

Starter: What makes you feel unhappy?

Discussion: US Ractopamine Pork

Announcement News

Aug 29, 2020

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) yesterday announced that Taiwan would ease restrictions on US beef and pork imports, while setting standards for pork containing ractopamine, **in an apparent attempt to broker a trade deal with the US.**

“This is a decision that was made based on **national economic interests** and is in line with **future comprehensive strategic objectives**,” Tsai told a news conference at the Presidential Office in Taipei.

Despite her Democratic Progressive Party’s long insistence on a “zero tolerance” policy toward ractopamine, Tsai said she has instructed government agencies to set a “safe tolerance” level for the leanness-enhancing drug in imported pork, **based on scientific evidence and international standards**, on the condition that the public’s health is protected.

More nations have in the past few years allowed the import of meat products, including Japan and South Korea, who are Taiwan’s main trade competitors, and nine other member states of the **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership**, Minister of Economic Affairs Wang Mei-hua (王美花) said.

Later yesterday at a news conference at the Executive Yuan, officials said the policy, scheduled to take effect on Jan. 1, would have a limited effect on consumers and the nation’s pig farming industry.

Council of Agriculture Minister Chen Chi-chung (陳吉仲) said that Taiwanese consume about 900,000 tons of pork each year, 91 percent of which is locally produced, while US pork accounts for about 1 percent. Only about 20 percent of pig farmers in the US still use ractopamine, he said, adding that Taiwanese can always not buy US pork. The new policy would not have a significant effect on the nation’s eating habits or hog industry, he said.

The Food and Drug Administration would use the **Codex Alimentarius Commission’s** maximum ractopamine residue limit of 10 parts per billion in pork and beef as a reference, and set a maximum permissible value in imported US pork that reflects the eating habits of Taiwanese, he said.

1. What is our government’s reason for importing US ractopamine pork?
2. How do you think about the policy U-turn from “zero tolerance” toward ractopamine to “safe tolerance”? What position does our government base on?
3. What’s your opinion on the strategy that by labeling the source of the meat, people can make their decision to eat ractopamine pork or not?
4. Although more nations have allowed the import of ractopamine pork, about 160 nations still ban or restrict the use of it, including all countries in the EU, Russia and China. So why do most of the countries ban it?

What is ractopamine?

Ractopamine is a drug added to animal feed.

What is it used for?

Animals that take the drug grow larger and leaner, and take less feed to grow. All this is good for farmers, as they can spend less money to get more meat from their animals. It is usually used to “finish” animals, getting in some weight gain in the last few weeks before slaughter.

International Controversy?

The Codex Alimentarius Commission and Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) published an information sheet in April 2012 summarizing their **evaluation** on ractopamine. Later that summer, Codex **voted** to adopt a **Maximum Residue Limit (MRL)** for ractopamine in pork and beef.

Despite the long-awaited decision, many countries across the globe have either kept or move forward with the ban on the controversial drug. All of the members of the **EU** along with **China** and **Russia** have banned its use in domestic meat production as well as in imported products. Ractopamine use is currently legal in the US, Canada, and Mexico.

Scientific Evaluation

What does Codex Alimentarius Commission base on?

JECFA has reviewed the available data on ractopamine and performed comprehensive risk assessments considering its toxicology, residues in and intake from food animals in 1993, 2004, 2006 and in 2010. Based on the data provided, including information on dietary consumption, JECFA concluded that the recommended MRL are compliant with the Acceptable Daily Intake for consumption of muscle, liver, kidney and fat.

Why does EU ban ractopamine?

After reviewing the **JECFA** evaluation on ractopamine, EU found weaknesses in the data about the risk assessments which would undermine any proposal for a maximum residue level for ractopamine.

Why does China ban ractopamine?

Because the traditional Chinese diet embraces pig offal(內臟), and because ractopamine is concentrated by the gastro-intestinal system (腸胃道系統) of animals, Chinese officials have banned ractopamine.

Discussion

1. What are the benefits of using ractopamine on meat products?
2. Does the usage of ractopamine benefit consumers?
3. In fact, China imported 1.68 million tons of pork from USA in the first 5 months of 2020, so how can it be?
4. According to the information from both sides, do you agree with the US ractopamine pork policy? What is your reason or what position does you base on?

Extended thinking

1. How can we make a decision in such a dilemma where information from both sides seem reliable and convincing?
2. How do you compare ractopamine meat products to genetic modified food?
3. What is the risk you are willing to take on on food safety?
4. In fact, human beings have been enjoying things that are definitely bad for health, for example, cigarette, fried food, and etc. So what do you think? Are we over-reacting toward the usage of ractopamine since it is no different to others?