



Argentine Beef Import Quota Expansion

May 5, 2026

In February 2026, the average price cattle producers received for their cattle reached a record high. The price increase was in part due to the year-over-year decreases in U.S. cattle inventory, suspended cattle imports from Mexico due to New World Screwworm, and slower pace of U.S. cattle slaughter. The reduction in cattle inventory led to an increase in the retail price of beef across the United States. The U.S. beef cattle supply chain is made up of interconnected links. The supply chain comprises cattle producers that raise beef cattle, processors that slaughter the beef cattle to develop beef products, and entities that sell the beef products to U.S. consumers directly or through intermediaries. Typically, if the price the cattle producer receives for the cattle increases, the price for beef products that U.S. consumers purchase also would increase. This price dynamic may sometimes contribute to entities along the U.S. beef supply chain and U.S. consumers of beef products having different perspectives on policies affecting domestic production of cattle and U.S. beef prices, particularly in periods of rising cattle and U.S. retail beef prices.

On February 6, 2026, President Trump issued a proclamation to address the high U.S. beef prices for American consumers by temporarily increasing the volume for the U.S. beef tariff-rate quota (TRQ) for imported Argentine beef. Under TRQs, a certain volume of imports enter *in-quota* and face lower or no duties. Imports that enter outside of the in-quota volume (i.e., *out-of-quota*) face higher duties. The U.S. Constitution grants Congress the authority to regulate foreign commerce and impose tariffs. Congress delegated authority to administer agricultural TRQs to the President, including for beef imports, under Section 404 of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act (P.L. 103-465, 19 U.S.C. §3601). Additionally, the President “may temporarily increase the quantity of imports” under the in-quota rate of an agricultural product TRQ if existing supplies are inadequate to “meet domestic demand at reasonable prices” because of “natural disaster, disease, or major national market disruption.” The February 2026 proclamation was issued a day after the United States and Argentina signed an Agreement on Reciprocal Trade and Investment. The Trump Administration had publicly proposed increasing Argentine imports since October 2025.

Several Members of Congress expressed concerns before and after the proclamation announcement. Some Members cited concerns related to Argentina’s inconsistent food safety and animal health standards. Other Members expressed concerns about potential destabilization for the U.S. cattle market. In the 119th Congress, the trade title of H.R. 7567, as passed by the House on April 30, 2026, would address President Trump’s February 2026 proclamation. The bill would express congressional concerns that the expanded quota is detrimental to U.S. cattle producers and could have a “ripple effect throughout the domestic economy affecting feed suppliers, equipment dealers, veterinarians, and other rural businesses.” H.R.

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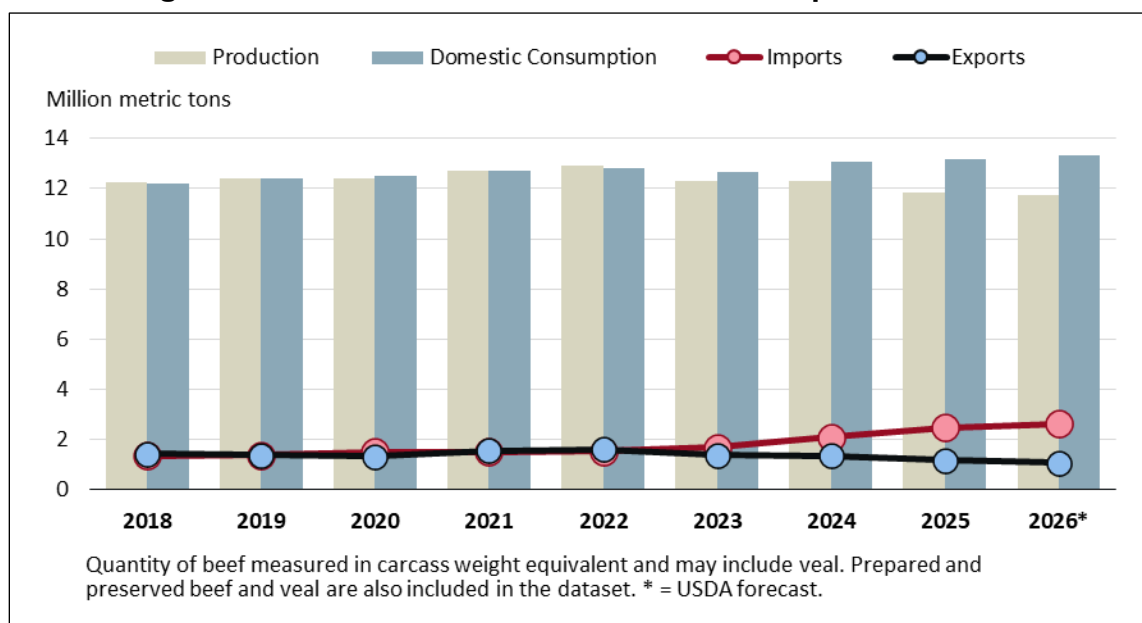
7567 would require the Secretary of Agriculture and U.S. Trade Representative to jointly submit a report, to specified congressional committees, detailing what effect a change in the TRQ or other duties for Argentine beef imports would have on U.S. beef and cattle markets.

Some analysts argue that an increase in Argentine beef imports would have a negligible effect on the price of U.S. beef. Other analysts claim U.S. beef cattle producers may respond by slowing down the rebuilding of the U.S. cattle herd.

U.S. Beef Imports and Tariff-Rate Quotas

Due to limited domestic beef cattle production and high beef prices since 2020, foreign beef imports have increased to augment U.S. supply, and U.S. beef exports have decreased (**Figure 1**). According to USDA, most beef imports are *lean beef trimmings* (i.e., the lower quality pieces of meat that remain on the carcass after the marketable cuts, such as steaks and roast, have been removed), which are an input of U.S. ground beef.

Figure 1. U.S. Beef Production, Domestic Consumption, and Trade

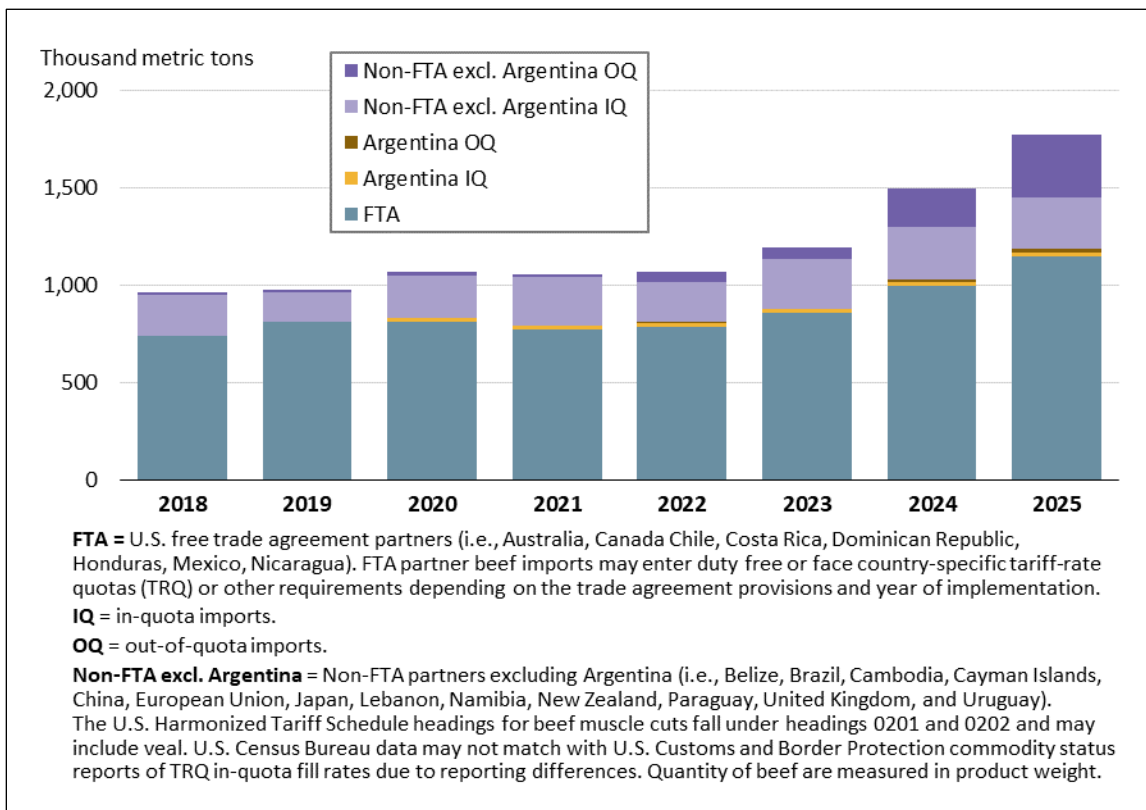


Source: CRS using U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), “Production, Supply, and Distribution Online,” April 2026.

Argentina has an annual country-specific in-quota quantity of 20,000 metric tons (MT) that faces a lower duty of \$44 per MT and a higher 26.4% duty on the product’s value when the in-quota threshold is reached. Argentine beef imports enter into the United States under the World Trade Organization TRQ established under the Uruguay Round Agreements. From 2018 to 2025, Argentine beef imports were on average less than 2% of total U.S. beef imports. In 2024 and 2025, there was an uptick of out-of-quota beef imports from Argentina and other countries (**Figure 2**) while domestic beef production continued to fall and domestic beef consumption continued to rise.

The February 2026 presidential proclamation increased Argentina’s in-quota volume by an additional 80,000 MT in quarterly tranches of 20,000 MT through calendar year 2026. The additional quota for Argentina would account for less than 5% of total 2025 beef imports. The proclamation also restricts imported Argentine beef that is allowed under the additional quota to lean beef trimmings.

Figure 2. U.S. Beef Imports



Source: CRS using U.S. Census Bureau Trade data via USDA, FAS, “Global Agricultural Trade System,” April, 2026.

Congressional Considerations

Congress may choose not to take action concerning the importation of beef or domestic supply. If Congress chooses to act, it may consider legislation that would address the President’s current and/or future trade actions. Congress may consider options that would restrict beef TRQs to protect the domestic cattle and beef industry from import competition or expand the TRQs in an effort to lower U.S. retail beef prices.

Additionally, Congress may consider increasing or decreasing the type and/or amount of federal support or oversight that may affect a U.S. cattle producer’s decision on herd size. Congress may also consider policies that either increase or decrease domestic production of cattle and beef. Such policies may affect one or all of the stages of the U.S. beef supply chain. Policies that could affect U.S. cattle producers may include the increase or decrease of direct financial support to offset higher production costs. Congress may also consider examining competition in the U.S. beef supply chain.

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