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U.S. & Mexico Impose Restrictions On Cattle Imports Due To Health Concerns

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During December, the US and Mexico each announced veterinary health-related measures intended to protect their respective cattle industries. On Dec. 6, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) asked Mexico to brand all cattle exported to the US with the letter M. According to Bill Johnson a USDA veterinary inspection service official the identification mark will help US authorities determine the true origin of the cattle and help prevent the spread of bovine tuberculosis. USDA statistics show that roughly 83% of the cattle found to have tuberculosis in the US are thought to have been imported from Mexico. In comparison, only about 33% of cattle diagnosed with the disease a decade ago were thought to be of Mexican origin. The US imports about one million head of cattle from Mexico annually. Separately, Mexican veterinary health authorities on Dec. 11 announced a ban on imports of Canadian cattle, following the discovery of "mad cow" disease in a small number of cattle in the province of Alberta. Mexico imports the equivalent of US$13 million of Canadian cattle annually. According to John Kellar, a veterinary health specialist for Agriculture Canada, the disease was discovered in a herd of cattle originally imported from Britain in the 1980's. The disease which causes deterioration of the brain in livestock--resulted in numerous deaths among cattle herds in Britain during the late 1980's and early 1990's. In fact, Canada stopped importing cattle from Britain in 1990 because of an outbreak of the disease in that European country. Kellar said Canadian health authorities have quarantined the ranch where the infected cattle originated and are studying other measures to prevent a spread of the disease. He told the government news agency Notimex that a special report will be sent to Mexican health authorities once a full investigation is completed. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 12/06/93; Notimex, 12/11/93)

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