

South Korea finds banned bones in U.S. beef shipment for third time this month

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SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA — South Korea found banned bones in a U.S. beef shipment for third time this month and plans to send the entire shipment back to the United States, an official said Wednesday.

South Korea's Agriculture and Forestry Ministry said it found rib bones earlier in the day in one box of a 16.15-tonne shipment that arrived in South Korea on Aug. 5, the ministry official said. He asked not to be named, citing the agency's policy.

The official declined to identify the U.S. facility that processed the beef.

But he said Seoul had already suspended the facility from shipping meat bound for South Korea and revoked its import approval needed for export to South Korea because of similar violations in recent months.

Last year, South Korea agreed to import only boneless U.S. meat from cattle under 30 months old, lifting an almost three-year ban imposed on American beef after mad cow disease was discovered in the U.S.

Such meat is thought to be less at risk of carrying the disease.

Scientists believe mad cow disease spreads when farmers feed cattle recycled meat and bones from infected animals. The cattle disease is also believed to be linked to the rare but fatal human variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

The latest shipment had been sent July 23, nine days before Seoul halted quarantine inspections of U.S. beef after discovering a shipment containing a vertebrae. Seoul resumed its quarantine inspections of U.S. beef on Aug. 27.

Two similar incidents happened last week when rib bones were found in beef shipments from Greeley, Colo.-based meatpacker Swift & Co. and Cargill Meat Solutions Corp., based in Wichita, Kan.

Seoul has since canceled import approval for the two U.S. facilities.

South Korea was the third-largest foreign market for American beef before it banned imports in December 2003.