



Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 11/23/1998

GAIN Report #UK8057

United Kingdom

Livestock

UK beef export ban lifted

1998

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Report Highlights:

EU Farm Ministers have voted to lift the export ban on British beef. The ban has been in force since March 1996.

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

EU Farm Ministers today (November 23) voted to lift the export ban on British beef. The only minister to vote against the lifting of the ban was Germany's Karl-Heinz Funke. The move will initially only apply to de-boned beef from cattle born after 1 August, 1996. It is also expected that the European Commission will insist on the culling of a further 12,000 offspring from cows that have died of BSE as a condition of lifting the ban.

The news has been immediately welcomed by British farmers and exporters, who have seen beef prices slump since the ban was imposed in March 1996 at the height of the BSE crisis. Pre-BSE, British beef exports were worth BPS520 million (USD875 million) annually with about 3,400 tons exported weekly. At the time, this was equivalent to around 25 percent of the UK national kill, or 11,000 head.

However, British beef is unlikely to be found on the tables of Europe and the rest of the world for at least several months because British farmers and meat processors are likely to face similar problems to those faced after the export ban was lifted for Northern Ireland last March. The first one-ton load of Northern Irish beef failed to leave port until the end of June, as EU inspectors made further checks of procedures and plants. Indeed, speaking on British television earlier today, Franz Fischler, the EU Farm Commissioner did not anticipate seeing any exports of British beef until at least March 1999, once all the necessary inspections have been made.

Even then, regular commercial trade will take time to resume. Northern Ireland is currently exporting just one 25 ton container per week and is finding it very hard to increase its market share. Traders are reporting that no one is prepared to buy forward, retailers remain nervous about stocking UK origin beef and third country business, which it had been hoped would resume fairly quickly, has yet to materialize. Anticipating similar problems for the rest of the UK, the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) is planning a beef export promotion campaign. Concentrating on reverse trade missions for foreign traders and press, the MLC aims to show these people firsthand the control measures in place in the hope that some of the concerns over the risk of BSE in the UK can be alleviated.

According to Duncan Sinclair, policy analyst with the MLC, marketing efforts are likely to initially focus on the quality end of the market, supplying farm assured suckler beef and Scottish beef to Continental hotels and restaurants.