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ATO Guangzhou engages Guangdong Provincial CIQ on frozen meat certif

Report Categories:

Agricultural Situation

Livestock and Products

Trade Policy Incident Report

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Report Highlights:

Summary: In an effort to better understand the latest interpretation of Beijing's new import requirements for U.S. frozen meat exports, ATO Guangzhou pressed the Guangdong Provincial Quarantine and Inspection Bureau (CIQ) for answers to the 51 health certificates for U.S. frozen meat still held in ports under their authority. On August 20, ATO Guangzhou facilitated a meeting with the leaders of the Provincial Bureau and included representatives from the U.S. Poultry and Egg Export Council and the U.S. Meat Export Federation. After almost two hours of detailed discussions, Post was informed that 51 containers were still detained. One piece of favorable news was that Guangdong CIQ still accepted "in lieu of" certificates and would establish a regular communication mechanism with Post on the release of the detained shipments.

General Information:

Background: In April, the Guangdong Provincial Quarantine and Inspection Bureau (CIQ) initiated a verification process in an effort to compel the United States to adopt an electronic certificate verification system for U.S. frozen meat product shipments. All U.S. frozen meat products arrived at ports under the supervision of Guangdong CIQ would require verification from the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) thereafter. When the electronic system (eTDE) for health certificates was introduced on June 1st, all of the health certificates had to be verified by CIQ port officers in their internal database before the product meat products could be released. However, some issues remain unsolved which include some shipments before and after the effective day of June 1st.

Meeting objectives:

- To obtain the exact number of detained shipments at port before June 1
- To obtain the exact number of detained shipments at port after June 1 and reasons for their detention.
- To discuss areas of improvement in communication exchanges and areas where Post can facilitate the release of detained shipments at port
- Issues with the electronic verification system and training requirements

Strategies: On August 8, ATO Guangzhou organized a networking dinner with Guangdong CIQ prior to the official meeting. The dinner was supported with funding from the Emerging Market Program's CIQ Outreach fund. The purpose of the dinner was to set a friendly tone with the newly appointed CIQ Guangdong Director and select staff supervising frozen meat import departments. The official meeting began with an iteration of ATO Guangzhou's history of overview of trainings programs held in country, public diplomacy programs in the States supported by USDA and FSIS, and an overview of ATO Guangzhou's role in facilitating discussion with FSIS and other regulatory agencies. ATO Director also provided an overview of FAS/AMS efforts on the eTDE system and its updates based on previous conference calls and emails on the issue.

Outcomes:

- Guangdong CIQ's newly appointed director responsible for frozen meat products inspection appreciated Post's efforts to increase outreach and communication as well as in supporting Guangdong CIQ front line officers' work through training programs
- Guangdong CIQ continues to accept "in lieu of" health certificates unlike Shanghai, Shenzhen or Tianjin.
- Guangdong CIQ agreed to set up a regular communication mechanism with ATO Guangzhou to facilitate the release of detained shipments

- We now know that 51 containers remain held at ports. (According to CIQ Guangdong, they sent 786 certificates for verification and did not receive feedback for 193 of them.)
- If a health certificate could not be found in the electronic system, the six-digit document ID can be provided to CIQ to help search the certificate and verify with FSIS. A product can only be released when the electronic information is found in CIQ's system, so a hard copy of the health certificate will not be accepted. This information is clear now.

Guangdong CIQ suggestions:

- The stability of the eTDE system "should be improved" (generally speaking)
- Trainings/communications should be provided to U.S. exporters in terms of how to input and what type of port information to be input. Try to avoid errors, such as missing hyphens or wrong names of port. This is a common practice given the large number of ports managed by Guangdong CIQ can be confusing to U.S. exporters. Accuracy is critical when AQSIQ systems input data from eTDE (Note: CIQ Guangdong doesn't actually have access to the eTDE.)
- U.S. side should set a time frame for verification process to shorten the waiting time at ports. AQSIQ forwarded 3,288 certificates for verification, and received 2,700 responses from FSIS. There are still containers dated back to May sitting at various ports of Guangdong and Shenzhen (Note: Shenzhen ports are managed by Shenzhen CIQ, an entirely separate CIQ regulatory authority reporting directly to Beijing.)
- U.S. exporters could improve packaging and labeling. Labeling is a big problem for frozen meat products: limited to no Chinese, incomplete product information, typos and wrong information is typically encountered by inspection officials.

Follow up: ATO Guangzhou will sustain its efforts in maintaining effective working relationships with Guangdong CIQ and press them on improving communication channels for detained U.S. agricultural products. The issue for Post remains that many requests are not forwarded from FSIS to Guangdong CIQ in a timely fashion and the national quarantine and inspection administration (AQSIQ) sometimes provides separate verification requests creating duplicate workloads and confusion.