

# 2025 Guide to Crossing Borders with Holiday Food

Rules, restrictions, and reality for crossing borders with holiday food

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Holiday traditions often involve special foods, but transporting them across international borders requires understanding complex regulations.

## Declaration is Critical to a Safe Crossing

### Every food item must be declared, regardless of:

- How it's packaged
- Whether you think it's allowed
- Its value or quantity
- Your citizenship status

### Failure to declare food results in:

- Confiscation of items
- Fines starting at \$300
- Potential criminal charges for intentional violations
- Delays affecting your entire travel party

## Meat and Poultry Products

Most restrictive category due to disease concerns.

### Prohibited:

- All fresh, frozen, or refrigerated meat
- Raw or partially cooked poultry
- Sausages and cured meats (unless commercially canned)
- Home-prepared items containing any meat
- Gravy or stuffing containing meat products

### Limited exceptions:

- Commercially canned meat (labeled and sealed)
- Fully cooked and shelf-stable products
- Dried meat snacks (commercially packaged)

That home-cooked turkey? Cannot cross. Grandma's famous stuffing with sausage? Prohibited. Ham for holiday dinner? Not allowed unless commercially canned.

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## Dairy Products

Complex regulations vary by product and origin.

### Generally prohibited:

- Unpasteurized milk and cheeses
- Fresh dairy products
- Items requiring refrigeration

### Generally allowed with declaration:

- Hard-aged cheeses
- Commercially packaged butter
- Powdered milk products
- Shelf-stable dairy items

## Fruits and Vegetables

Most fresh produce cannot be imported/cross borders due to concerns about pests and diseases.

### Prohibited:

- Fresh fruits (includes decorative arrangements)
- Fresh vegetables
- Plants and plant cuttings
- Seeds

### Allowed exceptions:

- Some commercially frozen items
- Certain canned products
- Dried fruits (commercially packaged)

## Baked Goods and Desserts

Seemingly innocent baked goods create confusion.

### Allowed:

- Bread without meat ingredients
- Cookies and pastries (no meat fillings)
- Cakes and pies (no meat-based ingredients)
- Commercially packaged baked goods

### Prohibited:

- Items containing meat (pork in tamales, bacon in appetizers)
- Products with unpasteurized dairy
- Anything with fresh fruit fillings

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## Prepared Dishes

Complex prepared foods face the strictest scrutiny.

Each ingredient matters. A casserole containing vegetables, cheese, and turkey faces prohibition because of the turkey, even though other ingredients might be allowed separately.

## Regional Considerations

Regulations vary by crossing point and origin country. Mexico-US crossings have different restrictions than Canada-US crossings. Research specific requirements for your route.

## Practical Strategies

- Ship items ahead — non-perishable foods can be mailed legally if allowed for import
- Purchase at destination — eliminates crossing complications entirely
- Choose allowed items — focus on baked goods, hard cheeses, and shelf-stable items
- Prepare accurate declarations — list every food item you're bringing

## When Officers Question Your Food

### Officers may:

- Ask detailed questions about ingredients
- Request to see items
- Open the packaging for inspection
- Confiscate prohibited items
- Issue fines for undeclared items

Cooperate fully and honestly. Arguing about confiscated items doesn't change regulations.

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