

March 31, 2011

- In FY 2010, the United States imported approximately 3.2 billion pounds of meat and poultry products from 29 eligible foreign countries. In addition, the United States imported approximately 22.4 million pounds of processed egg products from Canada.
- USDA establishes policies and regulations governing the importation of over \$50 billion dollars worth of imported goods. APHIS actually inspects only a portion of these products. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection inspects the majority of these imported goods.

USDA's role

- USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) establishes the regulations and policies for the importation of plants, animals, and animal products (hides, antlers, reproductive commodities) designed to keep American agriculture safe.
- Without this protection, disease and pests of plants and animals of foreign origin would harm the ability of the U.S. to produce food for the Nation.

Specifically, APHIS

- regulates the importation of affected plants, animals and animal products originating in countries and/or regions where foreign diseases and pests have been detected;
 - requires import permits accompany properly sanitized products; and
 - updates continually its import regulations to reflect the most current foreign pest and disease status information that could affect U.S. imports.
- USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) regulates meat, poultry and processed egg products.
 - But first, FSIS must deem a foreign government's food safety system to be equivalent to the U.S. system, in order for a foreign country to export product regulated by the United States.
 - USDA officers, working in association with other import inspection personnel, ensure that the meat, poultry and egg products imported from other countries are properly inspected prior to entry and that the products are from properly certified establishments within eligible countries.

Port of Entry Requirements

APHIS regulations set forth the entry requirements for agricultural commodities to prevent the entrance of foreign pests and diseases into the United States.

- APHIS works closely with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to ensure that these regulations are properly implemented and enforced as well as maintains a training facility for CBP's agricultural inspectors.

Live Animal Inspection Process

At ports of entry where livestock and live birds enter the United States:

- CBP initiates a hold on the animals,
- notifies APHIS of the live animal shipment, and
- APHIS dispatches personnel to the port of entry to inspect for signs of disease.

When livestock is refused entry, APHIS works with CBP to either re-export or destroy, as appropriate.

Plant Material Inspection Process

At ports where regulated propagative plant material (seeds and plants intended for planting) enter into the United States:

- CBP transfers the material to Plant Inspection Stations where APHIS inspects the material for exotic pests and disease.

If propagative plant material can be treated as a condition of entry or when a treatable plant pest has been detected, APHIS will oversee treatment and CBP will release the material into commerce.

When plant material is refused entry, APHIS works with CBP to either re-export or destroy, as appropriate.

Meat, Poultry and Egg Product Inspection Process

In order for a foreign country to export product regulated by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) to the United States, FSIS must first deem a foreign government's food safety system to be equivalent to the U.S. system.

- USDA's system of establishing country-by-country equivalence makes the foreign country accountable for its own food safety system and the establishments within its borders. This is an efficient, effective, and globally-accepted approach.
- After establishing the equivalence of a nation's system, FSIS conducts audits of that system to make sure that it continues to be equivalent.
- FSIS verifies the effectiveness of foreign systems through re-inspection of product at the border.
- Every shipment of meat, poultry, or processed egg products, with few exceptions, must be presented to an FSIS inspector at one of the approximately 120 official FSIS import establishments located at major ocean ports of entry and land border crossings.
 - Every import shipment is re-inspected for documentation irregularities, evidence of tampering, transportation damage, and proper labeling, to ensure that the product was produced in an eligible establishment in an approved country. This process is assisted by FSIS's Automated Import Information System (AIIS).
 - More intensive inspections are completed on about 10 percent of shipments, including product examinations. Approximately 5 percent of shipments are sampled and the samples analyzed for microbiological contaminants.

Background: Meat, Poultry and Egg Product Inspection Process

- “Equivalence” is the foundation for FSIS’ system of imports, and recognizes that a country can provide an appropriate level of sanitary protection, even though the measures employed may differ from measures applied in the United States.
- Any country may apply to be evaluated for equivalence by submitting a request to FSIS.
 - There are 30 countries eligible to export to the United States.
 - While any country has the sovereign right to maintain any level of protection that it deems appropriate to mitigate food safety hazards, a country wishing to export to the United States still has the burden of proving that its system is equivalent to protections in the United States.
- When an application is received, FSIS first analyzes the country’s regulatory system documents to assess whether the country has laws, regulations, and an infrastructure to support an equivalent system.
 - If the review is satisfactory, FSIS moves to on-site review.
 - During an on-site review, an FSIS audit team evaluates all the aspects of a country’s inspection program, including individual establishments and the laboratories that will be testing product destined for the United States.
- When FSIS makes an initial equivalence determination, a proposed rule is published for comment in the ***Federal Register*** setting forth the determination and the reasons for the determination and seeking public comment.
 - FSIS reviews comments submitted and, if appropriate, publishes a final rule to add the country as eligible to export meat, poultry, or processed egg products to the United States.
- Countries are responsible for ensuring that all facilities exporting meat, poultry, and processed egg products to the United States employ standards that are and continue to be equivalent to U.S. standards.
 - FSIS verifies that this is happening via annual audits of foreign food safety systems and procedures through on-site visits by FSIS personnel, including certified establishments, laboratories and a review of government controls.