

Standard Management Rule 01: Soft cheese and grated cheese (excluding raw milk cheese)

From the 1st July 2009 NZFSA replaced this SMR with a standardised format for all Imported Food Requirements.

For the current version refer to the Imported Food Requirement for soft cheese and grated cheese.

Recent Updates:

Date	Location	Information
1 July 2009	All	Made obsolete refer to the Imported Food Requirement for soft cheese and grated cheese.
30 August 2007		Removal of three Swiss varieties of cheese (Gruyere, Sbrinz and Emmental) and transfer to 'Imported Food Requirements for raw milk cheeses'.
30 August 2007	Section 2.1	New clearance option for products from Australia. Products manufactured and exported from Australia do not require certification or physical inspection.
18 July 2007	Section 3.4	Sampling and inspection costs have been updated.
24 November 2005	Section 2.1	New certification option for products from the European Union.
23 November 2004	Section 3.1	Changed wording to make clear that grated cheese should be tested unless it fails the visual check for mould

Background Information:

SUMMARY OF HAZARD:

Soft cheeses and grated and powdered cheeses (excluding raw milk cheeses), are high risk foods because they have been linked to illness caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*. It is the manufacturing and handling process that exposes soft cheeses to contamination by *Listeria monocytogenes*. Soft cheeses have characteristics that make them more conducive to *Listeria* growth. Grated cheeses are exposed through the grating process. Because of this risk, the safety of grated and powdered cheeses and all soft cheeses is monitored by sampling and testing for the presence of *Listeria monocytogenes*.

The low moisture, low pH, high salt content and long maturing of hard cheeses makes the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes* very unlikely. As a result, hard and semi-hard varieties of cheese that are not grated do not pose the same health risk and enter New Zealand without restriction.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON AGENCY ROLES:

The following descriptions have been included to clarify the roles of the New Zealand Food Safety Authority and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in imported food.

New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA):

NZFSA was established on 1 July 2002 as a semi-autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and since then as a fully-autonomous body on 1 July 2007. The Authority has responsibility for the food functions previously managed by MAF and the Ministry of Health. Establishment of the NZFSA provides a more integrated approach to food safety in New Zealand. NZFSA is the controlling authority for imports of food and sets policies, criteria and procedures to monitor the safety of imported food for human consumption. (see www.nzfsa.govt.nz).

- **Auckland Central Clearing House (ACCH):**

ACCH is part of the Auckland Regional Public Health Service, and is contracted by the NZFSA to carry out day to day operational procedures. The ACCH provides the initial point of contact for information to importers and customs brokers throughout New Zealand. It facilitates the inspection and clearance services of identified imported products.

- **Public Health Units (PHU):**

Food and Health Protection Officers (Food/HPOs) employed by the various public health services are responsible for the inspection and sampling of high-risk imported foods under the coordination of the ACCH.

Biosecurity New Zealand:

Biosecurity NZ is the lead agency in New Zealand's biosecurity system. 'Biosecurity' is the protection of New Zealand's economy, environment and people's health from pests and diseases. It includes trying to prevent new pests and diseases arriving. Established in November 2004 (replacing MAF Biosecurity), it has been tasked with a 'whole of system' leadership role,

encompassing economic, environmental, social and cultural outcomes. Importers should contact Biosecurity NZ directly to check their requirements <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/>.

Obsolete

Import Criteria Applying to Soft and Grated Cheeses (excluding raw milk cheeses)

1.0 Products targeted:

Prescribed foods are targeted at the border using the New Zealand Customs tariff code system. Products classified with the following tariff codes are captured under this rule:

Tariff codes targeted for Soft and Grated Cheeses	
<i>Grated and powdered cheese</i>	
0406.20.00.01A	Grated Etc Cheddar Cheese
0406.20.00.09G	Colby Cheese Grated Etc
0406.20.00.11J	Cheshire Cheese Grated Etc
0406.20.00.19D	Egmont Cheese Grated Etc
0406.20.00.21F	Gouda Cheese Grated Etc
0406.20.00.29A	Other Cheese Grated Etc
<i>Soft cheeses</i>	
0406.40.00.00L	Blue-Veined Cheese
0406.90.00.01G	Other Cheese In Tins
0406.90.00.39D	Other Cheese Other

Soft cheeses or other varieties of cheese which requires monitoring on entry:

Blue Cheese	Coulommiers
Brie	Creamed Cheese
Butterkase	Harzer Kase
Camembert	Limburger
Cottage	Romadur
Cream	Saint Paulin

All varieties of grated cheese including hard varieties

All varieties of powdered cheese including hard varieties

Any other cheese that does not appear in the Hard and Semi-Hard cheese list

*Adopted by reference, and notified in "The New Zealand Gazette" published by the Department of Internal Affairs to come into force on 25 February 2000

INADVERTENT CAPTURES:

As the tariff classification system is not designed specifically around the imported food regime, some food products may be inadvertently captured by the targeted tariff codes above. The 0406.90.00 codes may stop some varieties of hard cheeses. These hard cheeses (excluding those made from raw milk) are listed below and can be released by the Central Clearing House without any testing. Importers may apply for a Multiple Release Permit (MRP) to resolve this inconvenience.

Any cheeses that **do not** appear in the hard and semi-hard cheese list below are considered to be soft cheeses and are required to be sampled and tested. The hardness or semi-hardness of cheese is determined by the information declared to the NZ Customs service, **not** a declaration provided by the manufacturer.

NOTE: Liquid cheeses and cheese flavourings are not included under this Rule and do not need to be sampled and tested.

Hard and semi-hard varieties of cheese (excluding those made from raw milk) that do not require monitoring on entry:

Amsterdam	Gudbrandsdalsost
Cheddar	Havarti
Cheshire	Herrgardsost
Colby	Hushallsost
Danablu	Leidse (Leyden)
Danbo	Mainser Kase
Edam	Maribo
Edelpilzkase	Mozzarella
Egmont	Norvegia
Emmental manufactured from pasteurised milk	Parmesan
Esrom	Provolone – unsmoked
Extra Hard Grating	Provolone – smoked

Feta	Romano
Friese (Frisian)	Samsoe
Fynbo	Svecia
Gouda	Stilton
Gruyere manufactured from pasteurised milk	Tilsiter

REVIEW: NZFSA is currently reviewing the way soft cheeses are selected for monitoring. The current method of using the names of the cheeses is proving difficult as in recent years new products have been developed and many cheeses are being called after geographical areas.

Obsolete

2.0 Clearance options:

The following 3 options are available to clear consignments captured under this rule:

2.1 Pre Clearance Arrangements:

Where the NZFSA (or Ministry of Health prior to July 2002) has negotiated pre clearance arrangements with other governments or specific manufacturers then agreed import conditions apply for a prescribed food. This may include acceptance of certification for a prescribed food. Importers should check specific requirements (including certification) with their local PHU prior to importing a prescribed product.

For soft and grated cheeses (excluding raw milk cheeses) pre clearance arrangements exist with Australia, Norway and the European Union. Details of these arrangements import conditions are as follows:

- Australia – Imports of products manufactured and exported from Australia are recognised under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement (TTMRA) and are not subject to certification or verification (sampling and testing) requirements.
- Norway – Imports of products manufactured and exported from Norway must be accompanied by agreed certification from KIM (Kontrollinstituttet for Meierprodukter) and standard verification (sampling and testing) rate applies.
- European Community – New Zealand has a Sanitary Agreement with the European Community (EC) to facilitate trade of live animal and animal products. Agreed certification must accompany all imports and a reduced level of physical inspection of 2% applies. Importers must obtain an MRP in order for this reduced rate to be implemented. Refer to <http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/imported-food/eu-nz-vet/index.htm> for more information.

Where certification is a condition of import, certificates are required to accompany **each consignment**.

Consignments imported under certification are required to be tested at intervals. Unless otherwise stated in an arrangement, the standard testing rate used to verify certification which applies to most prescribed foods is 1 in every 20 where consignments are more frequent than 20 in a six month period. Where consignments are less than 20 in a six month period, they are tested every six months. Similarly, unless otherwise stated in an arrangement, where testing is required, the sampling and testing protocol applied is specified below under point 3.

2.2 Multiple Release Permits (MRPs):

MRPs are issued on a case by case basis to importers with the technical skill and experience to manage a quality imports system. They are specific to importer, broker, product and supplier and are issued for a defined time period. MRPs enable importers to bypass the normal import clearance procedure for prescribed foods saving time and clearance costs. Where testing is required, the sampling and testing protocol applied is specified below under point 3, unless a different protocol is a specific condition of the MRP.

MRPs are issued for imported food products that are:

- Inadvertently captured by the tariff codes monitored by the NZFSA.
- From particular suppliers under an arrangement agreed to by the importer and NZFSA. This includes the importer maintaining an agreed imported food surveillance programme for the products covered by the MRP.

MRPs have not been issued for all prescribed food products, however, they have been issued for soft cheeses and grated cheeses (excluding raw milk cheeses). Importers wishing to apply for a MRP for this product should contact the NZFSA to discuss their situation prior to completing a MRP application form.

2.3 Clearance sampling and testing on arrival in New Zealand:

In the absence of a pre clearance arrangement or a MRP, soft and grated cheeses (excluding raw milk cheeses) are sampled and tested in New Zealand according to the sampling and testing protocol detailed below.

3.0 Sampling and testing protocol:

3.1 Microbiological criteria:

In order to ascertain if a consignment is safe the consignment is inspected and samples taken for laboratory testing.

The following criteria are used when deciding if a consignment captured by this rule is safe to be released:

- Visual signs of mould - grated cheese only – reject and no *Listeria* testing required for rejected product.
- Nil tolerance for *Listeria monocytogenes* per 25g - grated and soft cheeses n = 5.

3.2 Sampling criteria

3.2.1 When to sample consignments:

ACCH identifies which consignments are to be sampled and tested. Sampling frequencies depend on whether a pre clearance arrangement or a MRP are used as clearance options:

In the absence of a pre clearance arrangement or a MRP:

The frequency of sampling is based on the sampling and testing history developed by each importer for a specific product. A “specific product” means a product that is exactly the same i.e. the same size bottle/packet, variety, brand, and is manufactured by the same company. As a compliant history is developed, the frequency of sampling and inspection is reduced for the importer for that specific product. This reduction is governed by the “switching rule”, which follows the steps below:

- Sampling initially starts out at the *tightened* level (where 100% or every consignment is sampled and tested) until 5 consecutive compliant consignments have been cleared, when:
- Sampling is then lowered to the *normal* level (where 20% or 1 consignment in 5 is sampled and tested), until another 20 consecutive compliant consignments have been cleared (or 100 consignments imported since day 1), when:
- Sampling is then lowered to the *reduced* level (where 10% or one consignment in 10 is sampled and tested).

The frequency of sampling returns back to the *tightened* when a product is tested and found not to comply.

ACCH selects the frequency of sampling that is to apply to an imported product at any particular time using the *Switching Rule*. However, application of the *Switching Rule* may also be affected by the difficulty of managing the hazards applying to particular food product. Importers can contact their local PHU to discuss application of switching rules and, where they have a compliant history that meets the requirements above, can request a reduction in testing. Importers can also present a case if they wish to deviate from the switching rule applied. This is considered by the NZFSA on a case by case basis. Special approval may be given for specific products to be advanced to a further reduced level of testing (1 consignment in 20).

Certification under a pre clearance arrangement:

Where testing is required to verify certification the sampling frequency does not follow the *Switching Rule* but is 1 in 20 consignments unless otherwise stated in the Arrangement – see point 1 in ‘Clearance Options’.

MRPs:

Where sampling is a requirement of a MRP, the MRP will specify the sampling frequency.

3.2.2 Who samples consignments:

Sampling must be carried out by PHUs, who will arrange for one of their Food/HPOs to inspect and sample any consignment identified as requiring testing.

3.2.3 Number of lots to be sampled per consignment:

Food/HPOs select the lot(s) to be inspected and sampled. Where a consignment contains more than one lot, the number of lots to be sampled is calculated using the table below. This table is standard for all prescribed foods.

Number of lot codes in consignment	Number of lots to sample	Reject lots if n samples fail
1	1	$n = 1$
2 -8	2	$n = 1$
9 -15	3	$n = 1$
16 – 25	5	$n = 1$
> 26	8	$n = 1$

3.2.4 Sample weight

- Each sample must weigh a minimum of 100g
- 25g of each sample must be analysed
- Individual units or packages should be sampled if these are available

3.2.5 Inspection – grated cheese only:

Food/HPOs carry out visual inspections of grated cheeses. If mould is detected by Food/HPOs while carrying out a visual inspection, the lot is rejected and samples do not need to be taken and submitted for testing as described below.

3.3 Testing requirements:

3.3.1 NZFSA approved laboratories:

Samples of imported food can only be tested by laboratories approved by the NZFSA. At present only laboratories that are accredited by International Accreditation New Zealand (IANZ) to do the relevant test are approved by the NZFSA. NZFSA is currently updating its list of approved laboratories.

3.3.2 Methodology to be applied by laboratories:

The preferred method of analysis for MICROBIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS is described in the *Compendium of Methods for the Microbiological Examination of Foods*, American Public Health Association, and most up-to-date version.

3.3.3 Compositing samples:

The laboratory may composite up to 5 of the 25g samples from a lot prior to or after pre-enrichment samples for *Listeria monocytogenes* only.

3.4 Sampling and testing costs:

All sampling and testing is at the importers expense. Permit and sampling costs are listed below, are in New Zealand dollars and include GST:

- Permit application assessment : \$48 per line assessment + \$96/hour
- Sampling and inspection: \$96 per hour payable in 15-minute units

For laboratory costs, contact NZFSA approved laboratories.

3.5 Reject criteria:

PHUs will apply the following criteria to lots after inspection and sampling:

REJECT lots of grated cheese that show visual signs of mould.

REJECT lots that test positive for *Listeria monocytogenes*. Any untested lots in the same consignment as a rejected lot, must be sampled for clearance at the rate detailed in *Sample Requirements* above before a decision is made on clearance.

- When lots fail the import criteria, those lots and any untested lots in the same consignment are rejected;
- Lots that fail the import criteria are not re-tested;
- Importers have the option of having any untested lots sampled and tested, and if any of these lots pass they can be cleared. Any untested lots in the same consignment of a reject lot must be sampled for clearance at the rate detailed in *Inspection Requirements and Testing Requirements* above.

3.6 Special conditions that may apply:

In unique or out of the ordinary situations, the NZFSA reserves the right to either stop trade or replace the above sampling regime with a special elevated programme of testing in order to regain confidence in a product.

Obsolete