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No date yet, but China intends to lift ban on U.S. pork

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It's not yet clear when it will actually happen, but Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Thursday that China intends to lift its H1N1-related ban on U.S. pork and live swine, consistent with science-based international standards.

The announcement was made at the conclusion of meetings with Chinese officials at the US-China Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade.

The move "marks an important step forward in cooperation between the countries on agriculture issues," Vilsack said in a statement that was short on specifics.

US meat industry groups reacted with cautious optimism.

"We're encouraged because it looks the Chinese finally are going to lift the restrictions," Nick Giordano, international trade counsel at the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) told *Agri-Pulse*. "We're looking carefully for a date certain and want to make sure there's no strings attached."

"If China reopens the market under conditions that are reasonable and economically viable, that's a very important breakthrough," said US Meat Export Federation spokesman Joe Schuele. "But we're still waiting for more details on the announcement before we try to assess what kind of an impact it will have."

China was the fastest growing market for U.S. pork before it halted shipments in late April. A year ago, the Asian nation imported nearly 400,000 metric tons of pork worth nearly \$690 million, according to NPPC.

In his statement, Vilsack made no mention of disputes with Beijing over market access for US chicken, beef and cotton.

Throughout his travels in China this week, Vilsack emphasized the need to keep markets open and promote food safety and workable international regulatory standards that protect consumers without creating artificial trade barriers, USDA said.

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