

Chinese meat traders roll out Brazil's first deforestation-free beef certification

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SAO PAULO (AP) — Chinese beef traders on Wednesday began a landmark agreement to purchase beef from [Brazil](#) that is certified to have been raised in a way that doesn't involve any illegal clearing of forests.

The Beef on Track certification is the first of its kind for Brazilian beef, according to Imaflora, the agriculture and conservation group that provides the certification. China is Brazil's main trading partner and the largest importer of Brazilian beef.

The system rates Brazil's beef supply chains across four tiers, verifying if they are free of illegal deforestation, activity in protected or Indigenous areas and slave-like labor.

In 2025, more than half of Brazil's beef exports — 3.1 million tons worth \$8.8 billion — went to China, according to Brazilian government data.

The Tianjin Meat Association, which represents major Chinese meat importers and committed to adopt the certification system in October, has initially committed to purchase at least 50,000 tons of certified beef this year.

From Wednesday, participating companies will begin auditing imports in partnership with a Chinese certification firm. They will then be able to offer zero-deforestation labeled beef to the Chinese market.

Marina Guyot, director of climate and zero deforestation at Imaflora, said that although the certification may initially be seen as a niche tool, it has the potential to scale up and help decouple cattle ranching from deforestation.

"The idea is to create an incentive. A positive tool beyond enforcement and a market mechanism that can recognize the efforts already being made by some producers and expand them as it brings commercial advantages," Guyot said.

Brazil is the world's largest beef producer, accounting for about 20% of global output. But the expansion of cattle ranching in Brazil has come at an environmental cost

Pasture expansion has driven deforestation since the 1980s, particularly in the Amazon, where nearly 40% of the country's pastureland is located.

The [world's largest rainforest](#) plays a key role in regulating the global climate. Amazon deforestation had fallen after peaking in the 1990s and 2000s, but rose again during former President Jair Bolsonaro's 2019–2022 term, which was widely criticized for weakening environmental protections.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has pledged to end deforestation by 2030 and has strengthened enforcement policies that helped cut forest loss by 50% over the past four years.

After [years of enforcement](#), Brazilian authorities and major meatpackers signed a landmark agreement in 2009 to hold companies accountable for suppliers linked to deforestation. In 2023, the federal government began developing a national certification system using public databases to track social and environmental impacts across supply chains. The Beef on Track certification builds on those earlier efforts.

Raoni Rajão, who led Brazilian deforestation control from 2023 to 2024 and is a professor of environmental management at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, has focused his research on developing tools to track supply chains.

He said that requiring imports to verify the legality of production remains a taboo among diplomats, but has proven effective in Brazil's past. As an example, he noted that when Paraguay agreed in 2024 to check whether cars imported from Brazil had been stolen, it helped reduce theft along the border.

"Why not do the same for illegal deforestation?" Rajão asked. "What's the point of fining and sanctioning properties for deforestation if there's no support on the buyer's side?"

The Brazilian Beef Exporters Association said it is monitoring the certification initiatives but believes any new labels should align with existing systems, avoiding overlaps and requirements for implementation that could create production bottlenecks.

"The dynamics of the international markets have already been driving meaningful advances in the sustainability of Brazil's cattle sector," the association said in a statement.

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