

BABY EELS

[Anguilla anguilla] Spanish: angula French: alevin de l'anguille  
Fresh: Tariff Code 03.02.66.00.0.10 E - subject to quota (K)

Tariff Code 03.02.66.00.0.90 G - not subject to quota.

Duty: 1.2%, plus a fee of Pts 2.60/kg (net) on imports of these species made between March 1 and August 31.

Frozen: Tariff Code 03.03.76.00.0.10 B - subject to quota (K)

Tariff Code 03.03.76.00.0.90 D - not subject to quota.

Duty: 9.3%

The European eel is known by its Latin name Anguilla anguilla, whereas the eel found along the Atlantic coast of North America is called Anguilla rostrata.

Both species spawn in the Sargasso Sea near Bermuda, but the American variety grows much faster than its European counterpart.

If a leptocephalus of the European eel were to follow the migratory path of its New World cousin, it would reach the coast of the Americas before becoming an elver, resulting in its death since the latter transformation is necessary before entering freshwater.

In the leptocephalus/elver metamorphosis, the larvae become gradually shorter and thinner. For example, a mature larva is about 75mm in length and weighs some 1.5g, whereas a fully developed elver is 70mm long and weighs only 0.35g. This transformation is complete by the end of the summer season, from one to two months before baby eels begin their ascent of inland waterways.

Shortly before arriving off European coasts, the leptocephali are transformed into still-colourless elvers. These enter the brackish coastal waters and begin ascending rivers (from Iceland to Spain this takes place in November/December, while along the coast of the North Sea and the Kattegat Strait it occurs in March/April). Here they undergo a second metamorphosis, this time into eels.

Baby eels are particularly abundant in the Bristol Canal which funnels the elvers into the mouth of the Severn River.

Larvae are about 7mm in length when hatched, approximately 25mm at two months, 45mm at eight months, 75mm at eighteen months, 70mm at thirty months, and 65-70mm at three years when they begin the transformation to eels. At this point, deeply-embedded, minute, oval-shaped scales begin to emerge from their skin.