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# Importing food with a valid Safe Food for Canadians licence

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## 1.0 Background

To import most foods into Canada, the *Safe Food for Canadians Act* (SFCA) and its regulations (SFCR) require that you hold a licence issued by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

Since March 15, 2021, the CFIA has been using the Integrated Import Declaration (IID) to automatically verify that importers of the following commodities have a valid Safe Food for Canadians licence (SFC licence):

- dairy
- egg
- fish and seafood
- fresh fruits and vegetables
- honey and honey products
- maple and maple products
- meat and poultry products
- processed fruits and vegetables

If you import any of these commodities into Canada, you must hold a valid SFC licence and declare it correctly on your import declaration. **Your shipment will be denied entry into Canada unless import requirements are met.** Further, a non-compliance with the SFCA and/or the SFCR may result in enforcement actions, up to and including administrative monetary penalties and/or prosecution.

Refer to the CFIA's Food licences for more information on licensing. Visit Food imports for more information on requirements related to imported food.

## 2.0 What's new for importers of manufactured foods

### 2.1 Definition of manufactured foods

For licensing purposes, the manufactured foods commodity includes a variety of foods that fall under the following sub-commodities:

- alcoholic beverages
- confectionary, sweeteners, snack foods (containing or not containing nuts), non-bakery desserts
- fats and oils
- food chemicals
- grain derived foods
- infant foods
- multiple foods (such as sports nutrition, meal replacements, vegetarian pizza)
- non-alcoholic beverages
- nuts, grains, seeds
- spices, herbs, flavours, condiments, dressings
- vegan dairy substitutes
- foods not otherwise listed (such as cricket flour, yeast, simulated meat products, etc.)

Annex A – Food commodities identified in the licence application of the guidance document What to consider before applying for an SFC licence provides examples of foods that fall into each commodity and sub-commodity listed on the SFC licence application and can assist you in making sure your licence is issued for the correct commodities and sub-commodities. You can amend your licence at any time and there is no charge to do so; however, **it may take some time for the amendment to be processed**. Refer to Section 5.0 Service standards for issuing or amending an SFC licence for more information on licence processing times.

## 2.2 Automatic verification of Safe Food for Canadians licences

On February 12, 2024, the CFIA will begin using IID to automatically verify the SFC licences of importers of manufactured foods. This means that if you import any food commodity that requires a licence, including manufactured

foods, you must hold a valid SFC licence and declare it correctly in your import declaration, or your transaction will be rejected. If your transaction is rejected, IID will send you or your broker one or more reject messages that describe the reason(s) for the rejection and **your food shipment will be denied entry into Canada** until you correct the error(s) and re-submit your import declaration. All import requirements must be met before your shipment's import declaration can be accepted.

### Keep in mind

**Submit your import declaration as much in advance as possible.** You can submit your electronic declaration up to 90 days before your shipment arrives at the border. If you encounter problems submitting your electronic import declaration, please contact EDI-CFIA-ACIA@inspection.gc.ca.

**The CFIA does not manually issue SFC licences at the border** and the process of applying for or amending an SFC licence takes time. Further, the CFIA does not prioritize licence applications or amendments that are requested in response to licensing errors. All licence-related service requests are processed in the order in which they are received. Refer to Section 5.0 Service standards for issuing or amending an SFC licence for more information on licence processing times.

**If you don't have an SFC licence**, visit My CFIA to access guidance on how to create a My CFIA account and party profile. If you already have a party profile, **do not create a new one**. The SFC licence application is available online through your My CFIA account.

Refer to the CFIA's Food licences page for more information licensing requirements.

## Keep in mind

Before applying for your SFC licence, make sure you meet all applicable requirements under the *Food and Drugs Act* and its regulations as well as the *Safe Food for Canadians Act* and its regulations, including preventive control requirements. If you are required to prepare and implement a preventive control plan, you must do so **before** you request an SFC licence.

# 3.0 How to make sure you have a valid Safe Food for Canadians licence and declare it correctly when importing food

A valid SFC licence to import is:

- active (not expired, surrendered, suspended or cancelled)
- issued for the activity "Importing Food"
- issued for the commodities that are being imported

You or your broker must also enter your licence number correctly on your import declaration.

## 3.1 Confirm your licence is active (not expired, surrendered, suspended or cancelled)

To make sure your licence is active:

- log into your My CFIA account
- select your validated party from the drop down menu and press "Select"

- select the "Issued Permissions" tab and review the status of your licence

A status of "Issued" indicates an active SFC licence.

Note: Cancelled licences are removed from your profile.

## Expired licences

If your licence is expired you can apply for a new one using your My CFIA account.

Note: If you are applying for a new licence and already have a party profile in My CFIA **do not create a new one**. Review your Party Profile information for accuracy by accessing "Manage Party" in your My CFIA Dashboard. If you're unable to make the necessary changes, you may contact the My CFIA Support Team at 1-800-442-2342.

Refer to [Section 5.0 Service standards for issuing or amending an SFC licence](#) for more information on licence processing times.

## Surrendered licences

If your licence was surrendered you can contact the Profile Authority or Profile Manager responsible for your My CFIA account for more information on the status of your licence.

## Suspended or cancelled licences

If your licence is suspended or cancelled you can contact your [local CFIA office](#) for more information on the actions you need to take to resume importing food.

## 3.2 Confirm your licence is issued for the activity "Importing Food"

To make sure your SFC licence is issued for the international activity "Importing Food":

- log into your [My CFIA](#) account
- select your validated party from the drop down menu and press "Select"
- select the "Issued Permissions" tab
- select the licence number you would like to verify
- under the "Licence Permission Detail" heading, "Declared International Activities", verify your licence is issued for the activity "Importing Food" as well as for the [commodities and sub-commodities](#) you will import with that licence

Note: You should only request a licence for commodities and sub-commodities that you will import with that licence.

You can amend your licence, free of charge, through your My CFIA account to add or remove activities from your licence profile. Refer to [How to renew or amend an issued permission](#) for more information.

Refer to [Section 5.0 Service standards for issuing or amending an SFC licence](#) for more information on licence processing times.

### Attention foreign suppliers

To meet the requirements of the SFCA, your food must be brought into Canada by a person who has an SFC licence issued for "Importing Food" and for the commodities and sub-commodities they are importing.

Persons who do not have a fixed place of business in Canada and who qualify as **non-resident importers** are able to apply for an SFC licence **for importing food**. To learn more, refer to [Non-resident importers](#).

If you qualify as a non-resident importer but you also have a fixed place of business in Canada, **you must apply for your licence as an importer located in Canada.**

### 3.3 Confirm your licence is issued for the commodities you are importing

To make sure your SFC licence is issued for the commodities you are importing:

- review the detailed descriptions of each commodity and sub-commodity provided in Annex A – Food commodities identified in the licence application of the guidance document What to consider before applying for an SFC licence
  - It is important that you consult this document to make sure your licence was issued for the commodities you are importing. The commodity and sub-commodity titles found in the SFC licence application do not use the same definitions found within the SFCR. In most cases, these categories are broader than the regulatory definitions in the SFCR and standards of identity documents.
- log into your My CFIA account
- select your validated party from the drop down menu and press "Select"
- select the "Issued Permissions" tab
- select the licence you would like to verify
- under the "Licence Permission Detail" heading, "Declared International Activities", verify your licence was issued for activity "Importing Food" as well as the commodities and sub-commodities you will import with that licence



Note: You should only request a licence for commodities and sub-commodities that you will import with that licence.

You can amend your licence, free of charge, through your My CFIA account to add or remove commodities and sub-commodities from your licence profile. Refer to [How to renew or amend an issued permission](#) for more information.

Refer to [Section 5.0 Service standards for issuing or amending an SFC licence](#) for more information on licence processing times.

### Keep in mind

You or your broker must declare the most appropriate Harmonized System (HS) code and Other Government Department (OGD) extension for the food you are importing.

Use the [Automated Import Reference System](#) (AIRS) to determine your food's import requirements, HS code and OGD extension.

Use the [Automated Import Reference System Verification Service](#) to validate the coding of your AIRS commodities. Using the Automated Import Reference System Verification Service minimizes the number of rejected Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) requests due to incorrect entries, or missing or invalid AIRS coding in EDI transactions.

For information regarding tariff classification of goods, refer to the Canada Border Services Agency's [Canadian customs tariff](#) page.

### 3.4 Enter your licence number correctly on your import declaration

You or your broker must enter your SFC licence number into the "Registration Number" field in IID **exactly as it was issued**, without any additional words, characters or spaces. The licence format is an 8 digit alpha-numeric number (for example, A12B3CD4).

## 4.0 Summary of reject messages and how to correct them

If you or your broker omits or incorrectly enters your SFC licence number on your import declaration, or if the licence you declare is invalid, your transaction will be rejected and IID will send you or your broker one or more reject messages that describe the reason(s) for the reject. The table below lists the possible reject messages, the possible reason(s) for the rejected transaction, and the actions you can take to correct your licensing error(s). All import requirements must be met for your shipment to be accepted.

Note: The following table only includes information on reject messages related to the declaration of an SFC licence.

| Reject message   | Reason for reject   | Corrective actions   |
|--|---|--|
| AIRS registration number is required. (893 – Safe Food Licence).                     | The Registration Number field in IID is left blank.   | <p>Enter your SFC licence number in the registration number field <b>exactly as it was issued</b> and re-submit your declaration.</p> <p>If you do not have an SFC licence, you can apply for one using your <a href="#">My CFIA</a> account. Re-submit your declaration once you receive a notification that your licence was issued.</p> |
| Licence number must be 8 digit alpha numeric. (A12B3CD4). Verify licence in My CFIA. | <p>The licence number provided is not in the CFIA database.</p> <p>This message is received when a "Y" or "N" or any other text other than a licence number is entered in the Registration Number field in IID.</p> | <p>Enter your SFC licence number in the registration number field <b>exactly as it was issued</b> and re-submit your declaration.</p> <p>If you do not have an SFC licence, you can apply for one using your <a href="#">My CFIA</a> account. Re-submit your declaration once you receive a notification that your licence was issued.</p> |

| Reject message   | Reason for reject  | Corrective actions  |
|--|--|---|
| Licence number is either suspended, cancelled, or expired. Verify status in My CFIA. | The licence number entered is suspended, cancelled or expired.                   | <p>If your SFC licence is suspended or cancelled you can contact your <u>local CFIA office</u> for more information on the actions you need to take to resume importing food.</p> <p>If your SFC licence is expired you can apply for a new one using your existing <u>My CFIA</u> account.</p> <p>Re-submit your declaration with your new licence number once you receive a notification that your licence was issued.</p> <p>If you surrendered your SFC licence you can contact the Profile Authority or Profile Manager responsible for your My CFIA account for more information on the status of your licence.</p> |
| Licence number is not valid for importing. Verify activity in My CFIA.               | When the licence number entered is not issued for the activity "Importing Food". | <p>You can either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>amend</u> your current licence using your My CFIA account to include the activity "Importing Food" on your licence profile, along with the commodities and sub-commodities you will import with that licence; or,</li> <li>• apply for an SFC licence to import using your <u>My CFIA</u> account</li> </ul> <p>Re-submit your declaration once you receive a notification that your licence was issued or your amendment was accepted.</p> <p>Note: Licence amendments are free of charge. New SFC licences are subject to <u>fees</u>.</p>           |

| Reject message  | Reason for reject  | Corrective actions   |
|---|--|--|
| Licence number entered does not cover food being imported. Verify licence in My CFIA. | When the licence number entered was not issued for the commodity that is being declared. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the detailed descriptions of each commodity and sub-commodity provided in <a href="#">Annex A – Food commodities identified in the licence application</a> of the guidance document <a href="#">What to consider before applying for an SFC licence</a> to make sure that your licence was issued for the correct commodity.</li> <li>Review the HS code and OGD extension declared. Make sure that they are appropriate for the food you are importing. You can use the <a href="#">Automated Import Reference System</a> (AIRS) to determine your food's import requirements, HS code and OGD extension.</li> <li>Use the <a href="#">Automated Import Reference System Verification Service</a> to validate the coding of your AIRS commodities.</li> </ul> <p>If your current licence was not issued for the correct commodity you can either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">amend</a> your current licence using your My CFIA account to include the commodities and sub-commodities you will import with a that licence; or,</li> <li>apply for an new SFC licence to import using your <a href="#">My CFIA</a> account</li> </ul> <p>Re-submit your declaration once you receive a notification that your licence was issued or your amendment was accepted.</p> |

| Reject message | Reason for reject | Corrective actions   |
|----------------|-------------------|--|
|                |                   | Note: Licence amendments are free of charge. New SFC licences are subject to <u>fees</u> . |

## 5.0 Service standards for issuing and amending a Safe Food for Canadians licence

In fairness to all clients, the CFIA's National Centre for Permissions (NCP) processes all permission applications on a first in, first out basis. For SFC licence applications and amendment requests, it may take up to 15 business days from the time of receipt of your service request for your case to be assigned to a Case Management Officer. Depending on the complexity of your file, a service request for a new SFC licence or for a licence amendment may be assigned to a CFIA inspector and take additional time to review. Such requests require pre-issuance verifications and take an average of 70 business days to process.

Note: The NCP will not respond to repeated status update requests unless their service standard has been exceeded.

You can track your permission service requests through your My CFIA account. Refer to [Understanding the status of your My CFIA service request](#) for more information.

If you have questions about your SFC licence service request you can contact the NCP at [permission@inspection.gc.ca](mailto:permission@inspection.gc.ca).

### Date modified:

2023-11-01

