

Vietnamese food exporters gain simpler pathway into China's CIFER system

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The Viet Nam Sanitary and SPS Notification Authority and Enquiry Point (Viet Nam SPS) has issued a Vietnamese-language user guide for China's CIFER system, marking a step forward in simplifying export registration procedures for Vietnamese food exporters entering the Chinese market.

The guide translates and explains the operational procedures of the CIFER (China Import Food Enterprise Registration) system, managed by China's General Administration of Customs (GACC), which is a mandatory digital platform for the registration and management of many categories of imported food products.

According to Viet Nam SPS, the initiative is intended to help enterprises navigate key processes such as new registrations, amendments, renewals, cancellations, and application tracking, all of which are now primarily conducted online through the CIFER system.

Many Vietnamese exporters have previously faced challenges in accessing and using the platform due to complex technical requirements, language barriers, and strict documentation standards. Smaller enterprises in particular often required external consultancy support or significant preparation time to complete registration dossiers in compliance with Chinese regulations.

The newly released Vietnamese-language handbook is expected to significantly reduce administrative burdens, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, by improving clarity and accessibility of system requirements and procedures.

Through CIFER, businesses are required to submit detailed applications, upload supporting documents, and monitor approval status directly with Chinese authorities. The system also enables real-time feedback and communication during the review

process.

China currently requires that 18 categories of food products—including seafood, meat, dairy, honey, bird's nest, spices, dried fruits and vegetables, seeds, and specialized dietary foods—receive official recommendation from competent authorities in the exporting country before receiving registration approval from GACC. Other product categories may be registered directly by enterprises.

The guide also emphasizes that each enterprise is allowed to maintain only one CIFER account, with specific verification procedures required for different registration types depending on product classification and regulatory pathway.

Exporters are required to provide extensive documentation, including factory details, production capacity data, raw material information, processing procedures, food safety commitments, and recent inspection reports. Additional requirements include production licenses, facility layout diagrams, product images, and labeling materials.

Industry stakeholders note that preparing compliant electronic documentation remains one of the most time-consuming aspects of the process. Even minor discrepancies or missing information can lead to rejection, requiring enterprises to restart applications from the beginning, as revisions to rejected dossiers are not permitted within the same submission.

Beyond initial registration, CIFER also governs the full lifecycle of enterprise records, including updates, renewals, cancellations, and re-inspections. Businesses are therefore required to maintain accurate and timely updates to avoid disruptions in export operations.

China's tightening food safety and traceability requirements reflect a broader shift toward stricter import controls and enhanced regulatory oversight. For Viet Nam, this presents both compliance challenges and opportunities to improve production standards, traceability systems, and export readiness.

Experts suggest that enterprises capable of meeting CIFER requirements will not only improve access to the Chinese market but also strengthen their competitiveness in other high-standard international markets. The system is also seen as a catalyst for digital transformation within Viet Nam's agricultural export sector.

Viet Nam SPS has encouraged local authorities, industry associations, and businesses to actively report difficulties during the implementation process to ensure timely guidance and continued support.