

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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POLICY

Voluntary - Public

Date: 5/17/2019

GAIN Report Number: JA9054

Japan

Post: Tokyo

Japan Lifts Age Restriction on U.S. Beef

Report Categories:

Agricultural Situation
Livestock and Products
Trade Policy Monitoring

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Report Highlights:

On May 17, Japan formally removed the requirement that U.S. beef exported to Japan be derived from cattle less than 30 months of age. U.S. exporters can now export beef from cattle of any age to Japan for the first time since 2003. Expanded access could increase U.S. exports to Japan by up to \$200 million annually. U.S. beef exports to Japan must comply with the requirements of the USDA export verification program described in this report.

General Information:

On May 17, 2019, Japan formally revised its import regulations to remove age-based restrictions on beef and beef products imported from the United States. Prior to this revision, imports of U.S. beef were restricted to product derived from cattle less than 30 months of age due to concerns related to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

U.S. beef exported to Japan must meet the conditions described in the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) [Export Library](#) and implement an [Export Verification Program](#) operated by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

Among the requirements described above, U.S. establishments exporting beef and beef products to Japan must ensure hygienic removal of specified risk materials. This includes tonsils and distal ileum from cattle of all ages as well as the brain, eyes, spinal cord, trigeminal ganglia, skull (including head meat, but excluding cheek meat as defined by the AMS Export Verification Program), dorsal root ganglia, and vertebral column (excluding vertebrae of the tail, transverse processes of the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae, and wings of the sacrum) from cattle 30 months of age and older at the time of slaughter.

Background

In December 2003, Japan banned U.S. beef and beef products following the detection of BSE in a dairy cow imported into the United States from Canada. In December 2005, partial access was restored to U.S. beef muscle cuts and offal items from cattle 20 months of age and younger. In February 2013, Japan extended access to include beef and beef products from cattle less than thirty months of age.

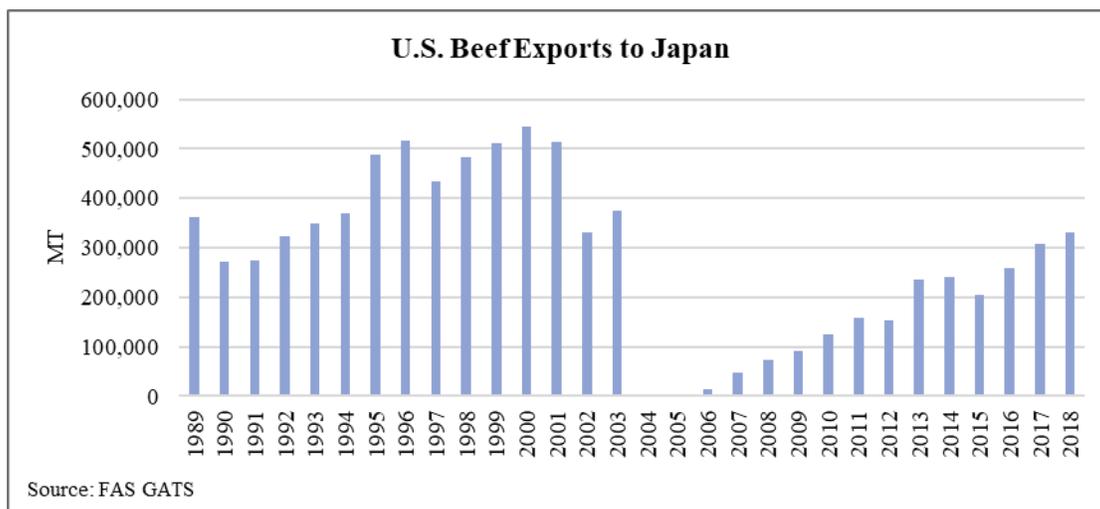
In April 2017, Japan eliminated age-based BSE testing on domestic cattle (see [JA7031](#)), paving the way for similar age-based restrictions to be lifted on negligible-BSE risk trading partners, including the United States. In April 2018, Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW) requested Japan's Food Safety Commission (FSC) to conduct a human health risk assessment to review the possible lifting of age restrictions on beef imported from the United States, Canada, and Ireland. On January 15, 2019, the FSC concluded that there was no additional human health risk to removing the age restriction for all three countries and provided its [report](#) (in Japanese) to MHLW.

In February 2019, officials from MHLW conducted a weeklong audit of the U.S. food safety system to verify the results of the FSC risk assessment. After completing the required 30-day public comment period between March 28 and April 26, MHLW formally notified port officials of the revised import conditions on May 17, enabling all-ages access for U.S. beef for the first time since 2003.

Trade Impact

Japan is the largest overseas market for U.S. beef, accounting for 25 percent of all U.S. beef exports in 2018. In 2018, the United States exported 330,000 metric tons (MT) of beef and beef products to Japan, valued at \$2.1 billion. While U.S. beef exports have rebounded remarkably since the market closure in 2003, export volumes have not yet fully recovered to pre-BSE levels. In 2003, U.S. beef exports totaled

375,000 MT. USDA estimates that the removal of age-based restrictions on U.S. beef could increase exports to Japan by up to ten percent on a value basis, or by approximately \$200 million, annually.



For more information on Japan's beef market, see FAS/Tokyo's Livestock and Products Semi-annual Report [JA9023](#).