

A Complete Beginner-Friendly Guide to Importing Food into the UAE

(Real Execution Process)

Step 1 – Obtain a UAE Trade License with Food Import Activity

The first action is company eligibility.

The exporter must work with a UAE-based importer that holds a trade license allowing food trading.

Where to go:

- Dubai Department of Economy & Tourism (DET)
- <https://www.dubaided.gov.ae>

What to do:

- Apply for or verify a trade license
- Ensure the activity includes *Foodstuff Trading* or *Food Products Import*

Required documents:

- Company registration documents
- Passport & Emirates ID of owner
- Office address in Dubai

Without this license, food import is legally impossible.

Step 2 – Open a Food Import Account with Dubai Municipality

After licensing, the importer must be registered in the food control system.

Where to go:

- Dubai Municipality Food Control Department
- <https://www.dm.gov.ae>

What to do:

- Create an importer account in the **ZAD / Montaji system**
- Link the trade license to the system

Required documents:

- Valid trade license
- Authorized signatory ID
- Company contact details

This step activates the importer in Dubai Food Import Regulations & Labeling systems.

Step 3 – Prepare Product Technical Information Before Registration

Before any online submission, the exporter must prepare accurate product data.

What to prepare:

- Full ingredient list
- Additives and E-numbers
- Shelf life
- Storage conditions
- Country of origin
- Packaging material

This information must match the actual product **exactly**.

Step 4 – Submit Food Product Registration

Each food product must be registered separately.

Where to go:

- Dubai Municipality Montaji / ZAD platform
- <https://montaji.dm.gov.ae>

What to do:

- Upload product details
- Upload ingredient breakdown
- Submit label artwork

Required documents:

- Product specification
- Label design file
- Manufacturer information

Approval normally takes 5–15 working days.

Step 5 – Design and Approve the Food Label

Label approval is mandatory before shipment.

What to include on the label:

- Product name (Arabic + English)
- Ingredients in Arabic
- Allergens clearly declared
- Net weight
- Production & expiry date

- Importer name and UAE address

Important rule:

Arabic text must be clear, readable, and permanent.

Step 6 – Collect Export Documents in the Country of Origin

Before shipping, the exporter must collect official documents.

Documents required:

- Commercial Invoice
- Packing List
- Certificate of Origin
- Health Certificate from local authority
- Approved product registration copy

These documents must match the registered product exactly.

Step 7 – Ship the Goods to the UAE Port

Only after registration approval should shipping begin.

Common ports:

- Jebel Ali Port
- Dubai Airport Freezone (for air cargo)

What happens:

- Shipping line submits manifest
 - Dubai Customs receives shipment data
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Step 8 – Complete Dubai Food Customs Clearance

Once the shipment arrives, clearance starts.

Where it is processed:

- Dubai Customs
- <https://www.dubaicustoms.gov.ae>

What authorities check:

- Product registration approval
- Label compliance
- Health certificate
- Physical inspection if required

Clearance is granted only after food authority release.

Step 9 – Release, Storage, and Market Entry

After clearance:

What must be done:

- Move goods to approved food warehouse
- Store according to temperature requirements
- Begin distribution to retailers

At this point, the product is legally allowed for sale in the UAE.

Step 10 – Maintain Compliance for Future Shipments

For repeat imports:

- No re-registration required if product is unchanged

- Any label or ingredient change requires re-approval
- Expired registrations must be renewed

This ensures continuous compliance with Dubai Food Import Regulations & Labeling.

Why This Step-by-Step Process Matters for Beginners

This structured process eliminates guesswork and protects beginner exporters from shipment rejection, fines, and product destruction. Following these steps exactly ensures smooth entry into the UAE food market.