



State Comptroller and Ombudsman
Annual Report 70B | 2020

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural
Development

Management and Supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Field of Importation of Cattle, Fodder and Disease Prevention

Abstract

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Background

Meat is one of the animal source foods marketed in Israel, and naturally it may contain disease-causing bacteria. Prevention of diseases derived from animal source foods requires monitoring of the various stages of animal care, starting from the food and vaccine provision stage, through to livestock transportation (from abroad and within the country), slaughtering the livestock and packing the meat, and ending with its transportation to the marketing chains and storage therein. Supervision of the various stages up to the stage of conveying the meat from the slaughterhouses is carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development through the Veterinary Services (VS).

Key figures

247,198

Head of cattle were imported to Israel in 2019, which were intended mainly for the meat industry

334,517

Head of sheep were imported to Israel in 2019, which were intended mainly for the meat industry

Approx. **130**

Ships for transporting cattle and sheep arrive in Israel every year

NIS **865** million

The monetary value of the cattle imported in 2019

NIS **187** million

The monetary value of the sheep imported in 2019

137,000 tons

Beef consumption in Israel in 2018

NIS **10-14** thousand

Price of head of cattle for slaughter








NIS **1.5-2.2** thousand

Price of head of sheep for slaughter

Audit Actions

 In February-August 2019, the State Comptroller's Office examined aspects related to the Ministry of Agriculture's supervision of the import of beef and sheep (livestock) for meat, for the purpose of disease prevention. The audit examined the process of approval of countries for importation of livestock and the manner in which the Ministry supervises the importation of the livestock and its raising including, inter alia, the manner of supervision by the Ministry of the conditions for transporting the animals from abroad; supervision of animal food imported from abroad; and its actions to prevent the spread of diseases among the animals. The audit was carried out at the Ministry of Agriculture, and especially in the VS.

The Situation Reflected in the Audit Findings

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-  Despite the lowering of customs duties on imported calves and despite the additional reforms carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture in recent years to lower the price of beef for the consumer, from 2013 to the end of 2018 there was a 4.5% - 6% increase in the meat price index.
 -  Despite the high rates of cattle infected with Brucellosis, the Ministry has not devised a new, viable plan to eliminate the disease and stop its spread.
 -  The VS determined that it was the responsibility of the raisers of livestock to vaccinate against the Brucellosis and Leptospirosis diseases while the market was short of vaccines that did not allow for the implementation of these instructions.
 -  During the supervision process of fodder import, visual inspection and sampling are not carried out. As a result, there is concern that fodder containing metals, pesticides, molds and toxins may enter Israel and harm the animals fed on it and humans consuming food produced from these animals.
 -  Approving additional countries for importing fodder may increase competition and lower prices, however there are six countries that are in the process of approval, having waited two to eight years already for the VS approval for fodder import.
 -  The VS did not hold regular visits to countries approved for fodder import for the purpose of monitoring their compliance with the health certificates they signed. Occasionally, data has been accumulated that seem to indicate that states are not in compliance. Findings have also emerged that reflect poor maintenance of the ships transporting livestock from abroad up to real danger to the animals and damage to their living conditions in a way that causes them great suffering. However, the Ministry of Agriculture did not sanction importers or ship owners who did not comply with the Ministry's instructions, except in very exceptional cases.









The State Comptroller's Office commends the removal of restrictions on beef and meat imports.

Significant improvement in human infection data for Brucellosis is apparent, and in 2019 it is expected to be much smaller than in previous years. Also, a downward trend is apparent in the amount of sheep which test positive. The reduction in human infection may be attributable to a campaign organized by the Ministry of Agriculture in areas that are prone to infection and to safety precautions by farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture conducted a self-examination, in which it examined the amount of compensation it paid to owners of livestock that had been destroyed after an outbreak of Brucellosis, acknowledged its mistake, in that the amount paid was less than required, and paid out the difference, even with regard to closed cases.

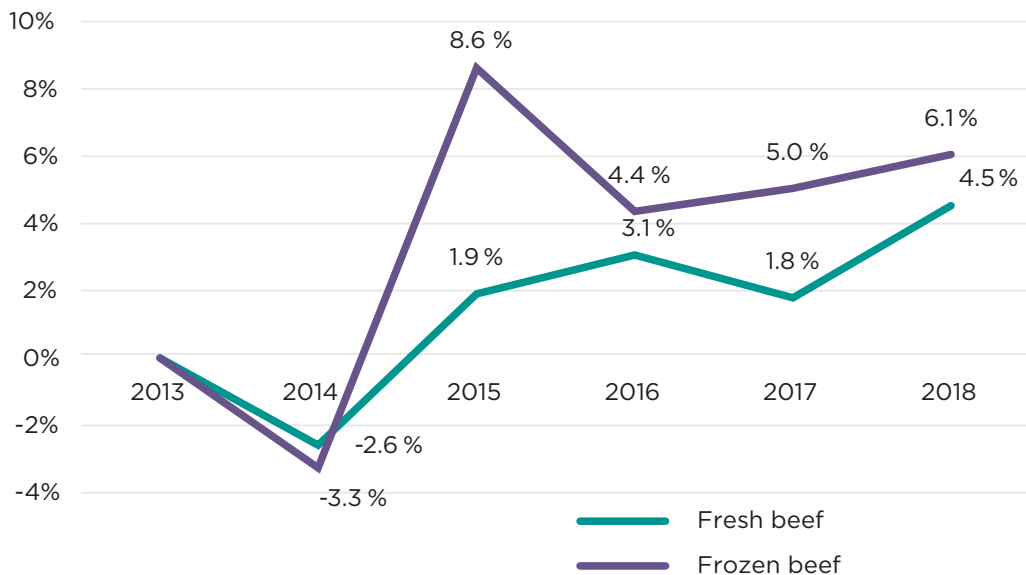
Main Audit Recommendations

-  The Ministry of Agriculture must examine the prices of meat for the public, taking into account barriers and failures in the meat market and accordingly make decisions that will allow the reduction of meat prices. The Ministry of Finance, Economy and Industry and the Competition Authority should also be involved in this matter, to ensure that the steps taken will achieve the desired results.
-  The Ministry of Agriculture must work to enforce the provisions of the law regarding import of livestock from abroad and to reduce the harm to animal welfare during transportation. To this end, they must employ advanced supervision measures and examine the possibility of exercising their powers, including the imposing of fines and suspending import licenses.
-  In order to reduce the spread of the Brucellosis disease, it is appropriate that the Ministry work with determination to maintain a monitoring, diagnosis and control system in all farms, according to the risk level defined for them. The VS, which often encounters a shortage of vaccines, must examine alternatives to the stock of vaccines in the market to enable immediate treatment for stopping disease outbreaks when needed.
-  In view of the dangers posed to public health in Israel and the local animals due to the importation of livestock into Israel and the exposure of the state to diseases not common in the region, the VS must carry out a careful examination and complete, periodic risk assessment of each approved, recognized country.
-  In order to increase competitiveness in the livestock importation market, it is proposed that the VS should act as soon as possible to authorize imports from other countries.
-  The VS must act as soon as possible to computerize the state approval process and publicize the various stages of implementation of the process in order for them to be accessible and transparent to the public. They must also work to computerize the audit forms regarding the living conditions of the livestock during transportation from abroad, to allow for ongoing, appropriate supervision of the matter and to prevent repeated violations of its guidelines.

Summary

Findings that could affect, among other things, public health, animal welfare and health, and meat prices in Israel were presented in the report. Optimizing the activities of the Ministry of Agriculture and the VS in the field which is entrusted to them, with emphasis on decision-making close to the time of identification of the risks, their execution and the exercise of their supervisory and enforcement powers, may improve the situation raised in the report. Improving the outdated computing infrastructure used by the Ministry should also contribute to efficient, focused and effective supervision of the issue. Due to the rise in consumer meat prices, the Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy and the Competition Authority, is required to take effective measures, including measures to increase competitiveness, which will reduce the price of meat for the consumer.

Changes in the price of 1 kg of beef in Israel in 2013-2018



According to the CBS data, processed by the State Comptroller's Office.