

## Premier defends policy on beef imports

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Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登毅) yesterday defended the government's decision to lift a partial ban on US beef, stressing that safety standards for US beef imports were on a par with imports from countries such as South Korea and Canada.

The Department of Health (DOH) announced on Friday that Taiwan would expand market access for US beef after officials reached an accord in Washington on Thursday.

Responding to allegations that the decision to lift the ban was made by either the Presidential Office or National Security Council, Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁琦) yesterday said the government was in this together. He did not deny the allegation.

"It is a joint decision," he said. "Of course the president was well aware of it."

Wang declined to reveal details of the decision-making process, only saying specialized agencies were in charge of the matter.

Under the terms of the new accord, US bone-in beef, ground beef, cow intestines, brains, spinal cords and processed beef from cattle younger than 30 months that have not been contaminated with "specific risk materials" will be allowed into Taiwan from Nov. 10.

Specific risk materials are defined in the protocol as the brain, skull, eyes, trigeminal ganglia, spinal cord, vertebral column and dorsal root ganglia from cattle 30 months of age and older, or the tonsils and the distal ileum of the small intestine from all cattle.

At present, Taiwan only allows imports of US boneless beef from cattle younger than 30 months that contain no specified risk materials.

Wu yesterday said tonsils and the distal ileum of the small intestine would remain banned.

"As for brain, spinal cord, eyes and cranial bone, they are banned via an additional clause," Wu said.

By the additional clause, the DOH meant that the bans on the four non-specified risk materials will be lifted only when importers obtain safety certificates from the US Department of Agriculture and pass local quarantine examinations.

Wu said the Executive Yuan would request that the DOH establish a mandatory liability insurance system for imported US beef products to ensure food safety.

Wu denied he had finalized the lifting of the ban after meeting American Institute in Taiwan Director William Stanton earlier this month.

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“No. How could I have the authority to finalize the policy? I didn’t even know the details,” Wu said.

Angry lawmakers across party lines demanded DOH officials deliver a report on the issue to the Legislative Yuan tomorrow.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislative caucus whip Lu Hsueh-chang (呂秀蓮) said KMT legislators could reluctantly agree to imports of some types of bone-in beef from the US but would not accept imports of some types of offal, as the protocol with Washington seems to allow.

Lu blasted the DOH for failing to report in advance to relevant legislative committees on the issue, adding that “in compliance with a 2006 legislative resolution, the DOH is required to provide detailed reports about the importation of US beef to the legislature.”

Lu said he was dissatisfied with the government’s compromise on the issue and demanded the DOH halt any further action.

“Otherwise, we will freeze the DOH’s budget,” he said.

Lu said the KMT caucus would look into officials involved in the decision to lift the ban.

“The Executive Yuan should take responsibility for not communicating with the legislature on the issue. Wu was a lawmaker when the legislature passed a resolution on Jan. 11, 2006 demanding legislative approval before the ban is lifted. Wu should have known that,” Lu said.

Lu said the KMT caucus would also seek to determine whether the National Security Council was behind the decision.

At a separate setting yesterday, former vice president Annette Lu (呂秀蓮) also criticized the new policy on US beef, saying the government is falling apart and letting other countries make endless demands.

“We find ourselves in a unique and difficult situation on the diplomatic front. If we don’t move forward, we will gradually fall behind,” she said. “The public must have such awareness and closely supervise the government.”

Saying the move was a warning, Lu added that President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) had promised on his campaign trail that his government would impose the strictest restrictions on US beef in Asia.

Meanwhile, DOH Minister Yaung Chih-liang (楊志良) yesterday offered to resign over the decision to lift the ban.

“Of course I will resign if necessary. I will take the responsibility,” Yaung told reporters.

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Wu yesterday praised Yuang's spirit of self-introspection, but added that it was because Yaung was not involved in the negotiations and knew little about their details that he felt disappointed.

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