

UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

U.S. Food Safety and Trade: Myth vs. Fact

Myth #1: Our Free Trade Agreements require U.S. authorities to permit foods that do not meet U.S. safety standards to enter the United States.

Fact: False. All our Free Trade Agreements allow the United States to determine the appropriate level of protection for food products. No exporting country can make the United States accept unsafe products or lower our food safety standards.

Myth #2: The U.S. food supply is “unsafe” because not all food imports are inspected.

Fact: All imported food products, including meat and poultry products, seafood, dairy products, and fresh and processed fruits and vegetables must meet stringent food safety standards that provide the same high level of protection Americans enjoy under the rules applied to foods produced in the United States. U.S. inspectors review all import records, assisted by a computerized statistical sampling program that aids targeted inspections. Products are reviewed based on their probable risk and given special scrutiny based on risk.

With respect to meat and poultry, foreign processing plants cannot ship products to the United States unless the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) certifies that the origin country has a food safety system that provides a level of protection that is at least equivalent to the U.S. system. A second layer of protection is added by the FSIS re-inspection program at U.S. border entry points.

For food and food products other than meat, poultry, and egg products, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires notice in advance of importation, so information review can occur prior to arrival of such items at U.S. ports of entry. FDA, in conjunction with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, undertakes port-of-entry review of imported food, including sampling and analysis of specific shipments where necessary to ensure that imported food complies with the requirements of the U.S. food safety system.

But record review and inspection are only part of the story. The U.S. food supply is among the safest in the world due to the cooperation and active participation of all stakeholders—farmers, industry, exporters, importers, and consumers—in protecting the entire U.S. food chain.

Myth #3: Trade rules in the proposed Free Trade Agreements with Peru, Colombia, Panama, and South Korea limit food safety standards and border inspection.

Fact: No provision in any of our FTAs limits the ability of the United States to protect our food supply. On the contrary, all our FTAs allow U.S. government agencies, on the basis of a science-based assessment of specific risk, to apply appropriate measures to safeguard life and health.

Myth #4: Under our Free Trade Agreements, U.S. food safety regulators are required to treat imported food the same as domestically produced food, even though more intensive inspection of imported goods is needed.

Fact: All imported food products must meet stringent food safety standards that provide the same high level of protection Americans enjoy under the U.S. rules applied to domestically produced foods. Our FTAs provide that food safety requirements be based on scientific principles, not discriminate against imports without scientific justification, and be no more trade restrictive than necessary to achieve their safety objective. There is nothing in our FTAs that restricts food regulators in the United States from taking appropriate surveillance and enforcement measures when necessary for food safety.