

Taiwan pulls drug-tainted US beef

Agence France-Presse in Taipei

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Three shipments of US beef have been pulled from Taiwan's shelves after they were found to contain drugs to promote leanness in animals, an official said.

"Now all the US beef that may contain the residue of the leanness drug Paylean has been removed from the shelves," Chiang Yu-mei, a health official at the Taipei city government, said. She urged consumers not to panic, but local media said 1.5 tonnes of such beef might have already been consumed on the island.

Three out of 24 US beef samples from three hypermarkets in the capital were found on Friday to contain Paylean at 2.84 parts per billion.

The incident sparked concerns from the United States, the island's leading source of beef imports. The Office of the United States Trade Representative said that US beef products were safe and urged Taiwan to lift its ban on leanness drugs, Taiwan's state Central News Agency said.

Taiwan, China and the European Union ban Paylean because of possible human health risks associated with the ingredient ractopamine, but 26 countries, including the US, Canada, Australia and Brazil, have declared the product safe.

Local media said the withdrawal of the shipment might cast fresh doubt on a proposed Trade and Investment Framework Agreement between Taipei and Washington. Talks ceased in 2007, when Taiwan reintroduced a ban on US bovine offal and ground beef amid a scare over mad cow disease. Taiwan banned all US beef imports in December 2003 over fears of the disease, but in 2006 allowed imports of boneless beef.