

British Shop Sold Illegal Foods in Canada

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SASKATOON - The future of a British specialty shop in Saskatoon is in limbo after several of its most popular foods were deemed illegal and pulled from the shelves.

Brit Foods owner Tony Badger says he's sold products like Irn-Bru, Marmite and Ovaltine in his three stores since 1997.

But he's been notified by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency some of their ingredients are illegal in Canada.

The CFIA could not be reached for comment.

Badger also has stores in Edmonton Alta, and Parksville, B.C.

He says this is the first time he's had trouble with his products, adding he's seen Marmite and Ovaltine sold in other stores across Canada.

"We've been bringing Irn-Bru in since the very beginning," Badger said, referring to a Scottish, caffeinated soft drink. "My understanding was we were importing legally. We've been declaring it through a customs broker and we've never had an issue until now."

However, Irn-Bru contains the red food colouring Ponceau 4R, which is not on the CFIA's approved list of food additives.

According to the CFIA's letter to Badger, Marmite, Ovaltine, Lucozade, Penguin Bars and Bovril "are enriched with vitamins and minerals" and therefore illegal.

Other products like canned soup and stock contained too much animal products.

Badger's product trouble began last October when his Christmas shipment was detained for inspection. Badger said that isn't unusual but he began to ask questions when the process took longer than usual.

He said sending requests for more information and getting anything in writing was a challenge and all the CFIA told him was that some of his products didn't meet Canadian standards.

In order to get the legal products released, Badger had to abandon the seized products. What was left of the shipment finally arrived on Dec. 18. He said he still hasn't received a list of the products that were seized and abandoned.

CFIA officials then came to his store last week and seized the remaining product from his shelves.

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"The concern now is, with the next shipment, if it gets held there may be new issues with new products, so it somewhat paralyses our ability to bring new product in," he said, adding the uncertainty is killing his business.

Customer Brian Smith said he regularly comes to the shop for Ovaltine and Royal Game soup, both of which were removed.

"I can feel for Tony on this because I think it's unfair that he's been in business since 1997 and now they're all of a sudden stopping it," said Smith. "It's good enough for the U.K., it should be good enough for Canada."

Badger's only silver lining has been word that the CFIA is now conducting a health-risk assessment to see whether the products should be sold in Canada.

"When this health-risk assessment is done we should know definitively whether you can import Irn-Bru," he said.

Irn-Bru maker A.G. Barr's website said the company is working to replace the food colouring to bring the product in line with the new guidelines set by the Food Standards Agency. The company assures the public the colouring is safe but all products with Ponceau 4R (E124) must carry a warning label stating the it could cause hyperactivity in children.

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