Food colourings, flavourings and sweeteners

Some plant and vegetarian products may contain food colourings, flavourings or sweeteners. Although these may be approved by the food authority in the country of origin, some of them may not be approved in GB. If you have any queries please contact our Food Additives team [through our online form](#).

Labelling

You will find general information about [food labelling](#) on GOV.UK For advice on the labelling of specific products, please [contact your local authority's Trading Standards Department or your local Environmental Health Department](#).

Organics

If you are importing organic products (live or unprocessed agricultural products, processed agricultural for use as food or feed and vegetative propagating material and seeds for cultivation), from third countries, contact the [Organic Imports team](#) at DEFRA. For information on organic regulation and standards (including labelling) within the UK please contact the [Organic Strategy team](#).

Packaging

Food contact materials and articles, including those used for food packaging, are controlled by retained UK law within GB. This legislation is particularly thorough in its control of plastic materials and articles intended for food use. For information on the safety of packaging please contact the Food Contact Materials team [through our online form](#).

Food hygiene

For general enquiries on food hygiene, including frozen food and seeds for sprouting, please contact our Food Hygiene Policy Team.

Pesticides

[Information on pesticides safety levels](#) contact Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Chemicals Regulation Division (CRD).

Contaminants

The [Contaminants in Food \(England\) Regulations 2013](#) make provision for enactment and enforcement of retained UK law which set out regulatory limits for contaminants in food, such as nitrate, mycotoxins, metals, 3-MCPD, dioxins and PAHs.

Import restrictions

There are some import restrictions/requirements that can apply to plant products or vegetarian products. These are as follows:

Higher-risk products

Imports of certain feed and food of non-animal origin that are considered to be higher-risk can only enter GB through specific ports and airports which are designated [border control points \(BCPs\)](#) where official controls will be carried out. A higher-risk product is feed or food that is either known to be, or is, an emerging risk to public health. For further information see [foodstuffs with GB import restrictions](#).

Aflatoxins

As of 1 January 2010 imports of certain foodstuffs from certain third countries are subject to special conditions due to contamination risk by aflatoxins. This will mean that consignments can only enter GB through specific ports or airports which are BCPs, where official controls will be carried out. Information for business operators as well as our guidance on [mycotoxins](#).

Vegetarian foods containing dairy products

Many vegetarian foods contain dairy products and as such may be considered as products of animal origin. For further information please contact the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) in Carlisle on 01228 403 600 (option 3) or by email at imports@apha.gov.uk. APHA is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Plant health requirements

There are a number of plant products that are either prohibited from entering GB from third countries or require a phytosanitary certificate to do so. Official controls and restrictions on the import, movement, and keeping of plants, plant pests and other material (e.g. soil) are vital to help prevent the introduction and spread of harmful organisms.

For more information about any plant health requirements, or whether the fruit or vegetables you want to import require a phytosanitary certificate, please contact the [Plant Health team](#) on the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) website.