



USDA Approves Import of Poultry Processed in China

On August 31, as most Americans were enjoying the Labor Day weekend and perhaps grilling hamburgers and chicken, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) quietly lifted its restriction on processed poultry (such as chicken and turkey) from Communist China being imported into the United States. Furthermore, the imported processed poultry will not require a country-of-origin label nor will U.S. inspectors be on site at processing plants in China before it is shipped to the United States for human consumption.



The USDA's announcement came in the form of an [official letter \(accompanied by an FSIS report\)](#) to Li Chunfeng, the deputy director general of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) in the People's Republic of China (PRC). "As all outstanding issues have been resolved, the PRC may proceed with certifying a list of poultry processing establishment as meeting the FSIS requirements," the letter said. The letter further stated:

These certified establishments may then *begin exporting processed (heat-treated/cooked) poultry products to the United States* under the conditions established in FSIS' April 2006 final rule; i.e. only processed poultry product from poultry slaughtered under FSIS inspection in the United States or in a country eligible to export slaughtered poultry to the United States. [Emphasis added.]

For now, only chickens or turkeys that are raised and slaughtered in either the United States, Canada, or other countries that are currently allowed to export poultry to the United States may now be sent to China in order to be cooked or processed into food products that will then be shipped back to the United States to be sold and consumed. Because the poultry is originally coming from the United States or other countries approved by the USDA, inspectors from the USDA will not be required on site in China when it is being processed, according to the [New York Times](#), which further stated:

And because the poultry will be processed, it will not require country-of-origin labeling. Nor will consumers eating chicken noodle soup from a can or chicken nuggets in a fast-food restaurant know if the chicken came from Chinese processing plants.

This raises a whole host of questions. For starters, how will consumers here know that the processed



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chicken and turkey that is shipped back to the United States is the same chicken and turkey that was originally sent from the United States or other USDA-approved country in the first place? If USDA inspectors will not be on site in China, how will U.S. consumers know whether or not the poultry has been mishandled during processing, tampered with, or contaminated?

Even if Chinese processing plants have passed a FSIS inspection in the past, what is to guarantee that such sanitary conditions and processing techniques would be the same when China begins processing poultry to be imported back to the United States?

Furthermore, without a country-of-origin label, how will U.S. consumers know whether or not the chicken or poultry product that they decide to purchase and consume came from China? And if no such labeling is required, then how else will U.S. consumers be able to make informed decisions about the chicken or poultry product that they put into their bodies?

In a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) said, "Given the well-documented shortcoming of the Chinese food safety system, we shouldn't allow unmarked meat into our markets that is processed in Chinese facilities that are not subject to food safety inspections." He further stressed, "This action could endanger the health and safety of American consumers and potentially undermines confidence in our nation's food safety standards."

Another concern, which makes this move by the USDA troubling and all the more surprising, are the recent outbreaks of the H5N1 and H7N9 strains of the avian bird flu over the last decade in China. From 2004 through 2007, the H5N1 bird flu resulted in the deaths of 332 people.

Earlier this year, an even more dangerous strain of the influenza, known as H7N9, broke out among live chickens in China's fresh meat markets. As of April 25, H7N9 is reported to have infected 110 people and has claimed 23 lives. Of those fatalities, one was reported in the province of Anhui, four in Jiangsu, six in Zhejiang, and twelve in Shanghai.

Both the H5N1 and H7N9 bird flu viruses are transmittable from birds, such as infected chickens, to people.

Although no cases of the avian influenza have been reported in the United States among either people or chickens, the initial shipments of Chinese-processed chicken should be free of infection if they in fact originated from the United States or other USDA-approved country and if the employees at the Chinese poultry processing plants are also free of any such infection.

But even if such optimistic conditions prevail, there is no guarantee that outbreaks of either H5N1 or H7N9 bird flu might not make their way into the United States via imported chicken from China. For instance, allowing U.S.-raised poultry to be processed in China could set the stage for allowing poultry that has been raised and slaughtered in China to be officially processed and shipped to the United States in the future. *World Poultry* magazine, a publication aimed at the international poultry industry, noted the following:

It is thought ... that the government would eventually expand the rules, so that chickens and turkeys bred in China could end up in the American market. Experts suggest that this could be the first step towards allowing China to export its own domestic chickens to the U.S.

With the recent [acquisition of Smithfield Farms](#), the largest pork producer in the world, by Chinese Communist Party-controlled Shuanghui International Holdings, coupled with the USDA's announcement lifting the restriction on the import of Chinese-processed poultry into the United States, it now appears



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that the Chinese Communists will either buy out American meat producers or simply process the remaining meat that they have yet to control.

The risk posed to U.S. food security and safety will continue to escalate, as more of the U.S. food industry gradually falls under the control and influence of China's ruling Marxist-Leninist government.



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