

Questions and Answers: Importing Irradiated Fruit from Thailand into the United States

Q. When did the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) publish the final rule to allow litchis longans, mangoes, mangosteens, pineapples, and rambutans from Thailand into the United States?

A. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) published the final rule in the *Federal Register* on June 21, 2007. Under Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 319.56-47, the final rule allows, under certain conditions, the importation of six fruits—litchi, longan, mango, mangosteen, pineapple, and rambutan—from Thailand into the United States.

Q. What are the requirements for exporting the six fruits to the United States?

A. To ensure plant pests of quarantine significance do not enter the United States through the importation of these fruits, APHIS preclearance officers in Thailand inspect fruit shipments for pests prior to export. If no pests are detected, a shipment is authorized to be treated prior to export with specified doses of irradiation at an APHIS-certified facility. If, however, pests of quarantine significance are found during a preclearance inspection, the shipment is refused treatment and is not eligible for export to the United States.

Fruit must be packed in pest-proof boxes and be safeguarded after treatment to prevent reinfestation. It must also be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate issued by the national plant protection organization (NPPO) of Thailand with an additional declaration certifying that the treatment and inspection of the fruit were made in accordance with U.S. import regulations. Longans and litchis are required to be packed in marked boxes indicating their prohibition for import into and distribution within Florida.

Q. How do I begin the process of importing litchis, longans, mangoes, mangosteens, pineapples, and/or rambutans from Thailand?

A. To begin importing litchi, longan, mango, mangosteen, pineapple, and rambutan from Thailand, you must first apply for an APHIS permit. You can apply

for a permit online via APHIS' ePermits system at www.aphis.usda.gov/permits by completing the Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) Form 587 for fresh fruits and vegetables. ePermits is a Web-based tool that allows you to apply for a permit, check its status, and view it online.

As an alternative, you can also submit an application to PPQ's Permit Services unit. The address is: Permit Services, USDA-APHIS-PPQ, 4700 River Road, Unit 133, Riverdale, MD 20737. The permit application form is available online at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/> or by calling (877) 770-5990. The permit to import any of the six fruits from Thailand is valid for 1 year from its issuance date.

Q. Are there any other requirements for importing these fruits from Thailand?

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 for importing litchi, longan, mango, mangosteen, pineapple, and rambutan from Thailand. For information about FDA's requirements, please e-mail industry@fda.gov. For 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 fruit arrives at a U.S. port of entry, CBP inspectors will verify three documents accompanying the shipment to ensure 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 Thailand's NPPO to certify that the shipment has been treated; and
- 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, CBP inspectors may further inspect precleared commodities at the port of first arrival.

Q. When traveling, can I carry fresh litchis, longans, mangoes, mangosteens, pineapples, and/or rambutans from Thailand to the United States in my personal baggage?

A. No. The rule only applies to commercial shipments of irradiated fruit from Thailand. Individuals traveling from Thailand to the United States cannot bring these fruits, even if they have been treated, in their personal baggage. The fruit must enter the United States via commercial channels (air or ship) where quarantine security can be assured. Boxes of fruit leaving that chain of custody are prohibited entry into the United States.

Q. Can I send litchis, longans, mangoes, mangosteens, pineapples, and/or rambutans from Thailand to the United States through the mail?

A. No. As stated above, these fruits 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 the imported fruit shows signs of pest infestation.

Q. Why haven't these fruits from Thailand been allowed into the United States until now?

A. APHIS approved the use of irradiation as a quarantine treatment for imported fruits and vegetables in October 2002. In January 2006, APHIS published another rule approving a minimum generic dose (400 gray) of irradiation for imported fruits and vegetables. Until the availability of this generic dose, the pests associated with the six fruits from Thailand could not be mitigated with any other APHIS-approved treatment.

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 all pests; it will, however, sterilize them, rendering them incapable of reproducing or emerging from host to adult. Thus, there may be instances where you will see insects on fruit; however, if they have been treated, they are not harmful to you or the fruit.

Q. How does the process of irradiation affect 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/or vegetables?

A. Yes. The FDA has evaluated the safety of this technology over the last 40 years. The FDA has found irradiation to be safe under a variety of conditions and has therefore 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 radiation" 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 litchi, longan, mango, mangosteen, pineapple, and rambutan from Thailand into the United States, please visit the APHIS Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov and click on the Irradiated Fruits from Thailand hot issues link.

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