Updated guidance on hygiene requirements for food of animal origin

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EU updates guidance document on hygiene requirements for food of animal origin

Guidance document on the implementation of certain provisions of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 on the hygiene of food of animal origin

Update

The EU has published an updated version of its guidance document on the implementation of the hygiene requirements for food of animal origin, Regulation 853/2004. This new version reflects recent changes in EU law, and provides clarifications to improve understanding of the requirements and harmonise their application.

Impacted products

Food of animal origin

What is changing?

The guidance document has been updated to reflect recent changes in EU law.

Key updates include:

- clarification on exclusions from the scope of Regulation 853/2004 for direct supply of certain food to the final consumer or local retail establishments (3.1)
- definitions and usage of the terms "handling", "activities", and "operations" (3.2)
- criteria for defining small slaughterhouses and game-handling establishments to allow flexibility (3.3)
- confirmation that insects and cultivated meat require novel food authorisation; this may change with market growth and identification of specific hazards (3.4)
- definition of "products of animal origin" to include any product derived from animals intended for human consumption (such as vitamin D3), excluding composite products (3.5) (there is guidance for composite products in European Commission 2015)

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- for fishery products, primary production includes stunning at farm level or slaughter at sea, including farmed tuna (3.9)
- approval of mobile slaughterhouses (5.7) and possibility of slaughter at the farm (see Adaptation of food hygiene rules for products of animal origin)
- guidelines on applying "freezing of fresh meat without undue delay" (5.8)
- differentiating between meat preparations and meat products (5.10)
- a dedicated section on identification marking (5.22, 5.23)
- a new section on fishery products to help implement specific hygiene requirements (5.15 to 5.21)
- decision trees for the application of Regulation 853/2004 to retail operations (Annex III) and approval of cold stores (Annex IV).

In addition, the reference numbers of the laws have been updated.

Why?

The initial guidance was published in 2009, and has been updated several times. A new update was needed to reflect changes in legal requirements, and to provide additional clarifications to improve understanding of the requirements and harmonise their application in all Member States.

Timeline

The updated version was published on 22 April 2024.

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

The guidance document aims to assist all players in the food chain to better understand and apply Regulation 853/2004 correctly and in a uniform way.

Food of animal origin exported from non-EU countries to the EU must comply with the requirements in that Regulation. These requirements are part of the public health attestation, which must be signed by the authorities of the exporting country, in the official certificates accompanying consignments (see EU official health certificates for exports to the EU – explained).

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Recommended Actions

Competent authorities and exporters from non-EU countries are recommended to consult the EU's updated guidance document to help in implementing Regulation 853/2004.

Background

Regulation 853/2004 lays down specific hygiene requirements for foods of animal origin.

The guidance document aims to promote a common understanding of legal requirements among competent authorities, and to help food business operators implement EU requirements. However, this document has **no formal legal status**. In the event of a dispute, ultimate responsibility for interpretation of the law lies with the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Resources

Online resources from the European Commission:

- Guidance platform
- Food law procedures

European Commission (2015) Illustrative Guidance on import/transit conditions and controls of certain composite products, and products which could erroneously be considered as composite products, originating from third countries

Sources

Guidance document on the hygiene of food of animal origin

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