Food additives: thickening agents and stabilisers

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EU amends conditions of use for various thickening agents and stabilisers

Commission Regulation (EU) 2026/196 of 28 January 2026 amending Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the use of carrageenan (E 407), locust bean gum (E 410), guar gum (E 412), gum arabic (acacia gum) (E 414), xanthan gum (E 415), pectins (E 440) and starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450) and Commission Regulation (EU) No 231/2012 as regards specifications for locust bean gum (E 410), guar gum (E 412), gum arabic (acacia gum) (E 414), xanthan gum (E 415), pectins (E 440) and starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450)

Update

Following evaluations of the potential impacts of certain thickening agents and stabilisers on infants and young children, the European Union (EU) has amended the conditions of use for the following food additives:

- locust bean gum (E 410)
- guar gum (E 412)
- gum arabic (acacia gum) (E 414)
- xanthan gum (E 415)
- pectins (E 440)
- starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450).

Impacted products

Infant formulas and follow-on formulas; foods for special medical purposes, food additives

What is changing?

The EU has made changes to the specifications (conditions of use) for food additives (Regulation 231/2012) as summarised below for the following food additives:

- locust bean gum (E 410)
- guar gum (E 412)

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- gum arabic (acacia gum) (E 414)
- xanthan gum (E 415)
- pectins (E 440)
- starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450).

For each of these additives, following an evaluation of the risks to infants and young children, the EU has revised the specifications to:

- reduce the maximum limits for toxic elements
- amend microbiological criteria in accordance with good manufacturing practice
- change the wording “solution/soluble” to “dispersion/dispersible”.

It has also made specific amendments in relation to the following.

Guar gum (E 412)

- Authorisation is withdrawn for infant formulas and special medical foods for infants (food categories 13.1.1, 13.1.5.1, and 13.1.5.2).
- The Kjeldahl method is specified as the method for protein analysis.

Gum arabic (acacia gum) (E414)

- Maximum limits are set for aluminium and proteins.

Starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450)

- This substance must not contain gluten when used in infant formulas and follow-on formulas.

For full details see Annex II of Regulation 2026/196.

In addition, the EU has amended a footnote concerning the combined use of gums in milk-based drinks and similar products intended for young children to also include **carrageenan (E 407)**, amending Annex II to Regulation 1333/2008.

Why?

These changes are based on recommendations by the European Food Safety Authority after it evaluated the safety of these food additives (see Resources).

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Timeline

The new specifications for these additives apply from **18 August 2026**. However, there are transition periods:

- If the food additive complies with current specifications and is placed on the EU market before 18 August 2026, it may be used by EU food manufacturers until stocks are exhausted.
- If a food complies with current specifications and is placed on the EU market before 18 August 2026, it can be marketed until its use-by date. In the case of starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450), this applies to foods placed on the EU market before 18 February 2028.
- Foods containing guar gum (E 412) and belonging to food category 13.1.5.2 may continue to be marketed until their use-by date if compliant with current specifications and placed on the market before 27 April 2027.

Background

Regulation 1333/2008 outlines the rules for assessment and approval of food additives within the EU.

- The list of approved food additives (Annex II) specifies which food additives may be used in various categories of food products according to the specified conditions.
- The list for specific applications (Annex III) details which food additives can be used in the manufacture of other food additives, enzymes, and flavourings.

Regulation 1333/2008 also specifies the maximum amounts that can be used in food products, based on two main principles:

- minimal necessary quantity: additives should be used in the smallest quantity needed to achieve their intended function, such as food preservation or flavour enhancement
- safety considerations: the quantities used must ensure safety for all consumer groups and reflect the acceptable daily intake (ADI) levels, particularly for populations with potentially higher consumption.

Specifications for each food additive are set out in Regulation 231/2012.

For further information see Commission guide on food categories.

For the most recently updated list of approved food additives and conditions of use, see Regulation 1333/2008: click on the date that follows “Current consolidated version”.

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Resources

Commission Regulation (EU) No 231/2012 laying down specifications for food additives listed in Annexes II and III to Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008

Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 on food additives

EFSA (2017) Re-evaluation of locust bean gum (E 410) as a food additive. EFSA Journal, 15(1): e04646.

EFSA (2017) Re-evaluation of guar gum (E 412) as a food additive. EFSA Journal, 15(2): e04669.

EFSA (2017) Re-evaluation of acacia gum (E 414) as a food additive. EFSA Journal, 2017;15(4): e04741

EFSA (2017) Re-evaluation of xanthan gum (E 415) as a food additive. EFSA Journal, 2017;15(7): e04909

EFSA (2017) Re-evaluation of pectin (E 440i) and amidated pectin (E 440ii) as food additives. EFSA Journal, 15(7): e04866.

EFSA (2017) Re-evaluation of oxidised starch (E 1404), monostarch phosphate (E 1410), distarch phosphate (E 1412), phosphated distarch phosphate (E 1413), acetylated distarch phosphate (E 1414), acetylated starch (E 1420), acetylated distarch adipate (E 1422), hydroxypropyl starch (E 1440), hydroxypropyl distarch phosphate (E 1442), starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450), acetylated oxidised starch (E 1451) and starch aluminium octenyl succinate (E 1452) as food additives. EFSA Journal, 15(10): e04911.

EFSA (2019) Opinion on the re-evaluation of acacia gum (E 414) as a food additive in foods for infants below 16 weeks of age and the follow-up of its re-evaluation as a food additive for uses in foods for all population groups. EFSA Journal, 17(12): e05922.

EFSA (2020) Opinion on the re-evaluation of starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450) as a food additive in foods for infants below 16 weeks of age and the follow-up of its re-evaluation as a food additive for uses in foods for all population groups. EFSA Journal, 18(8): e05874.

EFSA (2021) Opinion on the re-evaluation of pectin (E 440i) and amidated pectin (E 440ii) as food additives in foods for infants below 16 weeks of age and follow-up of their re-evaluation as food additives for uses in foods for all population groups. EFSA Journal, 19(1): e06387.

EFSA (2023) Re-evaluation of locust bean gum (E 410) as a food additive in foods for infants below 16 weeks of age and follow-up of its re-evaluation as a food additive for uses in foods for all population groups. EFSA Journal, 21(2): e07775.

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EFSA (2023) Re-evaluation of xanthan gum (E 415) as a food additive in foods for infants below 16 weeks of age and follow-up of its re-evaluation as a food additive for uses in foods for all population groups. EFSA Journal, 21(5): e07951.

EFSA (2024) Re-evaluation of guar gum (E 412) as a food additive in foods for infants below 16 weeks of age and follow-up of its re-evaluation as food additive for uses in foods for all population groups. EFSA Journal, 22: e8748.

Sources

Commission Regulation (EU) 2026/196 amending Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 as regards the use of carrageenan (E 407), locust bean gum (E 410), guar gum (E 412), gum arabic (acacia gum) (E 414), xanthan gum (E 415), pectins (E 440) and starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450) and Commission Regulation (EU) No 231/2012 as regards specifications for locust bean gum (E 410), guar gum (E 412), gum arabic (acacia gum) (E 414), xanthan gum (E 415), pectins (E 440) and starch sodium octenyl succinate (E 1450)

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