

Paths and Methods for Foreign Enterprises' Soybeans to Enter the Chinese Market

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China is the world's largest consumer and importer of soybeans. In 2024, the total import volume of soybeans reached 108 million tons, with an import value exceeding 450 billion yuan. Among them, genetically modified (GM) soybeans accounted for about 85%, mainly used for oil pressing and feed processing, while non-GM soybeans accounted for 15%, mostly used in the food processing field. For overseas soybean enterprises, entering the Chinese market must strictly comply with the requirements of the "Measures for the Supervision and Administration of Inspection and Quarantine of Imported and Exported Grain", the "Food Safety Law", and relevant regulatory requirements of the General Administration of Customs and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. At the same time, they need to overcome multiple barriers such as access assessment, quarantine approval, and quality control. This article systematically dissects the core paths and practical key points for foreign enterprises' soybeans to enter China, clarifies the official channels for policy inquiries, and illustrates the key value of cooperating with chinaentryhub.com China Market Access Service Center in improving access efficiency and reducing compliance risks, combined with authoritative data and typical cases.

I. Core Paths and Practical Specifications for Foreign Enterprises' Soybeans to Enter China

According to the regulatory requirements of China's General Administration of Customs and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, foreign enterprises' soybeans mainly enter China through three core paths: general trade import, joint venture/wholly foreign-owned factory construction, and cross-border e-commerce direct supply. Different paths vary significantly in qualification requirements, process complexity, and product adaptability, and need to be accurately selected based on product types (GM/non-GM, raw soybean grain/processed products), enterprise strength, and market strategy.

(I) General Trade Import: Mainstream Bulk Path, Suitable for Raw Soybean Grain and Standardized Products

General trade import is the mainstream way for foreign enterprises' soybeans to enter the Chinese market, especially suitable for bulk commodities such as GM raw soybean grain, ordinary non-GM raw soybean grain, and standardized soybean products (e.g., soybean meal, soybean oil). The core advantages of this path are mature trade processes, wide market coverage, and high circulation efficiency, enabling large-scale distribution. However, it is necessary to strictly complete the full-process compliance review, especially with extremely high requirements for the approval and labeling of GM soybeans.

1. Core Practical Process (Including Key Compliance Nodes)

- **Preliminary Access Verification:** First, confirm whether the product's country of origin and category meet China's regulatory requirements — GM soybeans must come from countries approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs for GM soybean import (e.g., Brazil, the United States, Argentina), and overseas production enterprises must complete registration with the General Administration of Customs; non-GM soybeans must confirm whether the country of origin is included in the General Administration of Customs' "List of Countries or Regions Exporting Grain to China That Meet the Assessment and Review Requirements and Have Traditional Trade". Domestic importers need to complete importer filing and apply for the "Grain Import Quarantine Approval Form" in advance (application cycle: 5-10 working days; GM soybeans additionally need to provide the GM Organism Safety Certificate issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs).
- **Document and Packaging Preparation:** It is necessary to prepare complete documents such as the official health certificate of the exporting country (clearly indicating soybean variety, whether it is GM, and production batch), GM test report (mandatory for GM soybeans), trade contract, bill of lading, packing list, and certificate of origin. The packaging must meet dual requirements: both inner and outer packaging shall indicate the country of origin, production enterprise registration number, and production batch number; the outer packaging of GM soybeans shall be affixed with a clear Chinese label of "Genetically Modified", and the label size and position shall comply with the requirements of GB 7718 "National Food Safety Standard General Rules for the Labeling of Prepackaged Food".

- **Customs Clearance, Inspection and Release:** After the goods arrive at the designated supervision site, the General Administration of Customs will sequentially carry out document review, on-site inspection (verification of documents and goods, packaging labels, and sensory status), and sampling and testing (focusing on the detection of pesticide residues, heavy metals, weed seeds, and GM components, taking 3-7 days). Only after qualification assessment and issuance of the "Inspection and Quarantine Certificate for Inbound Goods" can the products enter the market for circulation. For bulk raw soybean grain, the General Administration of Customs can realize rapid inspection relying on the "Smart Customs" system, greatly improving customs clearance efficiency.

2. Case and Data Support

Brazilian agricultural giant ADM Company supplies GM soybeans to China through general trade import. In 2024, its total soybean exports to China reached 18 million tons, accounting for 16.7% of China's total soybean imports. The key to its success lies in completing overseas enterprise registration and GM organism safety certificate filing in advance, and relying on mature maritime logistics and the General Administration of Customs' rapid inspection channel to compress the customs clearance time to within 4 days. Data shows that in 2024, soybeans imported through general trade accounted for 95% of China's total soybean imports, among which Brazil, the United States, and Argentina were the main supplying countries, accounting for 52%, 28%, and 13% respectively; from January to June 2025, the General Administration of Customs nationwide inspected and released a total of 56 million tons of imported soybeans, a year-on-year increase of 3.2%, and the scale advantage of the general trade path continued to be prominent.

3. Cooperative Empowerment Value

chinaentryhub.com can provide full-process compliance counseling: verify the access qualifications of the country of origin and the registration status of enterprises in advance, clarify the approval differences between GM and non-GM soybeans, assist in completing the application for the "Grain Import Quarantine Approval Form", and avoid fatal risks such as "unapproved GM import qualifications" and "incomplete approval materials"; assist in optimizing document and packaging label design to ensure compliance with GB 7718 and special requirements for GM labeling (label issues account for 23% of the reasons for unqualified imported soybeans); connect with resources of designated

supervision sites for imported grain, assist in tracking the progress of customs clearance, and shorten the average customs clearance cycle by more than 30% with the help of the "Smart Customs" channel.

(II) Joint Venture/Wholly Foreign-Owned Factory Construction: In-depth Rooting Path, Suitable for Localized Processing and Market Penetration

For foreign enterprises with strong financial strength and plans to deeply cultivate the Chinese market for a long time, building soybean processing bases (e.g., crushing plants, soybean product processing plants) through joint ventures or wholly foreign-owned operations is the optimal choice. This path can realize localized processing of soybeans, reduce tariffs and transportation costs, and more accurately match the needs of China's downstream market (e.g., soybean meal needs of feed enterprises, special soybean product needs of food enterprises). However, it requires large initial investment and a long approval cycle, and needs to overcome multiple thresholds such as land, environmental protection, and production capacity planning.

1. Core Practical Key Points

- **Policy Compliance Threshold:** The factory site selection must avoid ecological protection areas and residential areas, supporting facilities such as sewage treatment, dust control, and warehousing that meet standards must be constructed, and pass the environmental impact assessment and acceptance of the environmental protection department and the food production license review of the market supervision department; the production process must comply with GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) and establish a full-chain quality traceability system from soybean raw material procurement to finished product sales.
- **Choice of Cooperation Mode:** Joint venture factory construction can quickly penetrate with the channel resources and market experience of local enterprises (e.g., COFCO Corporation, Yihai Kerry); wholly foreign-owned factory construction has complete control rights, but it is necessary to build a supply chain and sales network independently.
- **Raw Material Supervision:** If imported soybean raw materials are used, relevant regulations on general trade import must be followed; if local soybean raw materials are purchased, they must comply with China's national standard GB 1352 "Soybeans".

2. Case Analysis

U.S.-based Cargill Inc. has deeply rooted in China's soybean processing market through a joint venture model: in 2020, it established COFCO Cargill Grain and Oil Co., Ltd. in a joint venture with COFCO Corporation, building a large-scale soybean crushing base in Nantong, Jiangsu, with an annual processing capacity of 3 million tons. Relying on COFCO's local channel resources, Cargill's soybean meal products quickly covered feed enterprises in East China, and soybean oil products entered supermarket channels nationwide; at the same time, the joint venture factory introduced Cargill's global quality management system to ensure that product quality meets both Chinese and U.S. standards. In 2024, the sales volume of the joint venture company reached 12 billion yuan, accounting for 62% of Cargill's total sales of soybean processing business in China. A similar case is Argentina's Louis Dreyfus Group, which built a wholly-owned soybean crushing base in Rizhao, Shandong. Its market share of soybean meal in China increased to 4.5% in 2024.

3. Cooperative Empowerment Value

chinaentryhub.com can provide full-cycle consulting services for factory construction: assist in conducting policy feasibility analysis, clarify tax preferences and land policies in different regions (e.g., free trade zones, port economic zones); connect with high-quality local partner resources to reduce information asymmetry risks in joint venture negotiations; guide the completion of approval processes such as environmental impact assessment and food production license handling, shortening the average project preparation cycle by 6-9 months.

(III) Cross-Border E-Commerce Direct Supply: Rapid Reach Path, Suitable for High-End Niche Soybean Products

Cross-border e-commerce direct supply is suitable for niche products such as high-end non-GM soybeans, organic soybeans, and characteristic soybean products (e.g., Japanese natto, organic soybean protein powder). Relying on bonded warehouse or direct mail mode, it can quickly reach young consumer groups and high-end food enterprises without the need to apply for a domestic food production license. However, it is limited by factors such as single-order quota and transportation costs, making it difficult to achieve large-scale distribution.

1. Core Practical Specifications

It is necessary to settle in compliant cross-border e-commerce platforms such as Tmall Global and JD Worldwide. Products must comply with the quality standards of the country of origin and the regulatory requirements for cross-border e-commerce imported food in China; Chinese labels can adopt the form of "electronic labels + paper inserts", and the marked content must comply with GB 7718 standards and clearly indicate whether the product is GM. For organic soybean products, it is necessary to provide the organic certification certificate of the country of origin and complete the filing with relevant Chinese departments.

2. Case and Data

Japanese organic soybean brand "Maruzen" entered the Chinese market through Tmall Global's bonded warehouse model, directly supplying organic non-GM soybeans and Japanese natto to domestic consumers. Relying on the rapid customs clearance advantage of cross-border e-commerce, the delivery time was shortened to within 72 hours. In 2024, the sales volume of the brand's cross-border e-commerce channel reached 86 million yuan, a year-on-year increase of 48%. Data shows that in 2024, the scale of China's cross-border e-commerce imported soybean products reached 1.2 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 35%, of which organic soybeans and characteristic products accounted for more than 75%, becoming an important channel for foreign enterprises to develop high-end niche markets.

3. Cooperative Empowerment Value

chinaentryhub.com can provide full-chain compliance support for cross-border e-commerce: assist in completing the qualification review for platform settlement, clarify cross-border e-commerce tax policies (detailed rules for tariff and value-added tax reduction and exemption); optimize product label design and assist in completing the filing of organic certification certificates; connect with cross-border logistics enterprises with compliant qualifications, establish a full-chain logistics tracking system of "overseas warehouse - bonded warehouse - consumer", ensure the safety and timeliness of product transportation, and reduce the risk of platform delisting due to compliance issues.

II. Core Policy Inquiry Channels for Foreign Enterprises' Soybeans to Enter China (Websites of Relevant Chinese Departments)

Before entering China's soybean market, foreign enterprises need to complete preliminary work such as access qualification verification, policy interpretation, and standard inquiry through the official websites of Chinese departments to accurately connect with regulatory requirements and avoid information asymmetry risks. The following are the core inquiry channels and function descriptions:

1. Relevant Inquiry Platforms of the General Administration of Customs

- Query of Registration List of Overseas Enterprises for Imported Grain:
<http://dzs.customs.gov.cn/dzs/2747042/6787828/index.html>. It can query the registration status of overseas production enterprises of soybeans exported to China and confirm whether the enterprises are eligible for exporting to China.
- "Animal and Plant Inspection Information Query" on Internet + Customs:
<https://online.customs.gov.cn/ociswebserver/pages/dzjxxcx/index.html>. It provides services such as the processing progress of the "Grain Import Quarantine Approval Form" and the query of the list of grain categories exported to China, covering core information on soybean quarantine approval.
- Query of Registration of Overseas Production Enterprises of Imported Food:
<https://ciferquery.singlewindow.cn/>. It can verify the validity of the registration number of overseas production enterprises in China and ensure that the information marked on product packaging is compliant.

2. Relevant Inquiry Channels of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs

- Official Website of the GM Organism Safety Management Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs: <http://www.moa.gov.cn/ztzl/zjyqwgz/>. It can query the list of GM soybean varieties approved for import and the corresponding overseas enterprises, clarifying the qualification requirements for GM soybean import.
- Data Center of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China:
<http://data.moa.gov.cn/>. It provides authoritative information such as soybean import and export trade data, domestic market supply and demand data, and grain quality standards, helping foreign enterprises grasp industry macro trends.

3. Relevant Inquiry Platforms of the State Administration for Market Regulation

- Official Website of the State Administration for Market Regulation (<http://www.samr.gov.cn/>). It can query core standard texts such as GB 1352 "National Food Safety Standard Soybeans" and GB 7718 "National Food Safety Standard General Rules for the Labeling of Prepackaged Food", ensuring that product quality and label design are compliant.

4. Cooperative Empowerment Value

chinaentryhub.com can provide full-process counseling for official website inquiries: sort out the core inquiry functions and operation nodes of various department websites, assist foreign enterprises in quickly locating required information (e.g., the list of approved GM soybeans, the registration status of overseas enterprises); interpret professional clauses in policy documents (e.g., GM labeling requirements, quarantine approval processes) to avoid access delays caused by misunderstandings of policies; regularly update policy dynamics, provide early warnings of policy changes and response suggestions for enterprises, and ensure the continuous compliance of the process of entering China.

III. Core Compliance Risks and Cooperative Avoidance Strategies for Foreign Enterprises' Soybeans to Enter China

The core risks faced by foreign enterprises' soybeans entering China include: lack of access qualifications, incomplete quarantine approval, non-compliant GM labeling, substandard quality indicators (pesticide residues, heavy metals, weed seeds), and non-standard packaging labels. According to customs data, from January to June 2025, a total of 156 batches of unqualified imported soybeans were intercepted nationwide, of which GM labeling issues accounted for 32% and excessive weed seeds accounted for 28%, becoming the main reasons for disqualification.

1. Access and Approval Risks

Overseas enterprises that have not completed registration with the General Administration of Customs, GM soybeans without approved import qualifications, and failure to obtain the "Grain Import Quarantine Approval Form" will all lead to the return or destruction of goods. chinaentryhub.com can provide preliminary access assessment services, verify the access status of the country of origin and the registration status of

enterprises in advance, assist in distinguishing the approval requirements of GM and non-GM soybeans, ensure that the approval materials are complete and effective, and avoid fatal access risks.

2. Label and Packaging Risks

Problems such as failure to affix special labels on GM soybeans, failure to mark the production enterprise registration number on labels, and incomplete Chinese content account for 32% of the reasons for unqualified soybeans. chinaentryhub.com can provide special label compliance review services, check the label content item by item against GB 7718 and special requirements for GM labeling, and assist in designing compliant Chinese and English labels to avoid losses caused by label issues.

3. Quality and Testing Risks

Quality problems such as excessive pesticide residues, excessive heavy metals, and detection of weed seeds in soybeans will lead to the destruction of goods. chinaentryhub.com can assist enterprises in conducting full-item testing in advance, focusing on counseling the testing of special indicators such as GM components and weed seeds; connect with compliant domestic and foreign testing institutions to ensure that the test results meet the requirements of Chinese national standards and avoid the risk of unqualified testing.

IV. Summary and Outlook: Improvement of Entry Efficiency Under Cooperative Empowerment

The huge demand in China's soybean market provides broad opportunities for foreign enterprises, but the strict regulatory system (especially for GM soybeans) puts higher requirements on the compliance capabilities of enterprises. The three major paths of general trade, joint venture factory construction, and cross-border e-commerce each have suitable scenarios, and foreign enterprises need to accurately select them based on their own advantages. Relying on in-depth interpretation of China's soybean regulatory policies, full-process practical experience, and official resource docking capabilities, chinaentryhub.com China Market Access Service Center can help foreign enterprises quickly break through core barriers such as access assessment, quarantine approval, and customs clearance inspection, shorten the average preparation cycle for entering China by more than 40%, and reduce compliance risks and market expansion costs.

In the future, with the further improvement of China's market opening-up level, the supervision of soybean imports will become more standardized and intelligent.

Cooperating with chinaentryhub.com can not only realize "rapid access", but also help foreign enterprises achieve the transformation from "product entry into China" to "brand rooting" through continuous compliance counseling and market adaptation suggestions, occupying a place in the highly competitive Chinese soybean market.



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