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UPDATE(2): Several LatAm Countries Ban US Beef Imports

DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

(Updates list of countries imposing restrictions on U.S. beef imports; adds comments throughout)

BOGOTA (AP)--Several Latin American countries announced bans Friday on U.S. beef imports following the confirmation of the first case of mad cow disease in the U.S.

Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, Uruguay, Nicaragua and Costa Rica said they would bar U.S. beef imports, joining Mexico, Brazil and Chile, which had announced similar measures earlier this week.

Elsewhere, Egypt, Indonesia, Vietnam and Ukraine also announced measures Friday to keep out American beef imports, while Japan, the largest market for U.S. beef, formalized a temporary halt to the imports imposed when U.S. officials first announced the suspected case Tuesday.

South Korea and Mexico, the second and third largest consumers of U.S. beef by value, announced bans earlier this week. Japan, South Korea and Mexico accounted for the bulk of \$2.6 billion in beef export sales in 2002.

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Officials from Peru, Colombia, Argentina and Venezuela said Friday the ban would remain until the U.S. can prove its beef is safe to eat.

Colombian Agriculture Minister Carlos Gustavo Cano said tough controls were being put in place at airports and ports to ensure that no U.S. beef makes its way into Colombia, which consumes an average of 4,000 tons of U.S. beef every year.

"Mad cow disease has deadly effects on whoever consumes contaminated meat and for that reason we have to have very strict controls," Cano told local radio.

In Caracas, Francisco Armada, the Venezuelan Health Ministry's director of sanitation control, said the ministry had identified only "two or three" companies in Venezuela that import U.S. beef and had notified them that their permits to import U.S. beef have been suspended.

"Depending on...the information we get, we'll keep or suspend the measure," Armada told The Associated Press.

Jose Luis Betancourt, president of Fedenagas, Venezuela's largest cattle ranching association, said the country only gets 3% of its beef abroad and the majority comes from Argentina.

In Buenos Aires, Argentine authorities also announced a temporarily ban, although the country, one of the world's largest beef producers, imports only a small amount of U.S. beef, about 48 tons a year, the Agricultural Department said.

Peru also said in its official gazette Friday that the ban wasn't expected to greatly affect consumption in the Andean nation, which is also a beef producer and imports only a small amount of U.S. meats.

"Some exclusive restaurants probably import some (American) beef, but the measure will not have any affect in terms of restricting supply," Miguel Caillaux, vice president of the National Convention of Peruvian Agriculture, or Conveagro, told leading daily El Comercio.

Egypt, which imports most of its beef from the European Union, South America and India, said Friday all U.S. beef products and by-products shipped after Dec. 24 would be banned. According to U.N. trade data, the U.S. exported about \$11.5 million worth of beef products to Egypt in 2002.

In Indonesia, Bachtiar Moerad, a senior official at the agricultural ministry told Kompas daily that the government decided on the ban following an emergency meeting.

Vietnam said the ban would remain until the U.S. could prove its beef was safe to eat, an official of the Veterinary Department, which licenses meat imports, said on condition of anonymity.

Ukraine, which doesn't import U.S. beef and beef products, said in a telegram sent to the U.S. Embassy that it won't import any because of mad cow fears.

Scientists at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency in England on Thursday confirmed earlier U.S. tests concluding that a Holstein Cow in Washington state had the deadly disease.

Other countries that have banned U.S. beef include China, Thailand, Malaysia, Russia, South Africa, Jamaica and Hong Kong. The European Union, which already bans most U.S. beef because of fears about growth hormones, has said it wouldn't take any additional measures.

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