

**Department of Agriculture
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**Agreement on Trade Facilitation
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT) Hearing
Monday 2 March 2015**

Question on Notice

1. How many food stuffs are examined prior to dispatch? And then upon arrival into Australia. Facts and figures are required (Senator Fawcett).

Response

The Department of Agriculture administers the *Quarantine Act 1908* and the *Imported Food Control Act 1992*. When food arrives in Australia, it must first meet Australia's biosecurity requirements under the *Quarantine Act 1908* to address quarantine concerns.

Biosecurity requirements

The Department of Agriculture inspects samples of a wide range of agricultural imports to verify compliance with Australia's biosecurity import conditions.

Inspections for most commodities are undertaken when the consignments arrive in Australia, although some horticultural commodities may be inspected under an off-shore pre-shipment inspection (OPI) arrangement in the exporting country. The department also conducts inspections and audits of facilities used to produce some types of food, including pigmeat for example, but does not directly inspect animal-based foodstuff prior to export to Australia. In addition, many foodstuffs are inspected by officers of recognised overseas authorities and certified by them for export to Australia, in accordance with our requirements.

Where an OPI is performed, the inspection follows the same process as those performed on arrival. The consignment or inspection lot is sampled and 100 per cent of the sample is examined for biosecurity pests, diseases and other contaminants such as soil, feathers, plant trash, etc. For commodities that may undergo OPI, the majority of inspections are performed in the exporting country. Commodities where no OPI is available are all inspected on arrival.

Remedial actions (such as treatment, reconditioning, destruction, rejection for export) are applied to the whole consignment or lot based on the inspection outcome of the sample.

Off-shore pre-shipment inspection is mandatory for fresh table grapes from Chile and South Korea (pending review after initial trade), and optional for the following fresh horticultural commodities:

- USA table grapes, citrus, cherries, strawberries
- New Zealand avocados, kiwifruit, summer fruits, tomatoes, capsicums, blueberries, cherries, lemons, mandarins/tangerines, persimmons, strawberries
- Chinese apples, pears
- Korean pears
- Japanese nashi pears

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In some circumstances the department undertakes comprehensive systems audits of the production, packing, treatment (where required), and export certification procedures in the exporting country prior to trade being permitted. The need for system audits is usually determined during the Import Risk Assessment process. The department has conducted audits of horticultural systems for Chinese apples, Korean table grapes, Fijian ginger, Thailand mangosteens, Philippine mangoes, Indian mangoes, Pakistan mangoes, and New Zealand apples.

The following OPI inspections were performed during the 2013/2014 financial year:

| Horticulture Offshore Pre-shipment Inspections 1 July 2013 – 30 June 2014 | | |
|--|----------------|------------------------------|
| Commodity | Country | Number of inspections |
| Apples | China | 13 |
| Pears | China | 32 |
| Cherries | USA | 147 |
| Peaches and nectarines | USA | 221 |
| Citrus | USA | 337 |
| Table grapes | USA | 395 |
| Avocado | NZ | 157 |
| Various: (Blueberries/tomatoes/capsicums/strawberries/ avocado/persimmons/lemons/cherries/ summer fruits) | NZ | 1015 |
| Total | | 2317 |

Imported food requirements

Once the biosecurity conditions have been met, the food will be subject to the *Imported Food Control Act 1992* to address compliance with Australian food standards and the requirements of public health and safety. This Act gives effect to the risk based Imported Food Inspection Scheme (IFIS) which is administered by the Department of Agriculture. This risk based inspection scheme targets foods known to pose a medium to high risk to human health and safety following a risk assessment by Food Standards Australia New Zealand. These risk foods are targeted initially at a rate of 100 per cent of consignments, with the rate reducing over time as a history of compliance from the overseas producer is established. All other food is subject to surveillance under the IFIS at a rate of five per cent of consignments.

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Under the IFIS, imported food is assessed for compliance with food labelling standards and it may also be sampled and tested for microbiological and chemical contaminants. Food that fails to meet Australian food standards is subject to further action such as being re-exported, destroyed or treated where possible. The inspection rate is then lifted to 100 per cent of future consignments until a history of compliance is re-established for that food.

In the 2013-2014 financial year:

18 370 entries of imported food were referred for inspection under the IFIS:

- 29 102 lines of imported food were inspected
- 95 058 tests were applied, including label and visual checks
 - 37 043 label and composition assessments
 - 21 518 analytical tests
 - 36 497 other tests

The department regularly publishes information about the inspection and compliance of food under the IFIS. Published data is available at:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.au/import/food/inspection-compliance/inspection-data>

Other requirements

In addition to the regulatory activities undertaken by the Department of Agriculture in relation to foodstuffs, the state and territory authorities have responsibility for monitoring all food, including imported food that is available for sale. Each state and territory authority has its own food legislation, and therefore state and territory action on food is different from, but complementary to, that which occurs under the IFIS.

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2. What are other countries doing especially in Asia with regards to implementing a process of 100 per cent of testing of high-risk agricultural products from Australia? (Senator Whish-Wilson)

Response

We are not aware of any country that routinely implements 100 per cent testing of agricultural products from Australia. Most of our trading partners, including

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Asian countries, conduct some degree of port-of-entry testing on imports from Australia and other countries. We are generally not notified of the level or the methodology of these tests.

If an unacceptable detection is made, the importing country may request an investigation and implement enhanced testing of the product from the implicated export establishment until they are satisfied the issue is resolved. The level of enhanced testing varies depending on importing country requirements.

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