





# Where does our food come from?

**safefood** is the all island body responsible for the promotion of food safety and healthy eating messages to consumers on the island of Ireland.

**safefood** carried out a survey which showed that one in two people have concerns about where their food comes from. It showed that people are uncertain about:

1. Whether country of origin should be listed on food labelling
2. How standards for imported food are maintained
3. What certain terms really mean, for example 'Food Miles', 'Fairtrade' and 'Sustainability'.

This leaflet aims to answer some of the important questions that people have in relation to food origin.

# Where does our food come from?

More food is produced on the island of Ireland than is imported, but in recent years the amount of food imported has increased steadily.

## Tracing the World on your Plate

To show that even one simple meal can have ingredients from all over the world let's look at the example of a pizza.

Could you have guessed where your favourite Italian dish came from?

Ingredients	European Union countries	Countries outside of the European Union
Ham	UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Netherlands	Chile, Japan, Brazil, New Zealand
Processed cheese	Republic of Ireland, UK, Belgium, Germany, Northern Ireland, France	USA
Pineapples	UK, Spain, France, Netherlands, Germany	Guatemala, Costa Rica, South Africa, Panama, Puerto Rico
Processed tomatoes	UK, Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal	Australia, China, Argentina, Thailand, Israel, Morocco
Wheat	UK, Belgium, Northern Ireland, Sweden, France, Italy	India, USA, Australia

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## Which countries do most of our foods come from?

Different types of food are imported onto the island of Ireland from both EU and non-EU countries. The table below shows which foods come from which countries.

Type of food	European Union countries	Countries outside of the European Union
Cereals	Netherlands, France, Denmark, Spain	Chile, Canada, Egypt, Pakistan, Thailand, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica
Prepared foods <sup>1</sup>	Spain, Germany, Republic of Ireland, Greece, France, Portugal	USA, Israel, Turkey, India, China, Ghana, Egypt
Fruit and vegetables	Italy, Germany, France, Spain	Costa Rica, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Honduras, New Zealand
Dairy products <sup>2</sup>	Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Finland, Austria, Denmark, Italy	Kosovo, Thailand, Canada, Argentina, China, Singapore
Beverages <sup>3</sup>	Germany, Netherlands, France, Luxembourg	Kenya, Israel, India, Brazil, Indonesia, USA, Canada
Meat	France, Germany, Netherlands	Brazil, Thailand, Argentina, USA
Seafood	Germany, Belgium, Denmark	Seychelles, USA, Thailand, Philippines, India, Iceland

1 Prepared foods include processed foods (sugar, chocolate, confectionary, ingredients etc).

2 Dairy products include milk, cheese, butter, dried milk powders etc.

3 Beverages include coffee, tea, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

## How do I know if imported food is safe?

Imported food from countries that are outside the EU must come through a border inspection post and go through a series of checks before they are allowed into the EU. The Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission routinely audits the controls carried out at these border inspection posts. Once inside the EU, they then come under the same regulations and controls as foods produced inside the EU.

Meat and meat products imported into the EU may only come from a country that is approved by the EU. The importers must produce a health certificate, signed by an official veterinary surgeon in the country of export, at the border inspection post. There are strict laws in place to make sure that food imported from outside the EU is safe and produced to a high standard.

Food producers, processors, retailers and caterers also take many steps to control food hazards and minimise the risk to consumers. The safety of the food supply chain is protected by laws that are mainly enforced by the Food Standards Agency (FSANI) in Northern Ireland and the Food Safety Authority (FSAI) in the Republic of Ireland.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The gross turnover for the food and drink industry on the island of Ireland in 2007 was approximately €20.9 billion (£10.6 billion), the total food exports were €9.2 billion (£8.44 billion) and the food imports were €5.1 billion (£4.66 billion).





## DID YOU KNOW?

Most of the meat and dairy products imported onto the island of Ireland come from within the EU.

## Is there any evidence that food from outside the EU is less safe than food from inside the EU?

On the island of Ireland, only one recorded outbreak (illness caused by food) thought to be associated with imported food has ever been reported<sup>1</sup>.

While there are incidences of contamination (eg. mycotoxins, foreign bodies, allergens, irradiation) these are monitored and controlled through EU inspections.

## How do we know that producers in other countries are keeping to food-production standards?

The low number of confirmed food outbreaks associated with imported foods means that standards are being kept at a high level. Since 2004, there have been no confirmed outbreaks associated with imported foods. There are laws and procedures in place to assure consumers that food produced in other countries is of a high standard.

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<sup>1</sup> In September 2004, 113 cases of *Salmonella* Newport were found. These were linked to lettuce that was thought to have originated from mainland Europe. There were no confirmed cases of the illness in the ROI; however, one case was found in Co. Donegal which may have been associated with the UK outbreak.

## Why can some foods be traced back to the producer but not others?

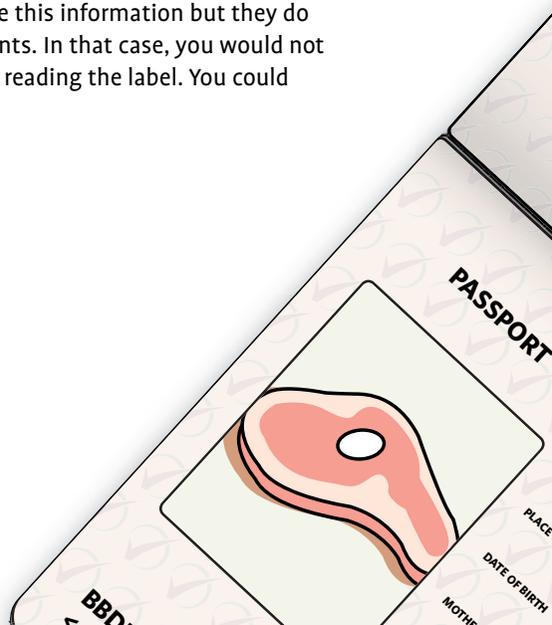
For a number of food safety reasons, it is important to be able to trace food from farm to fork. There are regulations in place for some foods, such as beef, where it is possible to trace the food from farm to fork as the name of the supplier or farmer must be displayed on the packaging. However, since some foods are processed and may have lots of ingredients from different countries (for example pork sausages or ready meals) they cannot be traced back to the farmer.

## How do we know if the country of origin stated on the pack is the true country of origin?

It is against the law for a food manufacturer to mislead a customer. For some foods, it is compulsory for the manufacturer to include the country of origin on the product label. Beef, veal, fish, shellfish, wine, most fresh fruit and vegetables, honey, olive oil, and poultry meat imported from outside the EU must state the country of origin on the label. Most food companies do tell the truth about food origin but it is important to read labels carefully.

## If a food is packaged on the island of Ireland, how do I know where it's from?

Pre-packaged foods must be labelled with the name of the manufacturer, packager or seller. The supplier must provide this information but they do not have to list the origin of all the ingredients. In that case, you would not be able to tell where the food came from by reading the label. You could contact the manufacturer directly.



## Why is there no Irish or Northern Irish quality symbol? I would prefer to know if my food was produced locally.

For some products, it is easy to see whether they are produced in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. There are a number of quality assurance schemes in place for food on the island of Ireland. For the Republic of Ireland, the Bord Bia Quality Mark on meat, eggs, fruit and vegetables means that the fresh food carrying the Mark has been produced to the highest standards and its origin can be traced back to the farm.

For Northern Ireland, there are several quality assurance schemes in place. An example is the Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance for beef and lamb (you can see the mark below). Other examples include the Northern Ireland Pig Quality Assurance Scheme and the Assured Produce Scheme.



**northern ireland**   
**farm quality assurance**



**DID YOU KNOW?**

The largest amounts of foods imported onto the island of Ireland are cereals, fruit and vegetables.





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[www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)