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A 'paradigm shift' coming for imported food

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Food importers will soon have to verify the safety of their products, whether garlic from China or hot sauce from Mexico, the FDA says in new rules released Friday.

The import measures, part of a broader suite of rules mandated by the Food Safety Modernization Act, will apply to nearly a fifth of the U.S. food supply and are a "fundamental paradigm shift," Michael Taylor, FDA's deputy commissioner for foods and veterinary medicine, said on a media call Friday.

For decades, the FDA has reacted to food-safety problems, whether found through limited import screening or domestic outbreaks (the most recent example being a salmonella outbreak linked to cucumbers from Mexico that has sickened nearly 770 people: <http://1.usa.gov/1infewo>). But the agency will soon require importers to have "foreign supplier verification programs," systems for verifying that their suppliers are manufacturing or growing food in "a manner that provides the same level of public health protection" as required of U.S. companies. Importers have some flexibility in how they can set up their programs, but many will have to do on-site audits of their suppliers if they determine the risk of contamination is high enough.

FDA has a helpful overview of the rule, which takes effect in 18 months, here: <http://1.usa.gov/1HS9T6s>

Landmark new rules for produce: The agency also released a major new regulation that sets the first federal food safety standards for produce growers, including new requirements on worker hygiene, water testing and keeping wildlife out of fields. Read the FDA's overview of the produce safety

rule here: <http://1.usa.gov/1X14K2X>. Pros can read the latest on the water requirements, the most controversial part of the regulation, here: <http://politico.pro/1Ps1ChD>.