

Brazil Could Raise Beef Exports to Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Brazil could end up increasing beef exports to Russia, its biggest buyer, after banning a controversial feed additive that promotes muscle growth in animals such as pigs and cattle, Russia's food safety watchdog said Thursday.

On Monday, Russia stepped up tests on U.S. and Canadian meat imports for traces of the additive, a beta blocker called ractopamine, and demanded that both nations certify their meat as ractopamine-free. U.S. exports alone to Russia are worth about \$500 million.

Ractopamine is in a class of drugs known as beta inhibitors or blockers, which counteract the effects of adrenaline on the nervous system and slow the heart rate. In [livestock](#), it promotes muscle gain.

Brazil enacted its ban on ractopamine on Nov. 12, and the country eventually plans to have a split system in place enabling it to produce ractopamine-free meat for buyers like Russia but

use it in meat for other destinations.

Russia's food safety watchdog said it was satisfied with Brazil's assurances and said Brazil may increase its current share of Russian beef imports, now about 43 percent, as a result. An increase would likely come at the expense of purchases of U.S. and Canadian meats while the testing and certification issue is resolved.

"Everything is all right with Brazilian meat. They guaranteed that meat coming to Russia will be ractopamine-free," said Alexei Alexeyenko, a spokesman for the Russian watchdog. "It is a very interesting step because they will be ready to keep their stake of the Russian market and even to increase it."

Russia imported 1.25 million tons of red meat worth \$4.5 billion from non-CIS countries in 2011, excluding offal, according to official customs data.

Russia has denied that political motives lie behind its tighter restrictions on North American meats, saying its decision was based purely on its food safety standards.

On Friday, the same day that the U.S. Senate voted on a measure to "name and shame" human rights violators as part of a bill expanding trade with Russia, Russia demanded that U.S. and Canadian meat imports be certified to be free of ractopamine.

Ironically, at a time when Russia sees the possibility of more Brazilian beef imports, it is still mulling restrictions on them after a case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, commonly known as mad cow disease, in an animal that died of other causes in southern Brazil in 2010.

The case is believed to have been an "atypical" one arising from a genetic mutation more common in elderly cattle that can spark the disease spontaneously, unlike cases in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s caused by contaminated feed.

The animal was buried on the farm where it died and never entered the food chain.

Alexeyenko said Russia would finish its investigation into the Brazilian case soon.

"I think the results will come pretty soon and then we will be able to decide on what to do," he said.

[Japan](#) announced Monday that it was suspending purchases of Brazilian beef and that it had requested further information about the animal from Brazilian authorities.

South Africa said Thursday that it was restricting Brazilian beef purchases. Both are small buyers of Brazil's meat.

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