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USTR Confirms Korea's Announcement on U.S. Beef

Washington, DC -- United States Trade Representative Susan C. Schwab made the following statement in response to the announcement by the South Korean government today regarding U.S. beef trade. The government announced that, as a result of recent discussions in Washington, Korea will put into effect the April 18th beef import protocol agreed to by the two governments and pave the way for U.S. beef to flow into the Korean market.

“I welcome the South Korean government’s announcement that it will shortly put the April 18 protocol into effect.

“Korean beef importers and U.S. exporters have reached a commercial understanding that only U.S. beef from cattle under 30-months of age will be shipped to Korea, as a transitional measure, to improve Korean consumer confidence in U.S. beef.

“At the request of U.S. exporters, once the protocol goes into effect, the U.S. government will facilitate this transitional private sector arrangement. The U.S. Department of Agriculture will set up a voluntary Quality System Assessment (QSA) Program once the protocol goes into effect. This program will verify that beef from participating plants will be from cattle less than 30 months of age.

“We have also agreed on a few additional clarifications to the April 18th protocol that we will implement once the protocol is in effect in an effort to increase the confidence of Korean consumers in U.S. beef.

“We look forward to safe, affordable, high-quality American beef – the same beef enjoyed by hundreds of millions of U.S. consumers and people in countries around the world – soon arriving on Korean tables.

“The resumption of U.S. beef exports to Korea is further evidence of our growing trade relationship with Korea, and the Administration will continue to work hard to obtain Congressional approval of the United States-Korea FTA this year.”

Background:

The June 13-19 discussions in Washington, led by Ambassador Schwab and Trade Minister Kim, focused on ways to facilitate the commercial, private-sector agreement between Korean importers and U.S. exporters to ship U.S. beef from animals less than 30-months for a transitional period until consumer confidence in South Korea improves. To support these voluntary commitments, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will establish, once the import protocol is in force, the “Less than 30 Month Age-Verification Quality System Assessment (QSA) Program for Korea” administered by the U.S. government under the Agricultural Marketing Act. This program will verify that all beef shipped to Korea under the program is from cattle less than 30 months of age.

In addition, both sides have agreed that certain products (brains, skulls, eyes and spinal cords), which are not specified risk materials in cattle less than 30 months of age, have not been traded between the two countries in the past. Once the import protocol is in effect, both sides will confirm their expectation that until there is market demand in Korea for such products, such commercial practice will continue.

The two governments will also clarify, once the import protocol is in effect, that Korea can take certain actions under the protocol if it finds serious non-compliance during its audits of U.S. beef processing plants, as well as actions it could take at the border upon detection of food safety hazards. All of these actions will be limited to the product or plant in question.

Finally, Korea confirmed that it will publish its import health requirements for U.S. beef and beef products, putting the April 18 protocol into effect shortly.

The April 18 protocol defines conditions for importation of U.S. beef to South Korea and provides for a full reopening of the market. It is fully consistent with OIE guidelines and will permit all U.S. beef and beef products from cattle of all ages to be exported to Korea, with appropriate Specified Risk Materials (SRMs), as defined by the OIE, removed, while guaranteeing commercial viability for U.S. industry. Both Korean importers and U.S. exporters reaffirmed the safety of all U.S. beef, regardless of age, in their statement and letter on June 20.

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