

Tokyo reexamines beef trading ban after panel ruling

BY MARI YAMAGUCHI
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOKYO — Japan's food safety panel on Monday ruled that relaxing domestic cattle testing standards for mad cow disease won't put consumers at risk, raising the possibility that Tokyo will reopen its lucrative market to U.S. beef imports.

The Food Safety Commission found that tests for the fatal bovine illness on cattle aged 20 months or younger were unable to detect the proteins linked to the fatal bovine affliction. Scientists believe the proteins associated with mad cow disease do not accumulate in cows that young.

"We have concluded that the risk of excluding cows younger than 21 months old from inspections is negligible or extremely small," Yasuhiro Yoshikawa, chairman of the panel's scientific experts, told reporters.

Still, scientists don't know enough about the disease to rule out risk completely, the panel said, which urged Tokyo to improve testing methods.

Japan banned U.S. beef imports in December 2003 after the discovery of the United States' first case of mad cow disease. Washington has been steadily pushing Tokyo to drop the ban, but Japanese officials have insisted that all imported beef come

from animals tested for mad cow disease, also called bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Japan has tested all cattle for mad cow disease since discovering its first case in 2001. Japan has found 16 animals with the disease, most recently a Holstein cow on Sunday.

The issue has caused discord between the two major trading partners, with some U.S. lawmakers threatening possible sanctions against Japan if the ban on beef trade isn't lifted soon.

During her March 19 visit to Tokyo, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice pressed Japan to end the costly ban. Before the ban, Japan was American beef's most lucrative overseas market, estimated at \$1.7 billion a year.

Monday's ruling by Japan's Food Safety Commission allows Tokyo to begin considering whether to lower restrictions on American beef imports. The health and agriculture ministries will now consider revising food safety standards, which would allow Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's administration to restart discussions with U.S. officials about resuming American beef imports.

Last month, a Japanese government panel backed a U.S. proposal to exempt younger cows from testing.

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PFC: Email correspondence contradicts earlier statements

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disgusting to sit here and hear all your excuses," she said.

Sherman said at the meeting that PFC did not make a promise because it did not pass a motion. He added, "the current year's budget would be unacceptable."

While PFC officials previously told the Emerald the committee agreed only to work on an amendment, e-mail correspondence between PFC members obtained by the Emerald indicates at least some members promised to form an amendment.

"I don't believe I ever promised the groups an amendment but I do know others did on the committee," PFC Chairwoman Persis Pohowalla wrote in the March 24 e-mail.

Black Student Union Co-Director LaTina Lewis, whose group is slated to lose three of its five paid positions and a 26.93 percent lower overall budget, said it was "ridiculous" that groups must pay for the PFC's mistake.

"I just get a sense that you guys don't really know much about what this new process is, but you are tryin to convince us to go along with it."

But PFC member Jael Anker-Lagos called the pay changes a "learning process" for everyone involved.

Sherman said groups were notified and the process was carried out.

Survival Center Co-Director Dinae Horne, whose group will be cut from five to three paid positions with a 21.43 overall budget reduction, said the model will affect her group.

"This is going to prove bad for many student groups," she said.

ASUO Vice President Mena Ravasipour said she would take the leaders' feedback into consideration when working on the ASUO Executive's budget recommendation to the Senate.

Some leaders also asked about the new payment system, which eliminates payroll taxes by paying student group leaders through the Business Affairs Office. Some leaders previously expressed concerns that pay would be used to pay student account balances first instead of being paid in cash.

Sherman said the money will be applied to account balances first, but students may be able to work with administrators to change that process.

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