

GUIDELINES FOR FOOD SELLERS

SELLING FOOD ONLINE VIA E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS

Introduction

These guidelines are developed to provide guidance for food sellers who sell food online via e-commerce platforms to understand their obligations under the legislations, and to outline industry good practices.

2 A food seller is responsible for the safety of the food it offers for sale to the public, and the food sold should come from SFA-regulated sources. Food sellers should adopt good food safety, and manufacturing, storage and transport practices. They should also implement applicable food safety assurance programmes to ensure that their food products are prepared/processed in a safe and hygienic manner that does not compromise food safety.

3 This document is relevant to any sale of food online via e-commerce platforms, including, but not limited to:

- (i) Bricks and clicks¹
- (ii) Online marketplaces
- (iii) Social media platforms
- (iv) Food delivery platforms

¹Refers to business models which operate both online and offline, i.e. a business which has physical retail premises and also sells its products online

Contents

	Page
1. An Overview of a Food Seller’s Responsibilities	3
1.1. Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses	3
1.2. Understanding the Food Regulations	3
2. Selling Food Online via E-commerce Platforms	4
2.1. Provision of Information to Consumers.....	4
(i) Prepacked Food Products	4
(ii) Non-prepacked Food Products	5
2.2. Ensuring Food Safety During Storage and Transportation of Food	5
3. Managing Food Safety-Related Incidents	6
3.1. Traceability and Recall Programmes.....	6
3.2. Food Safety: A Joint Responsibility	6
4. Frequently Asked Questions	7
5. Annex A	8

1. An Overview of a Food Seller's Responsibilities

4 A food seller in this guideline refers to anyone who sells food online via e-commerce platforms. This includes food businesses such as food importers, distributors, manufacturers, producers, packers, retailers, and food retail establishment operators.

1.1. Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses

5 Food importers who wish to import food into Singapore must obtain either a licence or register with the SFA and apply for an import permit (cargo clearance permit) before importing the food products.

6 Food businesses that operate at physical premises (e.g. restaurants, cafes, supermarkets, food manufacturers) must obtain the relevant licences or register with the SFA. These include local farms and food establishments involved in the production, manufacturing, processing, storage, and preparation of food for distribution and sale. Please refer to the SFA website² for more information on the licensing and registration of food businesses with the SFA.

1.2. Understanding the Food Regulations

7 During the import, production, preparation, packaging, storage, transport, or distribution of food for sale, food sellers must comply with the relevant legislations under the SFA. Please refer to **Annex A** for more information. The same regulations apply to food sold online via e-commerce platforms.

8 Food sellers must ensure that the food products are obtained from SFA-regulated food businesses (as set out in 1.1 above) and sources. The food must be prepared or processed in a safe and hygienic manner that does not compromise food safety. All commercial food imports that enter Singapore must be brought in by licensed/registered traders.

9 Food that is brought into Singapore by travellers returning from overseas, or by parcel posts, are only allowed for personal consumption and not for sale³. The sale of these food products without a valid import permit would constitute an offence under the regulations.

² For information on the various food establishments, please refer to the following links: <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-import-export>, <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-farming/food-farms/starting-a-farm>, <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-manufacturers>, <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-retail>

³ For more information, please refer to <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-import-export/bringing-food-for-personal-use>

2. Selling Food Online via E-commerce Platforms

10 Food sellers should ensure that important information on the food products as described in section 2.1 are made available to consumers online to enable them to make informed purchase decisions. When shopping for food at physical retail stores (e.g. supermarkets), consumers are able to physically choose the food products, view the food labels, and speak directly to the operator or staff to make enquiries, before purchasing the food product. Hence, when shopping for food products online via e-commerce platforms, consumers should also be presented with similar food product information in order to make informed purchase decisions.

11 The sale of food online also entails the storage and transportation of food products to consumers. In a physical store, consumers are able to assess the conditions of the food products before they make their purchases, such as checking for spoilages, or ensuring proper storage conditions of the food. When purchasing food online, the food products are delivered directly to the consumer. Thus, during the storage and transportation process, food sellers should ensure that the food products are maintained in proper conditions that do not compromise the safety of the food product.

2.1. Provision of Information to Consumers

12 A food label⁴ is an important and direct means for food sellers to communicate its food product information to consumers. It provides consumers with the basic information of the food product such as its contents (e.g. ingredients, allergens), source, nature and quantity. This enables consumers to make informed choices at the point of sale. It also helps consumers avoid buying affected food products in the case of a food safety incident.

(i) Prepacked Food Products

13 The labelling requirements under the Singapore Food Regulations apply to all prepacked food⁵ products for direct sale to consumers, including food sold via e-commerce platforms. Prepacked food products are to carry a food label containing the required general labelling information in English at the point of sale⁶:

- a. Common name or description of food
- b. Complete list of ingredients (including ingredients that are known to cause hypersensitivity to individuals like allergens)

⁴ Refers to any tag, brand, mark, or statement in words, pictures or diagrams, that is on, attached to, used, displayed in connection with or accompanying any food or package containing food

⁵ Food product that is packed in a wrapper or container in advance, before being put up for sale

⁶ Please refer to the Food Regulations or SFA website at <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-information/labelling-packaging-information/labelling-guidelines-for-food-importers-manufacturers> for more information on labelling requirements

- c. Net contents (including drained weight for food packed in liquid medium⁷ or gross weight for frozen food glazed with ice)
- d. Name and address of local food business operator (e.g. manufacturer, packer, importer, distributor, producer, or agent)
- e. Country of origin

14 For prepacked food which are listed online for sale on e-commerce platforms, food sellers are encouraged to display the same labelling information on the online listings. The information can be declared on the online platform or presented in the form of a photo of the product label that is clearly legible, to enable consumers to make informed food choices at the point of purchase.

(ii) Non-Prepacked Food Products

(Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Raw Meat, Raw Seafood, Cooked Meals, etc.)

15 Non-prepacked food⁸ which are sold online generally include groceries such as fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh meats, and ready-to-eat food. While these non-prepacked food products are exempted from the general labelling requirements, it is recommended for the same labelling information to be made available to consumers at the point of purchase. Food sellers are encouraged to display the following details, including, but not limited to:

- a. Name/description/photograph of food
- b. Net contents
- c. Country of origin/source of food
- d. Name and address of local food business operator
- e. Storage instructions
- f. Declaration of foods and ingredients that are known to cause hypersensitivity/allergens
- g. SFA licence/registration number (where applicable)
- h. Grading details (where applicable)

2.2. Ensuring Food Safety During Storage and Transportation of Food

16 Food sellers are responsible for upholding the hygiene and cleanliness of their premises where the food products are manufactured, prepared, or stored. Additionally, food sellers should ensure proper temperature control for perishable foods during storage, with the room or other refrigerated facility maintained at the appropriate temperatures.

⁷ Liquid medium is defined as water, aqueous solutions of sugar and salt, fruit and vegetable juices in canned fruits and vegetables only, or vinegar, either singly or in combination

⁸Food product that is not packed in a wrapper or container in advance, before being put up for sale; Food that is loosely packed at the retailer's premises

17 Under the Sale of Food Act and the Environmental Public Health Act, food being delivered must also be transported in a manner that is hygienic and does not compromise food safety. The delivery vehicle should be kept clean and in good order and condition, while receptacles used to cover the food in the course of transportation of food must be able to prevent the food from being contaminated.

3. Managing Food Safety-Related Incidents

3.1. Traceability and Recall Programmes

18 Food sellers are recommended to set up food traceability systems, including incident management plans such as food recall plans. Basic traceability records should capture:

- a. Information of food product to enable the food seller to **identify the affected food product** (e.g. batch/lot numbers, expiry dates, brand names)
- b. Information to enable the food seller to **trace the food one step back** (e.g. the name, contact information and address of supplier and transaction details)
- c. Information to enable the food seller to **trace the food one step forward** (e.g. the name, contact information and address of recipients and transaction details)

19 Incident management plans, such as food recall plans, enable food sellers to remove potentially unsafe products from the market in a timely manner. When a food product has been identified for recall, the seller should take all necessary actions to ensure that the affected food product is removed from sale and distribution. These actions should include the following:

- a. Check if the affected food product is part of the sellers' online listings and inventory. Seek clarification from the manufacturers/suppliers/distributors if necessary.
- b. Once identified, remove all online listings from the platforms where the affected food product is put up for sale. Where possible, display notice(s) online to inform customers of the incident and contact all customers who had purchased the affected food product to inform them of the recall alert and any subsequent actions, such as whether to return or discard the affected food product.
- c. Work with the manufacturers/suppliers/distributors and SFA to carry out follow-up actions on the recalled products (e.g. dispose of the product).

3.2. Food Safety: A Joint Responsibility

20 Food safety is a joint responsibility of the government, the food industry, and the consumers. All parties have a role to play in ensuring food safety. Food can be contaminated anywhere along the food chain and the assurance of food safety requires the combined effort of all stakeholders. Food sellers are responsible for the safety of the food they offer to the

public and must comply with SFA's food safety requirements. They should also communicate with and educate their consumers on their food products, which include providing assurance to consumers through managing consumer's enquiry and feedback. Food sellers are thus advised to provide a contact detail (e.g. a mobile number, email, or online feedback form) on their online listings for consumers.

4. Frequently Asked Questions

i. **Are all online food sellers that sell via e-commerce platforms required to be licensed by SFA?**

No. Food sellers that operate as businesses at physical premises (e.g. restaurants, cafés, supermarkets, food manufacturers) are required to have a licence issued by SFA to operate. Others, such as home-based food businesses (HBFB)* and those which purchase food products from licensed wholesalers/importers and resell them via e-commerce platforms, are not required to be licenced by SFA. They are nevertheless subject to food safety and hygiene requirements under the Sale of Food Act (SOFA) and Environmental Public Health Act (EPHA). SFA will take enforcement action for any infringements of our food safety and hygiene requirements.

* HBFB is addressed in part v.

ii. **Why is it important to display food product information when selling online?**

When shopping for food in a physical retail store, a customer is able to physically choose their food products and view the food labels before making purchases. Therefore, when purchasing food products online, consumers should also have access to the same information to be able to make equally informed purchase decisions.

Displaying sufficient information online not only serves as a means for food sellers to communicate on their food products with consumer, it also reinforces the importance of a consumer's responsibility to ensure food safety, by making well-informed assessments, exercising discretions, and being accountable for their purchase decisions.

iii. **Does attaching a photograph of the food product on an online listing, with the food labels clearly depicted suffice?**

Yes, attaching a photograph of the food product which clearly displays the required food labelling information on the online listing will suffice.

iv. **Where can I find more information on the labelling requirements for prepacked food?**

All prepacked food products for sale in Singapore must comply with the general labelling requirements of the Singapore Food Regulations. For complete information on the labelling requirements for prepacked food sold in Singapore and a detailed guide to self-check the food labels and criteria for use of nutrition claims, please refer to:

- <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/docs/default-source/food-information/labelling-and-packaging-information/a-guide-to-food-labelling-and-advertisements.pdf>

v. What about home-based food business operators which are selling food online?

Home-based food businesses (HBFB) fall under the HDB/URA's Home-Based Small-Scale Business Scheme, which allows residents to prepare small quantities of food in their homes for sale.

The scale of operations in a residential unit is limited. This, together with the conditions of the Scheme, means that food is prepared for only a very small number of people. Given this, SFA has a set of guidelines on food hygiene practices which operators under the scheme can refer to. As long as the operators comply with this set of guidelines, they will not require a licence from SFA.

Nevertheless, SFA will investigate if food safety regulations have been breached and will take the necessary enforcement action. For more information on HBFB, please visit the SFA website at <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-retail/overview/overviewnew>.

vi. How does SFA regulate online food sellers and ensure that food sold online is safe to consume?

Under our regulations, the sale of food that is unsafe, unsuitable or unfit for consumption is not permitted. Consumers should exercise discretion when purchasing food products online. If in doubt about the food product, they should find out more information (e.g. expiry dates, food labels) from the sellers or the e-commerce platform before they decide to purchase the product. Those who come across any potentially errant food sellers on e-commerce platforms should report to SFA via the online feedback form (www.sfa.gov.sg/feedback). As part of the enquiry and gathering of evidence, SFA may engage the feedback provider for more details. SFA will not hesitate to take enforcement action against errant food sellers if we have obtained sufficient evidence.

5. Annex A

The legislations can be found at the SFA website at <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/legislation> or at the Singapore Government Statutes online website at <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/>.

Category of Food	Relevant Legislations
Meat and fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wholesome Meat and Fish Act • Sale of Food Act
Fresh Fruits and vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of Plants Act • Sale of Food Act
Fresh Eggs Processed eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animals and Birds Act • Sale of Food Act
Processed Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sale of Food Act

Food Appliances	
Cooked food (including ready-to-eat food)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Public Health Act (part IV and IX)

The provision of food unsafe, unsuitable or unfit for consumption constitutes an offence under these legislations:

Sale of Food Act, Section 15

Selling unsafe or unsuitable food

(1) A person must not sell food that the person knows or ought reasonably to know is unsafe.

(2) A person must not sell food that the person knows or ought reasonably to know is unsuitable.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (2), it is immaterial whether the food concerned is safe.

Environmental Public Health Act, Section 40

Articles of food unfit for human consumption

(1) No person shall, without lawful excuse, have in his possession for sale by retail any article of food intended for human consumption which is unsound or unfit for human consumption.

Issued by the Singapore Food Agency

Date: 20 Sep 2021