



China's Refusals of Food Imports

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What Is the Issue?

China has adopted many new standards, laws, and regulations during the last two decades to address its food safety problems. Exporters aspiring to sell to that country's growing market must comply with these measures. This report profiles the kinds of foods refused entry by China and the violations reported. The results of this analysis can inform exporters and leaders in business and government about China's enforcement of safety regulations for imported foods.

What Did the Study Find?

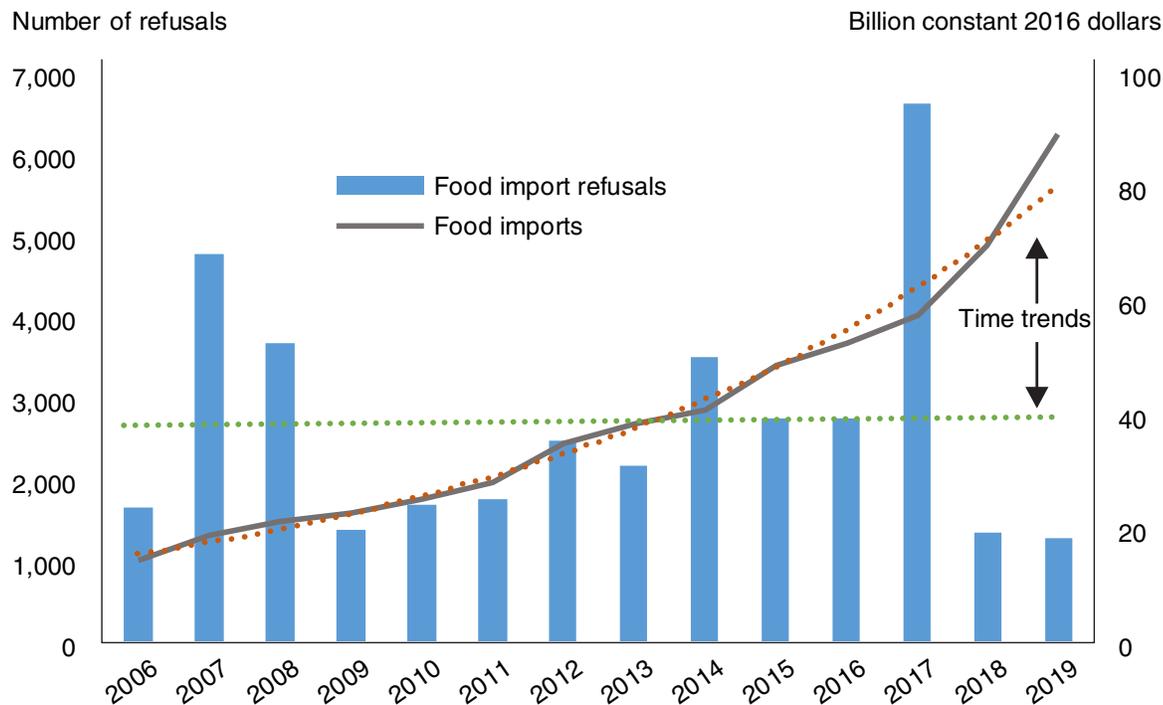
China's food safety laws and regulations require exporters of many commodities to pass audits and register with Chinese authorities. China accepted more than 99 percent of food imports during 2006-19, but thousands of shipments are refused annually due to violations of China's many laws, regulations, and standards. China's refusals did not trend upward during 2006-19, although its food imports did rise rapidly. Refusals fluctuated from year to year, peaking in 2007 and 2017 and dropping to their lowest-ever totals in 2018-19. The rate of refusal varies from year to year. Refusals surged during years when officials launched campaigns to step up inspections and regulatory enforcement.

Food additives and chemical composition that did not conform to Chinese standards and regulations were the most frequently cited violations for refusals. Other common reasons for refusals were incomplete or improper documentation and registrations, and problems with labels, packaging, and expiration dates. The prevalence of specific violations varied across products. For example, violations related to documents and procedures accounted for about half of meat refusals.

U.S. products accounted for 8.7 percent of China's food imports and 9.2 percent of China's food import refusals. The largest number of China's import refusals included processed and packaged consumer-ready foods. Refused processed products come predominantly from the European Union, United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

China food import refusals and value of imports from all countries and regions, 2006-19



Notes: The value of food imports is deflated with the International Monetary Fund's Primary Commodity Index for food. Green dots show the trend in food import refusals; red dots show the trend in food imports.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service analysis of data from China General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, China General Administration of Customs, and customs data accessed through the Trade Data Monitor.

China's COVID-19-related refusals of meat and seafood shipments during 2020 attracted attention from trading partners. Though data for calendar year 2020 were not yet available, USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) analyzed data for the first 7 months of the year. The examination showed China rejecting more meat and seafood shipments in the months before the pandemic as import volumes rose.

How Was the Study Conducted?

The study compiled records of 37,906 food shipments refused by China's border inspectors from 2006 to 2019. ERS researchers also analyzed 1,050 refusals for the first 7 months of 2020 to investigate COVID-19-related refusals. ERS obtained the lists from websites of China's border inspection agencies. Customs data on China's total food imports were tabulated to evaluate the quantity of refusals against actual imports. Domestic food testing results for 2019 were summarized to characterize domestic food safety enforcement for comparison.

Explanation of key acronyms

AQSIQ	China General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine
CIQ	China Inspection and Quarantine
COVID-19	Novel coronavirus 2019
CFDA	China Food and Drug Administration
GAC	China General Administration of Customs
RASFF	European Union Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed Imports
SAMR	China State Administration for Market Regulation
US FDA	U.S. Food and Drug Administration
WTO	World Trade Organization