

Frozen Chicken Imports Face Ban From Jan. 1, Official Says

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A Pennsylvania woman grabbing a bag of frozen U.S. chicken at Wal-Mart. **Mike Mergen**

Top sanitary doctor Gennady Onishchenko has reiterated that the government will ban sales of frozen chicken Jan. 1 in a move that will hurt imports from the United States.

Practically all chicken meat now imported into Russia, including from the United States, is frozen.

Onishchenko, chief of the Federal Consumer Protection Service, told news agencies last week that chicken meat loses a significant amount of its nutritional value when frozen, according to research conducted in Russia.

The decision to ban the use of frozen chicken for the manufacture of all processed products dates back to March 2008, Onishchenko said. The ban now applies only to the production of baby food.

U.S. Department of Agriculture spokeswoman Katie Gorskak said in a statement that the ban

had "no scientific basis or food safety rationale."

Russian chief negotiator in the talks to join the World Trade Organization, Maxim Medvedkov, said the organization's members had already called the ban ungrounded and indicated that it did not conform to its standards, Interfax reported.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said at a meeting with Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy last month that Russia might "practically do without" imports of poultry in 2011. American imports of chicken meat fell from a one-time high of 1.5 million tons to 300,000 tons this year, Putin said.

Russia banned chicken imports from the United States at the beginning of this year because producers used chlorine for processing the meat. It lifted the ban in August.

Although Onishchenko said Russian producers were ready for the new rules, president of the Russian Meat Union, Mumegeg Mamikonyan, said the cost of producing and handling chicken meat would increase, leading to higher prices, Gazeta.ru reported.

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