

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

L/3251

19 September 1969

Limited Distribution

Original: English

IMPORTS OF BEEF INTO THE UNITED KINGDOM

The following communication, dated 4 September 1969, has been received from the delegation of the United Kingdom and is being circulated for information.

Following the report of the Northumberland Committee (established to investigate the causes of the 1967/68 outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom) Her Majesty's Government announced on 1 May 1969 new measures to regulate imports of certain kinds of beef from countries where foot-and-mouth disease is endemic. These measures were described in a statement by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to Parliament, and an extract of this is reproduced below.

"The first part of the report of the Northumberland Committee on foot-and-mouth disease deals with policy to prevent and control future outbreaks of the disease. Its main recommendation is that the slaughter policy by itself should be continued as the best means of eradicating the disease provided that we maintain a meat import policy which reduces substantially the risk of primary outbreaks. The Committee proposes that the existing ban on imports of mutton, lamb and pigmeat (including unprocessed sheep and pig offals) from countries where foot-and-mouth disease is endemic should be extended to all unprocessed beef imports, unless wider considerations should make this unacceptable, in which case imports from these countries should be limited to boneless beef and processed offal. The Committee's view was that if bones, unprocessed offals and lymph glands were excluded from beef imported from such countries, the reduction of risk would be almost equivalent to that which would be achieved by a complete ban on imports.

"The Government have taken account of this assessment of the animal disease risks of the alternative courses, along with their economic implications for our meat supplies and our trade with a number of traditional supplying countries with whom we value our close relations. The Government have decided that the animal health and other interests can best be served by accepting the Committee's recommendations to continue the existing ban on imports of mutton, lamb and pigmeat and unprocessed offals from such countries where foot-and-mouth disease is endemic, and by limiting imports of beef from such countries to boneless beef and processed offals. There is already some trade in boneless beef, and to give reasonable time for the necessary changes in trading to be made, it is our intention to delay the introduction of the new arrangements until 1 October next. We propose to reduce the relatively high tariff of 20 per cent on boneless beef so that a reasonable level of trade may flow, and will have the necessary consultations to this end.

./.

"The Committee considered that it would be necessary to impress upon the governments of those countries which will be permitted to supply beef only in boneless form the importance of attaining a high standard of compliance with animal health requirements, and of hygiene and public health inspection. The Government attach great importance to this matter and will follow it up urgently with the governments of the countries concerned, who will be reminded of the necessity for Her Majesty's Government to withdraw immediately authorization for supplies to come from plants which do not meet the required hygiene standards."

After consultation with the governments of countries affected by these changes and with domestic interests, Her Majesty's Government further announced on 23 July 1969, that the customs tariff on boned or boneless beef (ex 02.01 and ex 02.06) would be reduced from 20 per cent to 5 per cent with effect from 1 October next (when the new import regulations enter into force). The object of this tariff reduction is to ensure that a reasonable level of trade should continue to flow, especially from those countries in South America whose traditional supplies have largely been of bone-in-beef. Her Majesty's Government confidently expect that this will be the case with a tariff at this level, but the rate of duty will be subject to review in the light of experience.

It must be emphasized that the new measures are being taken solely as a result of the need to maintain high standards of animal and public health in the United Kingdom. There is no question of attempting to provide protection for our domestic industry and we consider the new measures to be fully compatible with the GATT and with Article XX in particular.