

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: General Instructions for Shipping Product Samples to Japan

Country: Japan

Post: Tokyo ATO

Report Category: Exporter Guide, Food Processing Ingredients, Food Service - Hotel Restaurant Institutional, Retail Foods, Competitor, Export Promotion Programs, Honey, Market Development Reports, Market Promotion/Competition, Product Brief, Promotion Opportunities, Sales Mission Evaluation, Snack Foods, Trade Show Announcement, Trade Show Closing, Trade Show Evaluation

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Report Highlights:

Prospective exporters and exhibitors of major food trade shows and trade showcases often enhance their presentation with samples for display or tasting when visiting Japan. Successfully shipping food samples to Japan requires advanced planning and, generally, exporters coordinate with a customs broker (freight forwarder) to gather information and prepare documentation. This report provides general instructions on shipping samples.

Disclaimer: *The following are general standard shipping instructions at the time of publishing and may be subject to change or may differ depending on product specifics.* The Agricultural Trade Office (ATO) in Tokyo strongly recommends retaining a customs broker (or freight forwarder) or consultant to advise and handle shipping your sample products from the United States to Japan. Forwarders will generally file all required import documents. If not participating in a trade show or event that already has a contracted forwarder (information which the show organizer can provide), U.S. companies may seek customs brokers (freight forwarders) by region on the Japan Customs website: [List of Customs Brokers Associations \(English\)](#)

I. IMPORT REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS

Japanese food standards and regulations can be complex for U.S. exporters doing business in Japan for the first time. Freight forwarders can advise on applicable import regulations, including labeling, packaging, food safety and sanitary-phytosanitary requirements. For more information, please refer to the USDA Japan “[Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards \(FAIRS\) Country Report](#)”, which is updated annually and provides information on the general food laws and regulations on food additives, pesticides, packaging and containers, labeling, and other specific standards. The [Japan Food Sanitation Law](#) regulates food to ensure safety and prevent sanitation Hazards. Pertinent changes in this law are noted in FAIRS. Also in FAIRS, please reference information on the “Specifications and Standards for Foods, Food Additives, etc. under the Food Sanitation Law,” which summarizes import procedures. The ATO’s [Export Guides](#) also identify import requirements for many products.

For Trade Shows

ATO Tokyo strongly recommends U.S. Exhibitors follow instructions from official freight coordinators assigned by the trade show or USA Pavilion organizers for USDA endorsed trade shows. To participate in smaller trade shows or showcases, please follow the freight forwarder instructions.

If products are not to be sampled or distributed during a show, the only documents required are the commercial invoice and the “Certificate for Exhibition Goods to Display Only.” Under Japanese law an ingredient list and manufacturing process flow chart are not required, and the product is not tested. These products must be discarded or brought back to the country of origin after the show and may not be donated to a food bank or given away.

II. REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION FOR SHIPPING PRODUCT SAMPLES

Freight forwarders can help prepare required documentation which can benefit exporters by avoiding customs clearance issues. The required documentation for samples (not for sale!) is as follows:

A. Commercial invoice, packing list, bill of lading/air waybill:

For this, exporters should not mark “no commercial value,” but rather state the individual value of the items on the invoice. General terms that are easily understood should be used to describe the goods. A separate commercial invoice for dry, chilled, and frozen products is necessary.

B. List of Ingredients:

Ingredients should match the commercial invoice exactly (in the same order as well). Specificity is important with ingredients and level of additives used. Exporters should check to make sure that the level of additives used in a product is allowable. More information is available in [FAIRS](#).

C. Manufacturing or Processing Method (Flow Chart):

Product descriptions should match the commercial invoice exactly (same order as well). Relevant cooking/drying/extracting details, specific temperatures duration of application must be included. Also, relevant grinding, chopping, milling, etc., should be included, as well as water activity for all juice products. More information is available in [FAIRS](#).

D. In addition, but not limited to, the following commonly shipped categories have further restrictions or require health/phytosanitary certificates and import permits: (Please note, for each of the following categories, more information is available in [FAIRS](#).)

Meat and All Animal Products (Including Dairy): A USDA Sanitary (Health)

Certificate must accompany all meat and animal products that are eligible for exportation to Japan. If intended for sampling, further inspection is required. The standard inspection fee is Japanese yen (JPY) 50,000 per product,

plus a registration fee. The process takes about three weeks to complete. Please reference the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) website to find [Meat Export Requirements for Japan](#) which also includes information on restrictions for other meat products as well as certificates needed for all eligible meat exports. A list of certificates is also available in [FAIRS](#).

For imports for sale, the importer must file a “Notification Form for Importation of Foods” separately and must send samples to the MHLW quarantine station for testing. The documentation listed in A-D is for samples. Imports for sale must follow all the requirements described in the [FAIRS](#) report.

Fruits, Nuts, Vegetables, and other Plant Products: A phytosanitary certificate is required. Some fresh fruits and vegetables are prohibited from import to Japan. Please provide your freight forwarder general and/or botanical names to check in advance. Otherwise, please refer to the following database provided by the Plant Protection Station of Japan.

Alcoholic Beverages: A Certificate of Analysis is needed for each wine product that show the amount of SO₂ and Sorbic Acid. Alcohol content (%) and volume (in milliliters) need to be listed on the commercial invoice for all alcoholic beverages.

Soft Drinks: Further inspection and testing are required for product samples. The standard inspection fee plus registration fee will be added.

Grains (Rice, Wheat, Barley, Buckwheat, Millet, Canary Seeds, etc.): The inspection process will take longer, and samples need to be sent well in advance to allow ample time to clear customs.

Vanilla and Vanilla Flavor: Wild Vanilla is one of the species that is internationally protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). If artificially cultivated vanilla is used, please put the following statement under the product description on the commercial invoice, “The vanilla used for this product is artificially cultivated and not wild.”

Caviar: Sturgeon is one of the species internationally protected by CITES. Whether the sturgeon is farm-raised or wild, caviar cannot be imported without CITES approval.

Other Products: In addition to the above, certain products may require testing prior to customs clearance (i.e., nuts, juice, and dairy desserts) may be considered as pharmaceuticals under Japan’s Pharmaceutical Affairs Law (i.e., health foods); or are permitted for import by quota and with high duties and need to obtain certificates or permits (i.e., seafood, sugar, and dairy products). JETRO provides additional product specific information on their website, which can be found by following this link:

https://www.jetro.go.jp/ext_images/mexico/mercadeo/ImportProcedures_EN.pdf

III. SHIPPING INFORMATION

Shipping Duration

The typical length of time for surface shipment from ports in the United States to Tokyo is as follows:

West Coast: 12 days

East Coast: 30 days

Other: 12-30 days

In addition, importers need to take a few more days into account for unloading, customs clearance, and inland transportation. Shipping via air freight may be preferable depending on sample size.

Packing Materials

All shipments containing Non-Manufactured Wood Packing (NMWP) must be either heat treated or fumigated. This is not a paper-based certification. The NMWP and Solid Wood Packing Material (SWPM) must bear marks indicating the type of treatment under the International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) 15 regulations. In addition, the markings should contain the valid symbol approved by International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), country code, unique number of producer/treatment facility assigned by the National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO) of exporting countries, and treatment methods (HT/MB). More information is available in [FAIRS](#).

For Small Quantities

Small quantity shipments are often packed together by a freight consolidator. Most freight forwarders have this service and should be consulted regarding consolidation.

Duties

Payment of duties is typically exempted for samples. For trade shows, it depends on whether it is a bonded show or exhibition hall. Freight forwarders should advise on necessary steps for tariff classifications and/or duty exemptions.

Passenger Clearance

All passengers entering Japan are required to declare belongings. There are exemptions for personal effects and unaccompanied baggage for personal use, and they are free of duty and/or tax within the allowance. However, please note that commercial samples are subject to duty and/or tax since they are not regarded as being for personal use.

IV. KEY CONTACTS

USDA Japan frequently updates reports, which can be found by searching the FAS Japan Reports website.

ATO Tokyo

U.S. Embassy
1-10-5, Akasaka, Minato-ku
Tokyo 107-8420
Tel: 81-3-3224-5115
Fax: 81-3-3582-6429
E-mail address: atotokyo@usda.gov

ATO Osaka

American Consulate General
2-11-5, Nishi Tenma, Kita-ku, Osaka City
Osaka 530-8543
Tel: 81-6-6315-5904
Fax: 81-6-6315-5906
E-mail address: atoosaka@usda.gov

USDA Japan Webpages

<http://www.usdajapan.org/> (FAS Japan, English)
<https://twitter.com/usdajapan> (FAS Japan, English)

Cooperators and SRTG Contacts

Industry organizations and State Regional Trade Groups work closely with USDA to help food

and agricultural companies advance their exporting goals. To learn more about these groups, and which ones may be working in Japan, please see:

<https://www.usdajapan.org/find-a-partner/in-japan/>

USDA Reports

FAS publishes a variety of reports, which can help exporters prepare for entering the Japanese market such as the Exporter Guide, Food and Agricultural Import Regulations (FAIRS), and the Retail Guide. Links to most recent versions of these reports can be found here:

[Japan](#). These and many other reports are also available on our website at [Global Agricultural Information Network \(GAIN\)](#).

Attachments:

No Attachments.