Safeguard import duties for certain agri-food products

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European Commission proposes amended rules on safeguard import duties for certain agri-food products

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 as regards the school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme ('EU school scheme'), sectoral interventions, the creation of a protein sector, requirements for hemp, the possibility for marketing standards for cheese, protein crops and meat, application of additional import duties, rules on the availability of supplies in time of emergencies and severe crisis and securities

Update

The European Commission proposes to amend the rules that allow the European Union (EU) to apply additional safeguard import duties on certain agri-food products. Currently, safeguard duties cannot be imposed if imports are unlikely to disturb the EU market. The Commission proposes to remove this condition.

The Commission also proposes to clarify the volume of imports that can trigger the introduction of safeguard duties. These changes will align EU rules with obligations under the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture.

Impacted products

Cereals, rice, sugar, fruit and vegetables, processed fruit and vegetables, beef and veal, milk and milk products, pigmeat, sheepmeat, goatmeat, eggs, poultry, grape juice, grapes

What is changing?

The European Commission proposes to review the rules allowing the EU to apply additional import duties to certain agri-food products (see Impacted products).

Safeguard duties – additional import duties – can only be imposed either where prices drop below a certain level, or where the volume of imports exceeds a certain level (see Background). Currently there is a further condition: safeguard duties cannot be introduced if increased imports are unlikely to disturb the EU market (for example by causing significant price rises or falls on internal or external markets), or if the effects on trade of imposing safeguard tariffs would be disproportionate to the effect of those imports on the EU market (Regulation 1308/2013, Art. 182). The Commission proposes to remove this further condition.

The Commission also proposes to clarify how the volume of imports that can trigger the introduction of import tariffs is calculated. The reference point for calculating trigger volumes will be based on average yearly imports from the preceding 3 years (see Table 1).

Why?

The proposed changes simplify the EU rules and align them with the calculation method and rules in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (Art. 5(4)).

Demonstrating whether or not imports are likely to disturb the EU market is a difficult and time consuming process that limits the EU's capacity to react – which can be a particular problem for perishable seasonal products.

Timeline

The proposed rules will be adopted by late 2026/early 2027.

Background

Where imports of certain agri-food products to the EU are particularly high, the European Commission can apply additional safeguard import duties. Safeguard duties do not apply to goods imported under a tariff quota.

Safeguard import duties are a response to increases in imports, but can only be introduced if:

- the imports are made at a price below the level notified to the WTO
- the volume of imports in any year exceeds a certain level, known as "trigger volumes" (see Table 1).

For more information, see Import tariffs and tariff rate quotas explained.

Resources

World Trade Organization: Agreement on Agriculture

Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products

Sources

Proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 as regards the school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme ('EU school scheme'), sectoral interventions, the creation of a protein sector, requirements for hemp, the possibility for marketing standards for cheese, protein crops and meat, application of additional import duties, rules on the availability of supplies in time of emergencies and severe crisis and securities

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Table & Figures

Table 1
Trigger volumes permitting additional safeguard duties

Volume of all imports of a product as share of EU consumption (%)	Trigger volume (% of average yearly imports)[1]
≤10	125
>10 to ≤30	110
>30	105

1. Based on data for the 3 preceding years.
Examples:
If imports of a product = 100 kt and EU consumption = 1000 kt, then
imports/consumption = 100/1000 = 10% (column 1), so trigger volume = 125% of average yearly imports = 125 kt (column 2).
If imports = 100 kt and EU consumption = 500 kt, then
imports/consumption = 100/500 = 20%, so trigger volume = 110% of average yearly imports = 110 kt.

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Source: Art. 1(25) of the Proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation 1308/2013

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