

USDA accepts meat from Costa Rica

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture will again accept meat imports from the four Costa Rican slaughter plants it had removed from its list of approved exporters to the United States March 26, Food Safety and Inspection Service Administrator, Donald L. Houston has announced.

"A USDA team of technical experts returned from Costa Rica satisfied that changes proposed by the Costa Rican government are adequate to correct problems in that country's meat inspection system," Houston said. "We have

received word from Costa Rican officials that the stringent new controls have been fully implemented in these plants."

USDA removed Costa Rica's four slaughter plants from a list of approved exporters because the United States had been receiving improperly identified product and product accompanied by fraudulent inspection certificates, he said.

"The United States must rely on the integrity and diligence of foreign inspection systems to comply with U.S. requirements for safe, wholesome product,"

Houston said. Imported meat must also pass USDA inspection before entering the United States.

"Actions taken by the Costa Rican government in recent weeks clearly demonstrate it is willing and able to meet U.S. inspection standards on a continuing basis."

Houston said Costa Rican inspection officials implemented a new system for issuing and controlling inspection certificates. The control of product intended for export also has been strengthened, with requirements for sealing and securing product in storage

facilities and for sealing vehicles and containers carrying product to export points.

"As an additional precaution—and to verify the effectiveness of the newly implemented Costa Rican controls—USDA import inspectors have been instructed to carry out tightened procedures on product entering the United States from that country," Houston said. "These procedures will remain in effect until the exporting firms in Costa Rica develop a good history

of compliance."

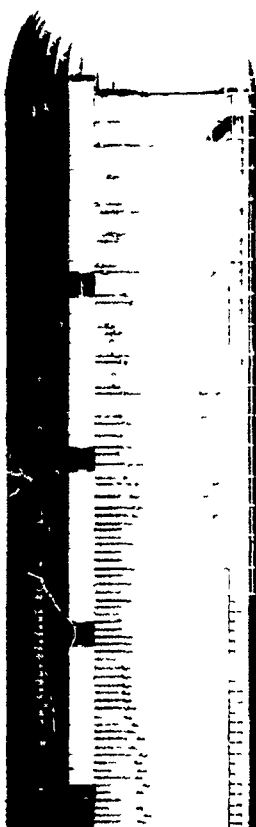
In 1981, the United States imported about 67 million pounds of meat from Costa Rica—less than a quarter of 1 percent of our meat supply, Houston said.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act requires that foreign countries exporting meat to the United States impose inspection requirements that are at least equal to those imposed on U.S. plants.

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