EXCLUSIVE POLICY

# Trump Delays Move to Lower Tariffs on Beef Imports

The administration was set to suspend tariff-rate quotas on all beef-exporting nations; beef prices have climbed steadily since Trump took office

By Patrick Thomas, Gavin Bade and Lindsay Wise
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Ground beef prices are up 40% from five years ago. CHENEY ORR/REUTERS

The Trump administration said it would delay a plan to address high beef prices, which would have suspended tariffs on imported beef.

President Trump had planned to sign Monday a pair of executive orders to lower tariffs on beef and reduce regulations on American cattle producers. On Monday evening a White House official said the actions had been delayed as the administration finalizes details.

The delay followed outcry from some congressional Republicans and cattle ranchers, typically a solid part of Trump's base. The Wall Street Journal earlier Monday reported Trump's plans to sign the orders.

"I know there'll be some concerns" among ranchers, Montana Republican Sen. Steve Daines said on Monday following reports of the tariff action.

The tariff issue is a “challenging tightrope for the administration,” added Sen. Cynthia Lummis (R., Wyo.), a cattle rancher. If the tariff changes affect cattle prices when ranchers are selling livestock, she said, “we’ll lose a lot of money.”

The White House official didn’t specify when the administration may move forward with the actions.

The administration had planned executive orders that would suspend the annual tariff-rate quota—which applies a higher tariff rate after a certain level of beef imports are reached—on all beef-exporting nations, enabling more of the product to enter the U.S. at lower tariff rates.

The administration also had planned to direct the Small Business Administration to increase loans and access to capital for U.S. ranchers, and to reduce protections for gray and Mexican wolves under the Endangered Species Act, a focus of rancher complaints. And the administration was prepared to reduce some regulations for U.S. cattlemen, including Agriculture Department rules requiring them to use electronic ear tags on livestock.

Opening the way for more imports risked angering cattle ranchers, a reliable constituency of the president’s. Trade groups representing U.S. cattlemen opposed the administration’s move to enable more beef imports from Argentina and on Monday criticized Trump’s planned tariff move, warning that an influx of cheap meat would hurt American ranchers.

Temporarily boosting beef imports would likely lead U.S. ranchers to hold back from adding more cattle, unless the administration committed to revisiting import constraints in two to three years, the Ranchers-Cattlemen Legal Action Fund said Monday.

Beef has been one of the most persistent sources of inflation for U.S. consumers over the past year and a half, while prices have eased for eggs, milk and other products. Ground beef prices are up 40% from five years ago.

The administration in February allowed more beef imports from Argentina

The administration in February allowed more beef imports from Argentina in a bid to bring down domestic prices.

## Lower rates

The Trump administration has carried out a series of tariff rollbacks aimed at alleviating costs for U.S. consumers ahead of the midterm elections in November. Last fall, Trump exempted many food products from his so-called reciprocal tariffs, and in January he delayed planned increases on lumber products and furniture.

The president also reconfigured steel and aluminum tariffs this year in hopes of making compliance more manageable for companies, though the move ended up raising the amount of levies paid for some metal products. He also hasn't followed through on a threat to increase his global minimum tariff from 10% to 15%.

Livestock prices have surged in the U.S. over the past few years, after cattlemen reduced the size of their herds to the lowest level in 75 years, according to the Agriculture Department. Consumer demand for beef has stayed strong, though, helping drive up supermarket prices.

Trump has tasked advisers with finding solutions. The Justice Department has launched a criminal probe into the largest U.S. meatpackers after Trump called for an investigation.

Ranchers began shrinking their herds after livestock prices tumbled during the pandemic and drought scorched grazing lands. Ranchers—who are making more money than ever before—have been reluctant to rebuild their herds, a process that can take years.

## Shopping around

About 20% of the 29 billion pounds of beef consumed in the U.S. is imported, and American meat processors and burger makers already have been ramping up imports from countries such as Brazil and Australia over the past year. For 2026, the U.S. is projected to import nearly 6 billion pounds, a record.

record.

Brazil recently surpassed the U.S. as the top beef-producing country in the world, accounting for 20% of the world's supply, according to USDA data. The country is home to JBS, the world's largest meatpacker.

Last year, Brazil shipped $1.75 billion of beef to the U.S., a record amount.

The Brazilian Association of Meat Exporting Industries, a trade group for the country's meat companies, recently called on Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to try to get the Trump administration to revisit the quota system.

Trump and da Silva met at the White House last week, discussing trade and tariffs along with crime and potential investments in Brazilian critical minerals.

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Patrick Thomas covers agriculture and America's food supply chain for The Wall Street Journal. He writes about the way food in the U.S. is grown and sold, reporting about the businesses of meat processors, grain traders, pesticide manufacturers, crop-seed developers and supermarkets....

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