

US beef arriving in a week's time: official

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The first batch of US beef exports under a relaxed ban is likely to arrive in Taiwan within a week after the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued Quality System Assessment (QSA) certificates to qualified suppliers, a Ministry of Economic Affairs official said yesterday.

While the new QSA regulations stipulate that both boneless and bone-in beef from cattle less than 30 months of age slaughtered on or after Nov. 2 can be exported to Taiwan, only boneless beef from cattle slaughtered before that date can be exported to Taiwan.

QSA-certified bone-in beef from the US will be subjected to the same inspection and quarantine procedures as those applied to boneless beef once it arrives in Taiwan, said the official, who declined to be identified.

“As shipments from the United States to Taiwan take seven to 10 days, the first batch of US bone-in beef will be able to enter Taiwan’s market after Nov. 17 at the earliest,” the official said.

The guidelines for the regulations were established in a protocol on US beef imports signed by Taipei and Washington on Oct. 23, but the QSA stipulations and the age of the cattle from which exported beef can be obtained were more clearly addressed in a detailed USDA document issued on Sunday.

While the protocol did not specify that beef and beef products must be from cattle of any particular age, the new regulations state that only deboned and bone-in beef products from cattle “less than 30 months of age” will be shipped “as a temporary market transition measure.”

The protocol also gives market access to US ground beef and beef offal, but the ministry official said the possibility of the USDA issuing QSA certifications for those products was remote.

Moreover, he said, the bureaucratic procedures known as “three controls, five certifications” are also expected to help bar those products from entering Taiwan amid public fears that some of the cattle might have been infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease.

Bureau of Food Safety Director Lin Hsueh-jung (林雪雄) said US beef exporters should submit three certificates — QAS, beef safety and quarantine certificates — when shipping their products to Taiwan.

Once the products arrive at Taiwan’s ports of entry, the Bureau of Standards, Metrology and Inspection and the Bureau of Animal and Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine will conduct random checks, with 5 percent of the shipments expected to undergo inspections before being allowed entry into the local market, Lin said.

On imports of US beef offal and ground beef, Lin said the ministry had separated them from bone-in beef and given each of them a separate classification number to facilitate import

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controls.

Prospective importers of US beef offal and ground beef should file applications with the ministry's Bureau of Foreign Trade, Lin said, but he did not anticipate many would because of stringent inspection procedures.

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