

China launches investigation into imported beef amid domestic industry concerns

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China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) has initiated a safeguard investigation into imported beef, following an application from the China Animal Agriculture Association (CAAA) and nine industry associations representing key domestic beef-producing regions.

The application alleges a significant surge in imported beef over the past five years, with import volumes rising by 106.28 per cent in the first half of 2024 compared to the same period in 2019. The applicants argue that this sharp increase has caused substantial harm to China's domestic beef industry, claiming a direct causal link between the import surge and the industry's struggles.

Statistics from the General Administration of Customs of the PRC (GACC) reveal that major beef exporters to China in 2023 and the first half of 2024 included Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. China's beef imports 2023 reached \$14.2 billion, up from \$8.2 billion in 2019. Brazil accounted for 42 per cent of the trade value, followed by Argentina (15 per cent) and Australia (12 per cent).

Brazil's government emphasized China's pivotal role as its largest partner in animal protein exports, with over one million tons of Brazilian bovine meat shipped to China in 2024—a 12.7 per cent increase from the same period in 2023. Brazil pledged to collaborate with its exporters to demonstrate that its beef imports benefit, rather than harm, the Chinese industry by complementing domestic production.

Meanwhile, the EU SME Centre highlighted that only five EU companies are currently eligible to export bovine meat to China due to disease concerns and regional recognition issues. These companies are from Latvia and Hungary.

MOFCOM reports that between 2019 and the first half of 2024, the market share of the imported beef under investigation rose from 20.55 per cent to 30.90 per cent in China. The proportion of imports relative to total domestic beef production also grew significantly, from 24.87 per cent to 43.87 per cent.

The ministry clarified that the investigation is not targeted at specific countries or regions and will not disrupt normal trade during the process. Authorities are committed to conducting an impartial review, safeguarding the rights of all stakeholders, and fostering a collaborative approach to address shared concerns.

China reiterated its commitment to maintaining open communication with all parties to promote a healthy and stable international trade environment.

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