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Japan

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

Positive List violation by Brazilian wheat flour 2008

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Report Highlights:

On May 30, 2008, MHLW announced a second pesticide residue violation finding in Brazilian wheat flour. The chemical detected was Methamidophos at the level of 0.22ppm. The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) has issued an inspection order for Brazilian wheat and wheat products, meaning 100% hold-and-test at the expense of importers.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Trade Report
Tokyo [JA1]
[JA]

Executive Summary

On May 30, 2008, MHLW announced a second violation of Japan's MRL Positive List for Brazilian wheat flour. The chemical detected was Methamidophos which was found at the level of 0.22ppm; Japan's MRL is 0.01 ppm. Since this is the second violation of the same chemical for Brazilian wheat flour, the first finding was on August 10, 2007, MHLW has issued an inspection order for Brazilian wheat and "simply processed products" (e.g. wheat flour), meaning 100% hold-and-test at the expense of importers. Note: Methamidophos is same chemical found in the Chinese dumplings that became headline news in Japan in January 2008. Since then MHLW has taken steps to increase inspections of processed products like flour.

Unlike other MRL violation cases involving products that can be traced back to a particular exporter or grower, wheat and its products are typically not easily traced and therefore it is extremely difficult to limit the sanctions to anything less than countrywide enforcement. In the case of Brazil, its exports of wheat and wheat flour to Japan have traditionally been very small (the last notable amount of wheat grain was exported in 1997 and flour exports are even smaller). Perhaps the dramatic drop in Australian exports since 2005 provided a unique opportunity for Brazil to enter the market. In addition, wheat and wheat based product imports are strictly restricted by state trading and high tariffs – the tariff on commercially imported wheat flour, as in this case, is 90 yen/KG, i.e. over 100% ad valorem. The total import volume in 2007 was only 2,000 mt (as opposed to wheat imports at 5.27 million mt). Therefore, the impact of this incident on the wheat and wheat flour market in Japan is expected to be minimal.

Currently, MHLW's announcement regarding this incident is available only in Japanese (<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2008/05/h0530-7.html>).

MHLW's announcement is summarized below.

(Provisional translation starts)

Regarding the implementation of inspection order to imported food (Brazilian wheat)

May 30, 2008
Inspection and Safety Division

Based on the Article 26, paragraph 3, the inspection order was issued as indicated below.

Inspection object: Brazilian wheat and its simply-processed products
Inspection item: Methamidophos (pesticide)
Background: As results of monitoring inspection by quarantine stations, methamidophos exceeding MRL was detected in Brazilian wheat.

Reference data regarding methamidophos exceeding MRL in Brazilian wheat

Case #1

Name of product: wheat flour
Volume of import: 96 cartons, 576 kg
Test result: Methamidophos-0.19 ppm (0.19ppm as wheat grain, JP MRL is 0.01 ppm)
Reported quarantine station: Yokohama
Date of violation officially reported: August 10, 2007
Measure taken: Whole shipment was discarded

Case #2

Name of product: wheat flour
Volume of import: 430 cartons, 6,450 kg
Test result: Methamidophos-0.22 ppm (0.22ppm as wheat grain, JP MRL is 0.01 ppm)
Reported quarantine station: Yokohama
Date of violation officially reported: May 29, 2008
Measure taken: Whole shipment currently being held

Actual imports of wheat flour from Brazil between January 1, 2007 and May 29, 2008

January 1-December 31, 2007

The number of import notification: 23

Volume: 68.6 metric ton

The number of chemical residue inspection: 5

The number of violation: Pirimiphos-Methyl (2), Methamidophos (1)

January 1-May 29, 2008

The number of import notification: 5

Volume: 16.2 metric ton

The number of chemical residue inspection: 5

The number of violation: Methamidophos (1)

(Provisional translation ends)