

Importing Food into South Africa: Regulatory Roadmap

The eight-step route from international artwork to cleared cargo: permits, specs, labels and Port Health.

Bringing a food product into South Africa involves more than shipping and duties: your label and documentation must satisfy the Department of Health, DALRRD, the NRCS, SARS and Port Health. This roadmap sets out the route our consultants follow to take international products from overseas artwork to cleared, shelf-ready cargo.

1. Classify the product

Confirm the correct regulatory category (foodstuff vs supplement vs medicine borderline; agricultural product standards; compulsory-specification products). Classification drives every later step: get it wrong and everything downstream fails.

2. Confirm import permissions

Determine whether the product requires an import permit (e.g. DALRRD for regulated agricultural and animal products; ITAC where applicable) and secure permits before shipment.

3. Check compulsory specifications

Products such as canned fish and canned meat fall under NRCS compulsory specifications. Confirm applicability, testing and any approvals early: these cannot be fixed at the port.

4. Localise the label

Adapt the international label to R146 of 2010: English language, South African allergen declarations, metric net quantity (Legal Metrology/SANS 289), local importer name and address, country of origin, compliant date marking and claims. Over-stickering is possible in limited cases but must itself be compliant.

5. Verify claims for the SA market

Claims lawful elsewhere (e.g. certain health or nutrition claims) may be prohibited here. Screen every claim against South African rules before printing.

6. Assemble the documentation pack

Certificates of analysis, health certificates where required, permits, supplier specifications, label proofs: the pack a Port Health inspector expects to see.

7. Clear Port Health & customs

Imported foodstuffs may be inspected, sampled and detained at points of entry. A compliant label plus a complete documentation pack is the difference between clearance and demurrage.

8. Maintain compliance in-market

Monitor regulatory change (including the draft R3337 regulations), keep specifications current, and respond to retailer and inspector queries with a local regulatory partner.

The five most common reasons import consignments get detained

	Detention trigger	Reference / note
■	Label not localised: foreign-language or non-R146 label on the shelf-ready pack	R146

	Detention trigger	Reference / note
■	Allergen declarations missing or not aligned to the South African allergen list	R146 reg. 43–44
■	Net quantity not in metric units or non-compliant marking	Legal Metrology; SANS 289
■	No local importer/distributor name and physical address on the label	R146 reg. 20
■	Missing permits or incomplete documentation at inspection	Import control

Need this done for you? Send your label artwork to info@ascfoodsafety.com for a professional compliance review: redlined report, corrected wording and a formal compliance letter. 48-hour express option available. ascfoodsafety.com/labelling-and-regulatory-advisory

This document is a general guide based on South African legislation current at the time of publication (July 2026) and does not constitute legal advice or a compliance certificate. Regulations change: including the pending replacement of R146 of 2010 by the draft R3337 regulations. Always obtain product-specific professional advice. © ASC Food Safety Consultants.