NAMSAN DESK | KOREA MARKET ENTRY SNAPSHOT | FREE SAMPLE

Bringing a US protein bar or nutrition snack brand to Korea

Prepared in Seoul by Jin. Data checked 7 Nov 2026. Public sources only, every fact linked. USD figures use KRW 1,357 per USD[1].

1. Summary

~KRW 800bn
aT forecast for Korea's protein food market, 2026 (all protein foods, not only bars)[2]

+15 to +44%
protein bar sales growth at three convenience chains, Jan to Oct 2026[3]

KRW 2,270
median price per bar in ten local retail listings I checked ($1.67)

- **Demand is real and mainstream.** Convenience chains report double-digit protein bar growth in each of 2024, 2025 and Jan to Oct 2026, though growth at GS25 and CU is slowing (GS25: 40.5%, 25.8%, 15.3%)[3]. 7-Eleven reports 44% for 2026 off a smaller 2025 gain of 12%[3].
- **The local price anchor is low.** Across ten local listings the cost per bar runs KRW 1,325 to 5,300. Orion's Dr.You PRO gives 24g of protein per 70g bar at KRW 2,000[4], about KRW 833 per 10g of protein. The US bars I found list well above that, so the pitch has to be taste, texture or a specific benefit.
- **US brands exist in Korea mostly through cross-border listings.** Quest, Built and RXBAR show up at KRW 3,907 to 9,001 per bar on iHerb Korea and a reseller[5][6]. That is the price ceiling a formal importer competes against, and it is also the evidence that some shoppers already pay for US bars.
- **Selling in Korea needs a registered importer, not a parcel.** Goods bought for personal use cannot be resold; Korean regulators publicly enforced this in July 2026[7]. Selling needs an import-and-sales business registration[8], a registered overseas factory[8], an import declaration[8] and Korean-language labeling[9].
- **Realistic first move:** test with a Korean importer or distributor that already holds the registration, on one or two SKUs, priced around KRW 3,000 to 3,800 per bar (a hypothesis to validate, section 5), before setting up anything of your own.

This is a desk research snapshot from public information. It is not legal advice, not a certified translation and not a regulatory opinion. Items I could not confirm are marked **to be confirmed** and listed in section 8.

2. Market size and direction

No public figure for Korea's protein *bar* market alone turned up in this pass (to be confirmed). What is available:

- The Korea Agro-Fisheries & Food Trade Corporation (aT) expects the domestic protein food market to reach about KRW 800 billion in 2026, roughly USD 590 million[2][1]. This covers all protein foods and drinks.
- GS25 says protein drink sales in H1 2026 rose 26.8% and passed banana milk for the first time[2]. Drinks are the bigger part of the story, bars the smaller.

Protein bar sales growth at convenience chains (year on year)

Chain	2024	2025	Jan to Oct 2026
GS25 protein bar	40.5%	25.8%	15.3%
CU protein bar	30.1%	25.0%	15.6%

7-Eleven protein bar	21%	12%	44%

Source: chain data reported by ZDNet Korea on 2 Nov 2026[3]. The growth base is not disclosed, so these are rates, not sizes. The same report names Orion's Dr.You PRO Crunch Bar as the number one protein bar at 7-Eleven[3].

What is driving it

Retail coverage points to protein moving from gym shoppers to everyday snacking, with convenience stores adding protein breads and snacks alongside drinks[3]. Newer launches also lean on plant-based protein and 'health management' positioning for women and older buyers[10]. For global context only, IMARC lists the worldwide protein bar market at about USD 3.9 billion in 2025[11]; I did not open the full report, so treat that figure as indicative.

3. Sales channels

Channel	What the public record shows	Open question
Coupang marketplace, Rocket Growth, Rocket Jikgu	Rocket Growth is Coupang's fulfilment service: a Korean seller describes Coupang handling storage, delivery and customer service[12]. Separately, Coupang's Rocket Jikgu cross-border service added more than 600 US, Japanese and Hong Kong brands in 2026, positioned as direct purchase of goods hard to find in Korea[13]. Whether that route is open to a small US snack brand is not stated.	Eligibility, fees and food-import handling for foreign sellers: to be confirmed.
Naver Smart Store	I could not retrieve Naver's own seller terms in this pass, so nothing here is confirmed about fees or foreign-seller rules.	Seller requirements for a foreign brand: to be confirmed.
Kurly	Carries a deep protein bar shelf: Orion, Selex, Harim, CJ, Lab Nosh, Myprotein, a Barebells-type soft bar and more, all with listed per-bar prices (section 4)[4][14].	Supplier onboarding: to be confirmed.
Olive Young	A third-party guide describes an application through the partner portal followed by a product showcase review[15]. Not verified against Olive Young's own terms.	Official terms and category fit for snack bars: to be confirmed.
Convenience stores GS25, CU, 7-Eleven	Reported protein bar growth is double-digit at all three chains[3].	Listing process for imported brands: to be confirmed.
Cross-border sites iHerb Korea, resellers	Quest, Built and RXBAR are already sold to Korean shoppers this way at KRW 3,900 to 9,000 per bar[5][16][6]. These are personal-purchase routes and are not a way for a brand to build a retail business.	Share of cross-border bar sales: to be confirmed.

4. Competitor price table

Fourteen listings, public product pages only, checked 7 Nov 2026. Group A is bars sold through local retail listings; Group B is US brands sold cross-border. The cost per bar is pack price divided by number of bars; the last number is cost per 10g of protein where the page states protein.

#	Brand	Product	Bar	Protein	Pack KRW / bars	Per bar KRW	KRW per 10g protein	Channel	Note
1	Orion Dr.You	PRO Protein Bar (3 variants)[4][17]	70g	24g	16,000 / 8	2,000 $1.47	833	Kurly	355 kcal, sugar 9g (peanut butter crunch)
2	Barebells (listed as 베어벨스)	Soft Protein Bar (choc / peanut)[18]	55g	16g	5,300 / 1	5,300 $3.91	3,312	Kurly	Brand identity inferred from product name; to be confirmed
3	Selex	Protein Bar (nuts / berry oat)[19]	50g	12g	9,900 / 6	1,650 $1.22	1,375	Kurly	
4	Lab Nosh	Protein Cookie Bar (3 flavors)[20]	35g	n/a	15,900 / 12	1,325 $0.98	n/a	Kurly	4 to 7g protein by flavor
5	Myprotein	Protein Bar (3 flavors)[21]	45g	15g	29,700 / 10	2,970 $2.19	1,980	Kurly	15g or more; contains soy, milk
6	Harim	O!neul Danbaek Bar (2 flavors)[14]	48g	16g	27,600 / 12	2,300 $1.70	1,438	Kurly	Gluten free
7	CJ Balance Meal	Protein Bar (matcha / peanut)[22]	34g	n/a	27,900 / 12	2,325 $1.71	n/a	Kurly	Protein not stated in page text; 38g for matcha
8	Protein Bangatgan	Haru Danbaek Bar, Cacao[23]	45g	n/a	22,410 / 10	2,241 $1.65	n/a	Kurly	Protein only in product image
9	Peba	Real Chocolate Protein Bar[24]	40g	12g	29,400 / 9	3,267 $2.41	2,722	Kurly	Price read as the 9-pack (unit price check)
10	Kellogg's (Nongshim)	Protein Bar K[25][26]	50g	n/a	6,190 / 3	2,063 $1.52	n/a	Danawa / Lotte Mart mall	Price includes KRW 3,000 shipping; 10.5g protein per 2023 launch story
11	Quest (US)	Protein Bar, 4-pack[5]	60g	n/a	18,320 / 4	4,580 $3.38	n/a	iHerb Korea	Cross-border; price via search index
12	Quest (US)	Protein Bar, 12-pack (Crispy Cookies & Cream)[27]	n/a	n/a	59,685 / 12	4,974 $3.67	n/a	iHerb Korea	Cross-border; price via search index
13	Built (US)	Puff Protein Bar, 4-pack[16]	44g	n/a	15,627 / 4	3,907 $2.88	n/a	iHerb Korea	Cross-border; page said seasonally unavailable
14	RXBAR (US)	Peanut Butter Chocolate, 12-pack[6]	n/a	n/a	108,017 / 12	9,001 $6.63	n/a	Ubuy Korea	Reseller, excl. shipping and customs

Rows 1 to 10 are group A (rows 1 to 9 on Kurly), rows 11 to 14 group B. USD uses KRW 1,357[1]. 'n/a' means the page text did not state it. Prices on Kurly can change daily and some carry a discount tag. Rows 11 to 13 come from the search index because iHerb Korea blocked automated access; I did not work around that block, so they are unverified live.

Reading the table

- Group A per-bar prices span KRW 1,325 to 5,300 with a median of KRW 2,270. Group B spans KRW 3,907 to 9,001.

- On protein per won, Orion's Dr.You is the benchmark (about KRW 833 per 10g). Where protein is stated, the others sit between roughly KRW 1,375 (Selex) and KRW 3,312 (the Barebells-type soft bar) per 10g, with Harim at 1,438, Myprotein at 1,980 and Peba at 2,722.
- Large pack sizes (10 to 12 bars) are the norm for local brands, so a 4-pack import entry looks small by comparison.

5. Suggested price position

Hypothesis, not a finding: a US brand with about 20g of protein in a 55 to 60g bar could test at **KRW 3,000 to 3,800 per bar** (about USD 2.21 to 2.80). That sits above the local median of KRW 2,270, below the cross-border Quest 4-pack at KRW 4,580[5], and close to the upper local brands (Peba at KRW 3,267[24], Myprotein at KRW 2,970[21]).

- **Why not lower:** Orion at KRW 2,000 with 24g protein is hard to beat on value, and an importer's landed cost (freight, duty, registration, margin) is not public; competing at the bottom is a risk.
- **Why not higher:** above the cross-border price, shoppers can already buy the same bar from iHerb Korea.
- **What would move it:** real landed cost, the retailer's margin, and a pack size of 6 to 12 bars to match what shoppers see on Kurly. All three are to be confirmed with quotes.

6. Regulation and the way in

Summary of public legal text, not legal advice. Confirm with the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (MFDS), your importer or a Korean licensed professional before acting.

Importing to sell: four steps

1. **Business registration.** A person who imports and sells imported food must register the business with the MFDS Commissioner, and the facility must meet standards set by ministerial order (Imported Food Act arts. 14 and 15)[8]. The Act also names separate registered businesses for declaration agents, internet purchase agents and storage.
2. **Overseas manufacturer registration.** The facility must be registered before the import declaration, and the MFDS can refuse to accept the declaration if not (art. 5). Registration is valid for two years and can be extended[8]. The MFDS portal notice says a government-issued factory document in English, showing the site really makes the product, is generally required[28]. The MFDS also runs on-site inspections of overseas factories[29].
3. **Import declaration.** A registered business importing for sale or business use must file an import declaration with the MFDS (art. 20), and is responsible for the safety and quality of the goods[8].
4. **Korean labeling.** Food must carry product name, content, ingredients, business name and address, consumer safety cautions and the manufacture date, expiry or quality-keeping date, in the form set by ministerial order; food without the label may not be sold or imported for sale (Labeling Act art. 4)[9]. MFDS guidance publishes a booklet on Korean labels for import declarations[30]. Exact font size, nutrition panel and allergen rules: to be confirmed in the current standards.

Personal direct purchase is not a business route

The Korea Customs Service allows list clearance for personal-use goods up to USD 150 (USD 200 for goods from the United States), but excludes health functional foods and food items from list clearance, so these need a regular import declaration; an accurate personal customs ID number is required for individual express parcels[31]. Whether shipping counts toward the limit is unclear across secondary sources (to be confirmed). In July 2026 MFDS and Customs publicly cited eight of fifteen import snack shops, four for selling directly purchased goods without import declaration or business registration and four for missing Korean labels[7]. MFDS stated that food brought in for personal use cannot be sold to others[7].

Ordinary food or health functional food?

The Health Functional Foods Act defines a health functional food as food made with raw materials or ingredients that have a useful function for the human body, and a 'function' as regulating nutrients or producing physiological effects for health use[32]. Health functional foods have their own label requirements, including the words 'health functional food' and the function claim[9]. A bar sold as ordinary food should not carry health-function claims beyond what MFDS notifications allow; I have not retrieved that notification, so the exact permitted wording is to be confirmed. Practical rule: keep the Korean pack to ordinary-food claims (taste, protein amount as a nutrient fact) unless an MFDS-approved path is used.

Law-change watch: the Imported Food Act lists two scheduled amendments, in force 31 Dec 2026 and 16 Mar 2027; I did not review their content (to be confirmed).

7. Entry options

Option	How it works	Cost and speed

A. Korean importer or distributor	A company already registered as an importer files the declaration and holds the label responsibility; you supply the product, factory papers and Korean label text. Usually the fastest way to test.	Importer margin, labeling and registration fees: to be confirmed by quote.
B. Own Korean entity	Set up a local company and register it as an import-and-sales business with a compliant facility[8]. Full control of price and channels.	Company set-up, facility and staff: to be confirmed. Slowest and heaviest.
C. Marketplace cross-border program	Coupang's Rocket Jikgu-style direct purchase listings[13]. Terms for small foreign brands are not public in what I found.	To be confirmed.
D. Internet purchase agent	The Act recognises an internet purchase agent business for imported food[8]; shoppers order and customs rules for personal purchase apply[31]. A way to test interest, not to build volume.	To be confirmed.

I have left out cost numbers I could not source.

8. Risks, next steps and open items

Risks

- **Enforcement:** unregistered resale and missing Korean labels were publicly targeted in July 2026[7].
- **Price war:** local brands win on pack size and value; a premium needs a visible reason.
- **Slowing growth at the big chains** (GS25 and CU rates fell each year)[3].
- **Claims risk:** protein-benefit wording can drift into health-function claims, which are regulated.
- **Unknown landed cost** until a quote exists.

Next steps

1. Pick one or two SKUs with 18 to 24g protein and a clear taste or sugar story; get the factory documents ready in English.
2. Ask two or three Korean importers for a landed-cost quote and their label requirements.
3. Confirm Coupang, Naver, Kurly and Olive Young terms for a foreign brand directly with each.
4. Run a small price test between KRW 3,000 and 3,800 per bar against the table in section 4.

What I could not confirm

1. Korea-specific protein bar market value (KRW). Only the aT all-protein-food forecast and convenience-store growth rates were found.
2. Coupang Rocket Growth: eligibility, fees and onboarding for an overseas brand with no Korean entity (Coupang seller pages not read).
3. Naver Smart Store: seller requirements and fees for a foreign brand.
4. Kurly: supplier onboarding process and margin terms.
5. Olive Young: official entry terms (only a third-party blog was found).
6. Which Food Code category a specific US bar falls under, and which nutrition-labeling duties apply after the 2026 amendment (not retrieved).
7. Facility standards and registration fees for an import and sales business (Enforcement Rule, not opened).
8. Inspection frequency and lab fees for imported bars.
9. Live iHerb Korea prices: pages blocked automated access, so four prices come from the search index and are unverified.
10. Whether the KRW 3,000 shipping in the Kellogg's price applies to the 3-pack or per order.
11. Whether the USD 150 / 200 duty-free limit counts shipping; secondary sources disagree.
12. Protein per bar for Quest, Built, RXBAR, CJ, Protein Bangatgan as sold in Korea.
13. Content of the two pending amendments to the Imported Food Act (in force 31 Dec 2026 and 16 Mar 2027); dates only were read.
14. Landed cost, freight, importer margin and total entry budget (needs quotes).
15. Global protein bar market figure (IMARC summary listed, not opened).

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