

Ma rules out new US beef negotiations

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President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) yesterday rejected the possibility of renegotiating the recent pact on importing US beef, saying his administration was more cautious than the former Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) government in relaxing restrictions on US beef products.

Emphasizing it was "unnecessary" to relaunch negotiations with Washington, Ma said attempting to renegotiate the protocol would seriously undermine the country's credibility.

"Our objectives [and our critics'] are the same: To protect the health and safety of the people," he said. "The campaigns initiated by non-governmental organizations can attain the same goal. Such an act is allowed by the protocol and is the best arrangement."

Several local governments have launched campaigns against the expanded imports and Ma said he "respected" their choice. The government relaxed its restrictions, but was not responsible for promoting US beef, Ma said while meeting representatives of outstanding businesspeople and foreign business groups in Taiwan.

Under the terms of the protocol, 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" (SRM) will be allowed into Taiwan starting on Nov. 10.

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

At present, the government only allows imports of US boneless beef from cattle younger than 30 months that contain no SRMs.

Ma said the government must respond to the request of the US, a WTO member, to lift its ban on US beef and the government's job is to strike a balance between protecting public health and securing the opportunity to participate in the international community.

"We must ask this question: Do we want to participate in the international community or not?" he said. "Negotiations are a matter of give-and-take. You cannot simply ask other people to accept your terms without accepting theirs."

No matter what the terms were, Ma said, the bottom line was to ensure the public's safety and health, and his administration had met that requirement.

While the new policy takes effect next month, Ma said ground beef and intestines would not be imported from the US.

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The Department of Health would also establish a mandatory liability insurance system to ensure food safety, he said.

“As far as the protection mechanism is concerned, the government has been doing its best,” he said. “Compared with the former government, we are much more careful in the decision-making process. They did not negotiate, not to mention conduct studies or visit livestock farms in the US.”

Emphasizing US beef was safe, Ma said more than 50 countries import US beef and Americans eat it. The government had adopted standards stricter than the “South Korean model” and those set by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), he said.

“Taiwanese have been eating boneless US beef for three years since the former government lifted the ban,” he said. “Bone-in and boneless beef all come from the same cows ... The risks posed by bone-in beef, intestines and ground beef are miniscule.”

Meanwhile, in an interview in the latest edition of The Journalist magazine (新新聞), Ma said lifting the ban could help improve relations with the US, but denied that there had been any trade-offs.

He said he hoped to see breakthroughs in the arms procurements and a trade and investment framework agreement with the US and possibly a free-trade agreement. He also hoped there would be headway in visa-waiver privileges.

In related news, a group of Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Taipei City councilors protested against the new US beef policy near the Presidential Office yesterday, urging the government to refuse to import US beef products.

“The US promotes its beef based on US interests, but our president, elected by Taiwanese, has ignored the public’s health and national interest,” Taipei City Councilor Chuang Ruei-hsiung (莊瑞雄) said.

Chuang and another six DPP city councilors, including Wu Su-yao (吳蘇瑯) and Huang Hsiang-chun (黃香春), and their supporters tried to move closer to the Presidential Office as they carried placards and chanted slogans such as “Restart the negotiation!” and “Refuse US ground beef and internal organs!”

Taipei City police blocked the protesters to stay on a sidewalk across from the building.

Wu slammed Ma for not having any “beef” in his policies, and demanded the government begin new negotiations with the US.

Huang accused Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌) of teaming up with Ma to “double-cross” the public.

“The anti-US beef association is not going to work because the city government does not

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have the authority to ban US beef at local stores,” Chuang said, referring to the Taipei City Government’s decision to form an association of more than 200 shops and restaurants that have agreed to boycott ground beef, and cows’ internal organs and spinal cords.

Also See: [EDITORIAL : Time for some facts about US beef](#)

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