

Questions and Answers: Importing Vietnamese Dragon Fruit to the United States

Q. When did APHIS publish the final rule to allow dragon fruit imports from Vietnam?

A. On July 30, 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) published a final rule in the *Federal Register* allowing, under certain conditions, the importation of commercial shipments of fresh dragon fruit from Vietnam into the continental United States.

Q. What are the requirements for exporting dragon fruit from Vietnam to the United States?

A. To ensure that pests of quarantine significance do not enter the United States, APHIS preclearance officers in Vietnam will inspect dragon fruit shipments for pests prior to their export. If there are no pests present, the fruit will be treated with specified doses of irradiation at an APHIS-certified facility prior to export. If, however, APHIS officers find live pests during a preclearance inspection, the shipment will not be eligible for treatment or export to the United States.

Dragon fruit must be packed in insect-proof boxes and safeguarded after treatment to prevent the risk of subsequent pest infestation. The fruit must also be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate issued by the national plant protection organization (NPPO) of Vietnam with additional declarations certifying that the fruit's treatment and inspection were completed in accordance with USDA regulations.

Q. How do I begin importing dragon fruit from Vietnam?

A. To begin importing dragon fruit from Vietnam, you first need to apply for an APHIS permit. You can apply for the permit by completing and submitting the Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program Form 587, "Application for Permit to Import Plants or Plant Products." The form can be completed online using the APHIS ePermits system at www.aphis.usda.gov/permits. The ePermits system is a Web-based tool that allows you to apply for a permit, check its status, and view it online.

You may also submit your application to PPQ's Permit Services unit. The address is: Permit Services, PPQ, APHIS, USDA, 4700 River Road, Unit 133, Riverdale, MD 20737. The permit application form is available for downloading at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/> or by calling (877) 770-5990. The permit to import dragon fruit from Vietnam is valid for 1 year from its issuance date.

Q. Are there other requirements for importing dragon fruit from Vietnam?

A. Yes. In addition to USDA requirements, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have specific requirements to import dragon fruit from Vietnam. For information about FDA's requirements, please e-mail industry@fda.gov. For more information on CBP's requirements, please visit www.cbp.gov. You may also contact an international customs broker who will help you with inspection and shipping logistics as well as the various agency approvals.

Q. What happens when my shipment arrives in the United States?

A. When your dragon fruit arrives at a U.S. port of entry, CBP inspectors will verify three documents accompanying the shipment to ensure that it was properly treated and inspected.

- PPQ Form 203—Foreign Site Certificate of Inspection—signed by an APHIS officer in the exporting country
- Phytosanitary certificate issued by Vietnam's NPPO certifying that the shipment has been treated
- APHIS import permit, verifying that the shipment has been authorized by USDA to be imported into the United States

If these entry requirements are not met, the shipment will be prohibited entry. In addition to verifying the accompanying documentation, CBP inspectors may further inspect precleared commodities at the port of first arrival.

Q. Can I carry fresh dragon fruit from Vietnam to the United States on my next flight?

A. No. The rule only applies to commercial shipments of dragon fruit. Individuals traveling from Vietnam to the United States cannot bring dragon fruit in personal baggage, even if the fruit has been treated. Dragon fruit must enter the United States via commercial channels (air or ship) where quarantine security can

be assured. Boxes of dragon fruit leaving that chain of custody are prohibited entry into the United States.

Q. Can I send dragon fruit from Vietnam to the United States through the mail?

A. No. As stated above, dragon fruit can only be commercially shipped to the United States. The fruit must be sent directly from the irradiation facility to its means of commercial conveyance (air or ship) and then exported directly to the United States. This ensures a strict chain of custody in the event that the imported fruit shows signs of pest infestation.

Q. Why haven't Vietnamese dragon fruit been allowed into the United States until now?

A. APHIS approved the use of irradiation as a quarantine treatment for fruits and vegetables in October 2002. Then, in January 2006, APHIS published another rule approving a minimum generic dose (400 gray) of irradiation for imported fruits and vegetables. Until the approval and available use of the generic dose, the pests associated with dragon fruit could not be mitigated through other APHIS-approved treatments.

Q. What is food irradiation?

A. Irradiation involves briefly exposing food to ionizing energy for a specific length of time in order to destroy or sterilize bacteria, microorganisms, or other pests of concern. Food is irradiated in a special processing facility and never comes in direct contact with the energy source. It is important to note that irradiation does not necessarily kill pests; however, it will sterilize them, rendering them incapable of reproducing or emerging from a host stage to become adults. Accordingly, there may be instances where you will see insects on your fruit; however, if they've been treated, they are not harmful to you or the fruit.

Q. How does the process of irradiation affect the pests?

A. The energy waves produced during the irradiation process physically breaks the molecular structure of the pests' DNA, killing or sterilizing them. However, at specified doses, the structure of the atom is not affected.

Q. Is it safe to eat irradiated fruits and vegetables?

A. Yes. The FDA has evaluated the safety of this technology over the last 40 years. It has found irradiation to be safe under a variety of conditions and has approved its use for many foods. The agency determined that the process is safe and effective in decreasing or eliminating harmful bacteria, insects, and parasites. In certain fruits and vegetables it inhibits sprouting and delays ripening, which allows for a longer shelf life.

Food irradiation is currently used in over 50 countries to control plant pests and is approved by the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, and many other organizations around the world. Although food irradiation has been in existence since the 1950s, scientists have just recently begun focusing on its ability to control harmful pests and diseases associated with fruits and vegetables.

Q. How do I know if my food has been irradiated?

A. The FDA requires that irradiated foods include labeling with either the statement, "treated with irradiation" or "treated by irradiation" along with the international symbol for irradiation, called the Radura.

Q. Where can I find out more information on this subject?

A. To learn more about imports of dragon fruit from Vietnam into the United States, please visit the APHIS Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/hotissues/index.shtml>. Under "Hot Issues," click on the link for Vietnamese Dragon Fruit Imports.

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