

'U.S. beef is a safe product'

Lawmakers hope Japanese ban will not be reinstated

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WASHINGTON — Less than two months after lifting a ban on U.S. beef, Japan closed its borders to the imports after a backbone was found in a shipment at Tokyo International Airport Friday.

"Our agreement with Japan is to export beef with no vertebral column and we have failed to meet the terms of that agreement," Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said in a statement.

The backbone, which is not classified as risk material in the United States because it is from beef under 30 months old, was found in a shipment of beef from Atlantic Veal and Lamb Inc. in New York.

"While this is not a food safety issue, this is an unacceptable failure on our part to meet the requirements of our agreement with Japan," Johanns said.

An investigation began immediately when Johanns sent a team of USDA inspectors to Japan to reexamine every shipment waiting for approval.

In addition to sending workers to Japan, Johanns said these

MAD COW DISEASE TIMELINE

2003

● **May 20:** Canada discovers its first case of mad cow disease. U.S. officials ban Canadian imports of cattle, beef and animal feed.

● **Dec. 23:** U.S. announces suspected case of mad cow disease in Washington state. Dozens of countries, including Japan and South Korea, halt American beef imports.

2004

● **Jan. 6:** DNA tests show Washington state cow was born in Canada.

● **June 1:** USDA expands testing for mad cow disease, planning to test more than 221,000 animals, 10 times the number tested in 2003.

● **June 25:** Two U.S. cows test "inconclusive" for mad cow disease.

● **June 30:** Follow-up tests show no sign of mad cow disease in the two animals.

● **Dec. 29:** U.S. decides to resume imports of Canadian cattle, beginning in March.

2005

● **Jan. 2:** Canada confirms a second case of

mad cow disease.

● **Jan. 10:** Cattlemen's group sues to stop cattle shipments from Canada.

● **March 2:** Federal judge blocks Canadian cattle from entering the U.S., agreeing with cattlemen. Government appeals ruling.

● **Oct. 4:** FDA announces change in feed regulations to remove cow brains and spinal cords, already banned from cattle feed, from food for all animals. Regulations are less strict than FDA had promised.

● **Dec. 11:** Japan ends its ban on imports of U.S. and Canadian beef.

● **Dec. 29:** Hong Kong ends ban on U.S. beef.

2006

● **Jan. 13:** South Korea ends ban on American beef.

● **Jan. 17:** Singapore agrees to end ban on American beef.

● **Jan. 20:** Japan halts shipments of American beef because a recent shipment contained spinal material prohibited under agreement with the U.S.

— Associated Press

measures are also being taken: All USDA beef inspectors will undergo additional export requirements training, more inspectors will be sent to every plant approved to export beef and two USDA inspectors will be required to review every beef shipment, as well as making unannounced inspections at every plant.

Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., said in a statement she is "stiffening her position against Japan," and she plans to look at imposing economic sanctions on the country if it reinstates a ban.

"Know I am looking at economic sanctions should their embargo be reinstated. As Japan

teeters back and forth, Colorado jobs hang in the balance," said Musgrave, a member of the House Agriculture Committee.

Other Colorado lawmakers are keeping their fingers crossed that the USDA's response will result in Japan lifting the proposed ban.

"The Japanese government has only recommended the ban be reimposed," Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., said in a statement. "Hopefully, quick action by the (USDA) will prevent another ban from becoming a reality."

Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., said he was pleased the USDA reacted quickly.

"Over the past couple years, we have worked with Japan to formulate standards by which they would accept U.S. beef and it is imperative we hold to these standards," said Salazar, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee.

Rep. John Salazar, D-Colo., agreed.

"We worked hard to build a bipartisan coalition in Congress to restore trade with Japan," Salazar, a member of the House Agriculture Committee, said in a statement. "We all know U.S. beef is a safe product and I hate the idea of giving anyone an opportunity to question the quality of our beef."