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Japan Agrees to Lift Beef Ban Pending Inspections

Last Wednesday Japan agreed to lift its ban on U.S. beef imports, pending planned inspections of U.S. meat processing plants, the agriculture ministry said. The step begins a resolution of a long-running trade dispute and gives U.S. ranchers access to what was once their most lucrative export market. "Japan agreed to resume U.S. beef imports on the condition that we find no further problems during onsite inspections," said agriculture ministry official Hiroaki Ogura. USDA Secretary Mike Johanns announced that Japanese audit teams were to arrive in the United States over the weekend and conclude their work by July 21. Upon completion of the audits, Japan has agreed to expeditiously resume beef trade. Johanns stated, "Ultimately, it is our goal to complete the Japanese audits with all plants that have met U.S. requirements to export beef to Japan being approved to do so at the same time. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of Japan recognizing the U.S. food safety inspection system as a single, effective system and acting accordingly in resuming trade." "When that occurs, my expectation is that minor noncompliance issues will not disrupt our entire trading relationship. Instead, Japan has agreed to notify us of such issues and discuss the appropriate course, such as the rejection of individual shipments, if appropriate," he added. U.S. beef shipments to Japan were halted in January after Japanese officials found a veal shipment that contained backbone, which Asian countries consider at risk for mad cow disease. American officials have been impatient for trade to resume, with several U.S. senators introducing a bill that would impose trade sanctions if Japan does not reopen its market to U.S. beef by August 31.

FSIS Posts Quarterly Progress Report on *Salmonella* Testing

FSIS recently posted on its website the quarterly progress report on *Salmonella* testing of selected raw and meat poultry products. This quarterly report provides preliminary data from the first three months of 2006. In February 2006, FSIS posted in the *Federal Register* its intention to publish results quarterly and to change how it used the results from its *Salmonella* verification sampling program for meat and poultry establishments as a way to enhance public health protection. FSIS is now providing results from individual *Salmonella* verification sample tests the agency regularly conducts at meat and poultry establishments to establishments that have asked to be informed of various tests. The report is available at www.fsis.usda.gov/science/Q1_2006_Salmonella_Testing/index.asp.



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Halting Antibiotic Use in Animals May Not Reduce Resistance

Eliminating antibiotic drugs from food animal production may have little positive effect on resistant bacteria that threaten human health, according to a report by the Institute of Food Technologists. In fact, such actions abroad have resulted in more antibiotic use and more resistant bacteria in some cases, according to the latest IFT Export Report, *Antimicrobial Resistance: Implications for the Food System*. "Prior human exposure to antibiotics is the greatest factor for acquiring an infection with antibiotic-resistant bacteria," said Michael Doyle, Ph.D., chairman of the IFT expert panel, microbiologist and food safety expert. "While preliminary evidence points toward, but does not prove that, human health risks result from antibiotic use in food animals, what is known is that once foodborne pathogens have acquired resistance, through whatever means, there are clear human health impacts." In Europe, the report noted, the elimination of antibiotics promoting animal growth resulted in increased disease among animals and more therapeutic applications of antibiotics on increasingly resistant bacteria. Further, this elimination of certain antibiotics by the EU has not shown to have reduced the prevalence of some antibiotic-resistant strains affecting human medicine. In fact, resistance increased among some pathogens. The new report and others are available online at www.ift.org/ExpertReport.

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Briefly . . .

FSIS Requests Extension of Information Collection: The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) published a notice in the *Federal Register* on Friday, announcing its intention to request an extension of a currently approved information collection regarding exportation, transportation, and importation of meat and poultry products. The agency is accepting comments through the Federal eRulemaking Portal at www.regulations.gov and by email at FSIS.RegulationsComments@usda.gov until August 22, 2006. This notice is available at www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FRPubs/2006-0014.htm.

Nominations Sought For NACMCF: The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced that nominations are being sought for membership on the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF). Nominations are being sought for individuals with scientific expertise in the fields of epidemiology, food technology, microbiology, risk assessment, infectious disease, biostatistics and other related sciences. Individuals who may be currently employed by state and federal governments, industry, academia or consumer groups are invited to submit applications. The NACMCF was established in 1988 to provide scientific advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services on public health issues relative to the safety and wholesomeness of the U.S. food supply. The Committee formulates positions on the development of microbiological criteria, the review and evaluation of epidemiological and risk assessment data and methodologies for assessing microbiological hazards in foods. The Committee also provides advice to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Departments of Commerce and Defense. Please visit the NACMCF homepage at www.fsis.usda.gov/About_FSIS/NACMCF/index.asp for further details on the nomination process.

Tyson Wins Wage Dispute: A federal jury has ruled in favor of Tyson Foods, Inc. of Springdale, AR in a case accusing the company of not paying workers for time spent donning and doffing apparel before, during and after shifts. The case (*De Asencio v. Tyson Foods*), filed in 2000 on behalf of seven workers at Tyson's New Holland, PA poultry plant, was heard for two weeks in a federal court in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, after 540 additional workers joined the suit. The jury concluded that putting on and taking off certain clothing is not considered work, according to a statement issued by the company on Wednesday. "We're grateful for this ruling because it shows we're paying our people correctly for the time they devote to their jobs," said Ken Kimbro, senior vice-president of human resources for Tyson. The decision came at a time when the industry has seen plaintiffs recently prevail in similar cases. Last May, officials with George's Processing, Inc. of Cassville, MO agreed to pay \$1.235 million as a settlement in donning and doffing claims dating back nearly six years. "Businesses across the country, including ours, are facing similar wage and hour suits because federal labor regulations in this area are vague," Mr. Kimbro said. "We're hopeful this decision will help bring some clarity to this nationwide legal debate."

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