



Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 10/11/2001

GAIN Report #EI1010

Ireland

Livestock and Products

Irish beef exports to Egypt set to resume 2001

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Report Highlights:

The Irish beef industry has welcomed a change in Egyptian veterinary requirements which is expected to re-open the Egyptian market to Irish beef. The market has been closed to EU beef since late 2000 over BSE worries.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
London [UK1], EI

The Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (DAFRD) has welcomed the publication of an Egyptian decree, October 7, which is expected to allow the long awaited reopening of the Egyptian market for Irish beef. The newly published decree extends the existing European-wide ban on beef imports due to worries over BSE but in a major development provides for an exemption for countries with BSE controls of the type operated by Ireland. This follows intensive contact at political, diplomatic and technical level over the past number of months between Irish and Egyptian officials.

Irish beef had been included in a general ban on European beef introduced by Egypt in the wake of the EU's BSE crisis in 2000. However, the GOI agreed with the Egyptian government that a delegation of senior Egyptian veterinary officials would travel to Ireland, August 2001, to conduct a detailed assessment of the BSE situation in Ireland, of the controls in place and the guarantees which could be provided to consumers as a result. The veterinary officials held detailed discussions with the DAFRD as well as conducting visits to farms, processing plants and laboratories involved in identifying BSE. According to DAFRD, the Egyptian experts were impressed with the Irish BSE arrangements and while the general ban on European beef has been extended, the exemptions are to a large extent based on the way in which BSE has been dealt with in Ireland.

Irish Agriculture Minister Walsh said that this excellent news comes at a crucial time for the Irish beef sector and represents an important confidence boost as Ireland's busiest slaughtering season begins. He said that there had been a huge investment of resources in Ireland's handling of BSE and he believed that it was extremely gratifying that the experts in one of Ireland's major markets have recognized this.

In recent years the Egyptian market imported in excess of 150,000 tonnes of Irish beef (valued in excess of USD 250 million) per annum. However, while the relaxation in Egyptian veterinary requirements opens up that market for Irish beef, exports there in 2001 will be minimal as the decree change has come at a very late stage in the year.

Producer groups, while welcoming the news, said that it will be several weeks before processing plants can commence producing beef for the Egyptian market. It is understood that beef destined for Egypt must meet strict criteria including being BSE-tested and coming from animals aged under two years. It is also expected that Egyptian experts will travel to Ireland to ensure that these criteria are being met at slaughtering plants. Processors have also noted that the UK market for Irish beef is particularly strong at the moment and with tighter supplies of cattle ready for slaughter prices are beginning to increase. The prospect of price increases has been welcomed by farming groups who warned that the EU Commission must now increase export subsidies to ensure that Irish beef is competitively priced to Egyptian importers.