

# SITPRO

**International Trade Guides**

**Importing**

## **Importing Goods of Organic Origin Certificate of Inspection**



# Importing Goods of Organic Origin

## Certificate of Inspection

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This guide provides basic information about the requirement for a Certificate of Inspection (Col) for products of organic origin imported into the UK. The procedures outlined in this information sheet have been introduced by European Legislation and took effect from 1st November 2002.

You should read it if you are involved in the importation of products of organic origin into the UK from countries outside the European Union. You should talk to your suppliers in the foreign countries and make them aware of the EU import procedures.

Without an endorsed Col imported produce may not be marketed as "organic". In the UK the organic certifying bodies will regularly audit importers on whether an endorsed Col has been obtained. Failure to comply with the requirement may result in fines or imprisonment.

All other requirements for the import of organic produce remain the same.

### **For which goods does the Certificate of Inspection apply?**

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It applies to consignments of organic produce imported from countries outside of the EU and EEA.

A consignment is any amount of organic goods conveyed by the same means of transport and coming from the same country. For example, 200 tonnes of wheat and 150 tonnes of barley brought in from Canada on the same ship from the same exporter can be regarded as a single consignment and be covered by one Col. However, 5 lorries bringing in cheese from Switzerland would each require an individual Col.

### **Who produces the Certificate of Inspection?**

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The Col is issued by the body certifying the goods as organic in the country of export. The document will give details on:

- Issuing authority and organic inspection body;
- Producer, exporter and importer;
- Country of dispatch, quantity, marks and numbers, commodity code number (tariff number)

For consignments to be released into free circulation (i.e. before Customs clear the goods), the Col needs to be presented to the relevant UK Port Health Authority (PHA) for verification and endorsement.

## **How does the PHA know that I will be importing organic produce?**

Before the goods are expected to arrive, you or your appointed agent are required to make a formal pre-notification to the PHA at which you intend to present your Col. Please contact the relevant PHA for advice on pre-notification procedures and forms.

## **What happens when the goods arrive?**

Prior to the release into free circulation you or your appointed agent must present the Col to the PHA for verification and endorsement.

The governing regulations set out some specific conditions on the release into free circulation. These conditions apply when:

- a. You intend to prepare or process the consignment whilst they are relieved from Customs duty. In this case, the verification and endorsement of the Col must take place before the consignment is prepared or processed.
- b. You intend to split your consignment into different batches (e.g. for onward distribution) under a Customs procedure that suspends the duty. In this case, the verification and endorsement of the Col must take place before the consignment is split. This includes the production and endorsement of a separate Extract of the Certificate of Inspection (extCol) document. This extCol is to be produced by the operator who performs the splitting and shall accompany the batches to their respective first consignees in order to allow customs clearance. It should be ensured that the importer receives a copy of the extCol.

Goods undergoing transshipment should have the certificate endorsed by the authority in the EU Member State where they clear customs. Goods in transit through the EU and not to be placed into free circulation are not subjected to the Col requirements.

If part of a consignment goes astray during shipment, the PHA will assess whether to endorse the certificate for the amount of produce that has arrived. Should the remainder, or any further part of the original consignment be shipped at a later date, these goods cannot be included on any previously adjusted and endorsed certificate.

## **How is the Certificate of Inspection validated?**

The PHA validates the information on the Col and if applicable any additional extCol. If the PHA approves the document(s), you may enter the consignment into free circulation. The PHA will make a charge per consignment for the verification and endorsement of the Col.

Any physical checks of the consignment will be conducted under the PHA's normal rules and do not entail additional inspections to verify the organic origin of imported consignments.

## What happens if my Certificate of Inspection fails the checks?

The PHA will inform you in writing, that your consignment has failed the verification process. You will then have the following options:

- appeal and keep consignment in storage (in this context, storage facilities outside of the port may be used if formal permission is granted by the Port Health Authority);
- re-export outside of the EU;
- import goods as non-organic following removal of all "organic" references from the consignment and documentation (providing the goods comply with the usual import requirements); or
- destruction of the consignment.

You will also be told of your rights of appeal and the time limits for any appeal. You will be liable for any charges incurred.

### Important

You must realise that failure to comply with these rules may delay, or even prevent, the importation of your consignment.

It is recommended that the Col should be kept by the importer for at least two years.

Nothing in this briefing affects the requirements for your goods to clear Customs or any other statutory authority.

### Further Information:

#### Defra Organic Farming Branch

Area 5F, Ergon House, c/o Nobel House  
17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3RJ

Tel: 08459 335577 or 020 7238 6951, Fax: 020 7238 6148

Email: [organic.imports@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:organic.imports@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/imports/imports.htm>

#### European legislation

The basis for these rules are Commission Regulation (EC) 1788/2001 as amended and Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91

<http://eur-op.eu.int/eur-lex>.

#### UK legislation

<http://www.legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/stat.htm>

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