KINGSTAR SOURCING GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

Sourcing Canned and Ambient Food from China

A Buyer's Verification Playbook

Prepared by Kingstar Food
Xiamen Kingstar Imp. & Exp. Co., Ltd.
Unit 1103, No. 221-1 Lianyue Road, Siming District, Xiamen, P.R. of China

sales@kingstarfood.com · kingstar.si · kingstarfood.com

Certifications: BRCGS, IFS, ISO 22000, HACCP, BSCI / SEDEX social audits, EcoVadis Silver (74/100)

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Who this guide is for, and what it is not

This playbook is written for importers, own-brand retailers and food-service distributors who buy canned, jarred or ambient food from China, and who want the first order to be a controlled risk rather than a bet.

It is a **verification sequence**, not a product brochure. Every check in it is one we expect a buyer to run on us, and most of them cost nothing but an hour of attention. The last section explains how we are structured and what we can put in front of you, so you can apply the same checks to us.

What it is not: it does not replace a lawyer, a licensed inspector or your own visit to the plant. It tells you when each of those is worth paying for.

The one rule: never let a payment run ahead of a verification step

Almost every sourcing loss — a deposit sent to the wrong entity, a container of under-filled cans, a certificate that turned out to belong to a different site — traces back to a payment that moved before a check was run. Three gates prevent most of it:

Gate	When	What must have happened
Gate 1 — deposit	Before any money moves	Legal entity, contract party, invoice header and bank beneficiary match; registration data checked; production site identified; production-site certificate verified
Gate 2 — production	Before mass production	Specification sheet signed; golden sample approved and counter-held by both parties; label artwork approved
Gate 3 — balance	Before the balance payment	Pre-shipment inspection passed against your specification at the agreed AQL, with photographic evidence
Tooling / plates	Before payment	Written ownership terms — you own the tooling or the print plates you paid for

If a supplier resists a gate, that is information about the supplier. If a buyer skips a gate because the order is urgent, that is how the expensive cases start.

Phase 1 — Write the requirement before you write to anyone

A vague brief invites a vague quotation, and vague quotations cannot be compared.

What a usable specification contains

- Product and variety, with any origin or grade requirement (for tuna: species, packing medium, chunk/flake/solid)
- Pack format: can or jar size, easy-open or standard end, net weight and drained weight
- Recipe parameters that change the price: brix, brine strength, in-juice versus syrup, oil content, added sugar or salt

- Label and carton requirements, including the destination market's labelling rules
- Destination market and port, and the compliance regime that follows from it
- Volume per variety, and whether a first mixed container is acceptable
- Target cost, and the Incoterm you are pricing against
- Delivery window, and the seasonality constraint behind it

Send the brief to a shortlist, not to the world. Five to eight suppliers gives you comparable answers; twenty gives you a spreadsheet and no signal. Score the replies on: completeness against your specification, technical questions asked back, willingness to quote a mixed container, and speed.

Phase 2 — Verify the supplier before you discuss price

2.1 The name test

The registered company name must match across four documents: the contract, the invoice, the bank beneficiary and the certificate holder. In China the bank account name is the legal entity name — an account held by an individual, or a "group collection account", is a red flag, not a convenience.

2.2 Registration data

Business scope, establishment date, registered capital and status are public on China's National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System (gsxt.gov.cn). Read the scope for what the company may do, and the establishment date for how long it has existed. A young company can be competent; it is simply a different risk decision.

2.3 Headcount against social-insurance data

Website claims of "500 employees" routinely fail a cross-check against the number of employees enrolled for social insurance. A cannery running two shifts is not staffed like a trading office. This is the cheapest reality check available.

2.4 Export records, not export claims

Ask for shipping documentation from the last twelve months for a comparable product, and ask which markets the product is already approved or registered in. "We export worldwide" is a claim; a bill of lading is evidence.

2.5 Factory or trading company — and is it disclosed?

Many Chinese exporters are not the factory. That is legitimate when it is disclosed. The tests: whose name is on the production licence for your category; whose name and address are on the BRCGS, IFS or HACCP certificate; who answers the technical questions; and who signs the contract. Undisclosed structure is a risk — disclosed structure is a supply-chain decision, and it should be written into the purchase order.

Phase 3 — Verify the certificates properly

3.1 Certificates belong to a site, not to a brand

A BRCGS or IFS certificate names one production site, at one address, with a defined scope of products and processes. If your order is produced elsewhere, the certificate may be genuine and still not cover your product.

3.2 Read four fields first

1. **Site name and address** — does it match the entity producing your order?
2. **Scope statement** — does it cover your product category and process?
3. **Grade** — BRCGS uses letter grades; IFS uses a level. Both move with audit findings.
4. **Issue and expiry dates** — an expired certificate is a historical document.

3.3 Then verify at the issuing body

Search the site name or certificate number in the scheme's own directory (BRCGS Directory, IFS certificate database) and compare scope and validity. This takes a couple of minutes and settles the question, because the certificate holder cannot edit those records.

3.4 Check the certification body

Certificates are issued by accredited certification bodies, not by the scheme owner. In China, certification bodies and their approvals are listed by the national accreditation authority (cnca.gov.cn); internationally they carry IAF-member accreditation. An unfamiliar body issuing a very cheap certificate with an unusually broad scope is a pattern worth pausing on.

3.5 Fake or unsuitable certificate signals

- A scope written so broadly it covers anything ("food products"), or a scope that differs between the PDF and the directory entry
- No certificate number, or a number the directory does not recognise
- A "site" address that is a residential building, an office tower or a virtual office
- No audit date, no auditor identification, no corrective-action history
- Pressure to accept the certificate as the only audit evidence, and to decline a buyer audit

3.6 ISO 22000, HACCP, social audits and EcoVadis

ISO 22000 is verifiable with the issuing certification body. HACCP certificates are issued locally and vary widely in what they verify — treat them as supplementary. BSCI and SEDEX SMETA reports carry an audit ID the buyer can validate with the scheme owner, and a SMETA report is only useful with the corrective-action plan attached. An EcoVadis rating is a buyer-facing sustainability assessment tied to an assessed legal entity: ask for the scorecard rather than a logo, and check the entity name and validity window.

Phase 4 — Verify the site, not the story

4.1 The video walkthrough, with an agenda

Screen-shared video is not an audit, but it is a strong filter when it is unscripted between fixed points. Send the agenda in advance:

1. Raw-material intake, grading and rejection log
2. Preparation and filling area
3. **The seamer** — ask for a seam teardown to be performed on camera
4. **The retort** — ask to see the operator's records and the instrument calibration tags
5. Metal detection or X-ray — critical limit, test piece, rejection mechanism
6. Label and date-coding station, artwork approval file
7. Finished-goods warehouse and container loading area

Then ask a follow-up question about something you saw. Fluency is the tell.

4.2 The audit day, in flow order

- **Retort first.** Ask for the scheduled process for your product and pack size, recent batch records, calibration status and how deviations are handled and re-processed. If a plant resists this section, stop there.
- **Seam integrity.** Teardown frequency, measured parameters, pass criteria, and what happens to product when a seam fails.
- **Foreign material.** Metal detection and X-ray critical limits, test-piece frequency, glass and hard-plastic policy, documented glass-breakage procedure.
- **Hygiene and allergens.** Personnel flow, cleaning between allergen-bearing runs, swab or rinse verification.
- **Water, steam and effluent.** Potable-water test reports; steam in contact with food should be food-grade.
- **Traceability, live.** Pick a finished pallet and ask the plant to walk it back to raw-material lots and forward to the container.

Budget: one full day for a single-line cannery; two for multi-line or multi-product. Third-party audit days in China typically run in the region of a few hundred US dollars per man-day — compare that with one rejected container.

Phase 5 — Documents: agree the list in the purchase order

5.1 The core set

- Certificate of Analysis, per production batch, against your specification
- Health certificate issued by the competent Chinese authority for the category
- Certificate of origin, in the format your tariff treatment requires
- Free sale certificate, where your market requires proof of free sale in the country of origin
- Commercial invoice, packing list, bill of lading or sea waybill
- Embassy or consular legalisation, where required

5.2 Market-specific additions

- **European Union** — products of animal origin such as canned tuna and other fish require an approved establishment and a veterinary health certificate, handled through the EU's TRACES system. Approval is granted per site: confirm the producing site holds it.
- **United States** — FDA prior notice, facility registration and, for low-acid canned foods, a filed scheduled process. Your own FSVP obligations sit with the supplier you use.
- **Middle East and North Africa** — halal status, Arabic labelling rules, date formats, and in some markets shelf-life limits measured from production date.
- **Latin America** — foreign-establishment or product registration in several markets; requirements differ enough by country to belong in the PO as a line item.

5.3 Labelling is a document too

Ingredient order, allergen statement, net and drained weight, nutrition format, lot and date coding, importer identification and country of origin. Artwork approval takes longer than most buyers expect — send your artwork requirement with the specification.

Phase 6 — Structure payment to survive one bad surprise

The purpose of staged payment is to cap the loss, not to save money.

- **Gate 1:** deposit only after the name test and verification pass
- **Gate 3:** balance only against a passed pre-shipment inspection
- **Instruments:** telegraphic transfer is cheapest once a verification routine exists; a letter of credit adds document discipline on a first order or a large value, but read the L/C terms against the documents you can actually obtain; escrow or payment platforms reduce transfer risk but do not verify quality; credit insurance transfers part of the residual risk for a premium
- **The scam that still works:** a late email, apparently from the supplier, changing the bank details. Never change bank details on the strength of an email — confirm by a live call to a number you already held, and require a signed change notice from the legal entity

Before the first payment, have in hand: registration data and status, bank beneficiary matching the registered entity, export documentation for a comparable shipment, a production-site certificate covering your category, and a purchase order that states the document list, the inspection gate and the claims route.

Phase 7 — Pre-shipment inspection before the balance

When: goods finished, packed and labelled, with the bulk in cartons. Book the agency five to seven days ahead and give the factory three to five days' notice. An inspection arranged on the loading day cannot produce findings you can act on.

Brief the agency in writing: your specification, the sampling plan (AQL 2.5 major / 4.0 minor is a common default), the critical-defect list, the approved artwork and the packing configuration. A report written against the supplier's description instead of your specification is worthless.

Canned-food specifics to name in the brief

- Net weight and drained weight per can — weighed, not declared

- Brix or brine strength, where your specification sets it
- Vacuum or internal pressure check; can and double-seam inspection for dents, rust, leakage and seam damage
- Label and date-code check against approved artwork, including market-specific date format
- Carton marks, carton condition, pallet configuration; container condition and loading supervision where agreed
- Laboratory report on the sampled cans for brix and drained weight, rather than inspector judgement alone

If it fails: do not release the balance. Ask for the retaining sample to be sealed and the failure documented with photographs and batch numbers, then require a written remedy — rework and re-inspection, batch replacement, or a credit against the invoice.

Phase 8 — Claims: decide the route before you need it

Put the claim ladder in the purchase order: what evidence is required (photographs, batch and lot numbers, the retained sample, third-party report), which remedies are available (rework, replacement, credit, price adjustment), who carries the cost of freight, storage and disposal, and the deadline for raising a claim after arrival. Buyers who agree this in advance resolve claims in days; buyers who rely on goodwill resolve a fraction of them.

Master checklist

Before the order ☐ Specification sheet written and sent with the RFQ ☐ Legal entity, contract party, invoice and bank beneficiary identical ☐ Registration data, business scope and establishment date checked ☐ Stated headcount cross-checked against social-insurance data ☐ Export documentation for a comparable product reviewed ☐ Production site identified and disclosed in writing ☐ Production-site certificate verified at the issuing body, scope included

Before production ☐ Golden sample approved, signed and counter-held ☐ Label artwork approved against the destination market's rules ☐ Document list agreed in the purchase order ☐ Payment gates and the claim ladder written into the PO

Before the balance ☐ Pre-shipment inspection passed at the agreed AQL, with photographic evidence ☐ Documents issued and checked against the destination market's list ☐ Ownership terms signed for any tooling or print plates paid for

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How Kingstar works — apply the checks to us

Xiamen Kingstar Imp. & Exp. Co., Ltd. has exported canned and ambient foods since **1998**. We are the exporting, quality-controlling and documentation party; production and packing run at **40+ audited co-packer sites**, and we say so plainly instead of implying that every line is ours.

What we can show you

- **Entity:** contract, invoice and bank beneficiary under the same legal entity, with registration details published on our company facts page

- **Certificates:** BRCGS, IFS, ISO 22000 and HACCP held at production-site level, plus BSCI and SEDEX social audits, and an EcoVadis **Silver (74/100)** rating with a scorecard available for review
- **Quality:** in-line QC, a QC team with 28+ years of canning and food-export experience, raw-material intake checks, per-batch Certificate of Analysis, and traceability from raw-material lot to production lot to container
- **Access:** buyer-appointed auditors and inspection agencies hosted at the production sites; live video walkthroughs with an agenda; pre-shipment inspection with your nominated agency
- **Coverage:** 60+ export markets across Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia-Pacific
- **Terms:** MOQ in principle one 20'FCL per variety, with mixed containers and trial orders possible; lead time typically 45–60 days from PO confirmation
- **Documents:** health certificate, certificate of origin, free sale certificate and embassy certification as required by the destination market, alongside the per-batch CoA

What we do not claim: we do not claim to own every production line we pack on; we do not publish customer names; and we do not offer a single generic "company certificate number", because certificates belong to sites. Ask for the copies that match your product and we will send them.

Verification sources

- China enterprise registry — National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System: gsxt.gov.cn
- BRCGS certificate directory: directory.brcgs.com
- IFS certificate database: ifs-certification.com
- Chinese certification-body approvals: cnca.gov.cn
- amfori BSCI: amfori.org · SEDEX / SMETA: sedex.com
- EcoVadis: ecovadis.com
- EU veterinary and establishment controls (TRACES): webgate.ec.europa.eu/tracesnt

Contact

Send the product, pack format and destination market. We reply with a specification sheet, a sample Certificate of Analysis, the certificate copies for the relevant production site, and a lead-time confirmation.

sales@kingstarfood.com · kingstar.si · kingstarfood.com

Kingstar Food · Xiamen Kingstar Imp. & Exp. Co., Ltd. · Unit 1103, No. 221-1 Lianyue Road, Siming District, Xiamen, P.R. of China