

Importing STEs in Korea and Japan: Evolution, Operation, and Implications

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1. Introduction

Agricultural trade policies in Korea and Japan drew much attention during the negotiations leading to the Uruguay Round Agreements on Agriculture (URAA). Before the UR the countries and others had been using non-tariff barriers and many other intervention measures in agriculture. Korea and Japan argued vigorously for maintaining their farm import barriers and subsidies. Throughout the negotiating process, Korea and Japan faced counter-arguments from agricultural exporting countries and countries pursuing agricultural policy reform.

Both Korea and Japan have long used state trading enterprises (STEs) to manage a significant part of their agricultural imports. How these STEs operate and their implications changed somewhat with the URAA. As new World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations on agriculture begin, this is a good time to review the role of these STEs and investigate how importing may evolve if that role changes.

Korea and Japan use STEs for a variety of commodities. But in both countries rice has a special status. In the URAA, both countries were granted a waiver from tariffication for rice. This special treatment for rice comprises one of the few exceptions for the “bound tariffs only” principle of UR agreements (Josling, et al., p.180). Instead of tariffication, rice markets for both countries are opened with the Minimum Market Access (MMA) provision and an explicit import quota.

Other agricultural products also faced MMA commitments as a part of tariff rate quota (TRQ) programs. There are also items with the Current Market Access (CMA) provisions. For some of these products, state trading is used for the TRQ

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portion.

This paper describes the operations of importing STEs of agricultural products in Korea and Japan. Since the case of Japan is similar enough to Korea, most of the paper is devoted to Korean case and a separate section explains Japan. More specifically, this paper intends to answer the following questions:

- As result of the URAA, what arrangements were made related to the state trading of agricultural products for Korea and Japan?
- What are the state trading agricultural products in Korea and Japan? What STEs are importing what product(s), and how much? How do these data compare to the pre-UR data? How do they use the revenues from STE operation?

For each STE, the description follows the classification schemes suggested by Josling and the ERS: ownership, i.e., the objectives and reasons for existence; the range of products covered; market power including monopolistic position in imports and control of domestic procurement and marketing; and the WTO compatibility, i.e., the existence of discriminating behavior or protection exceeding the bound tariff.

In the next, a brief overview of Korean agriculture is presented. The section is followed by background information on the results of the URAA for access to Korean market. Next the operation of the importing STEs is explained. Some statistics are shown to give a detailed idea on the operations. The description is based on the notifications to the GATT or WTO by the Korean government and other official documents. We then describe importing STEs in Japan. Final section summarizes the paper.

2. An Overview of Korean Agriculture

Korea is a food-deficit country with around 30 percent of grain self-sufficiency rate. Rice is by far the most important crop in Korea followed by horticultural crops. For example, in 1997, rice represents 42.6 percent and horticultural crops represent 34.5 percent of rural household revenues (Table 1). Moreover, horticultural crops have high regional concentration due to weather and other farming conditions. Livestock farming is also important and is dependent on imported feed grains.

Farms in Korea are small. Average area is 1.34 ha for the total of 1,440,000 farms in 1997. Of these, only 70,000 farms (4.9 percent) have more than 3 ha and 2,200 farms (0.15 percent) have more than 10 ha. 41.3 percent of farm households are part-time farms and the average proportion of non-agricultural income per farm was 31.4 percent in 1997.

Relative productivity of agriculture compared to non-agricultural sectors is low. As a result, even with relatively high producer subsidies, farm household income was 85.6 percent of urban household income and has declined during this decade. For 1998, given the drop in urban income and an increase in unemployment, this trend may reverse (Table 2).

3. Implementation Commitments for the URAA Market Access of Korea

Under the URAA, Korea opened the agricultural markets with tariffs or created TRQ's for all of the agricultural products except for rice. The beef TRQ is scheduled to be subject to tariffication with the beginning of 2001.

A wide-scale trade reform for agricultural products in Korea started in 1989 with the Committee on Balance of Payment (BOP) of GATT decision to terminate the application of non-tariff import barriers (so-called "BOP Graduation"). At that time, the Korean government announced a reform schedule of agricultural markets for 1991 to 1997. Livestock products, vegetables, and orange are the main products included in that schedule (BOP items).

With the URAA, access to the Korean market is regulated by tariffication and the specific market access (CMA and MMA). The existing NTB's were replaced by the bound tariffs. As a developing country in agriculture, the tariffs are scheduled to be reduced by 24 percent during 1995 - 2004. In addition, the MMA volumes are being expanded from 3 to 5 percent of domestic consumption over this same period. Rice tariffication, however, has special treatment.

The market access commitment opened the markets of 220 agricultural products that previously had non-tariff restrictions¹. Except for rice and beef, all products were brought into tariffication by July 1997. Beef (8 items by HS 10 digits) tariffication is scheduled to be effective as of January 1, 2001 and the tariffication of rice (14 items by HS 10 digits) is scheduled to be re-negotiated during 2004, one year before the end of implementation period.

Of the 220 commodities, TRQs were created for the 190 items². After the verification of the country schedule, 97 items out of the 190 market access items were included in the list of state-trading products. Among the state-trading products, the BOP

¹ This applies to product defined on 10 digit HS codes. The number increased to 242 as the classification method has changed. The products remain basically the same.

² The market access is given through MMA for 104 items and through CMA for 86 items.

items were given the time limits for the state trading. As a result, artificial honey and silk have already been removed from the state-trading commodity list³. Similarly beef import will be transformed to private sector by January 2001. The implementation period for the remaining state trading commodities is 1995 to 2004. The basic market access scheme due to the URAA and BOP arrangements is summarized in Figure 1.

According to the Country Schedule of Korea, the GATT/BOP products are subject to the following statement: “the Government of Republic of Korea or its designated agencies can take measures consistent with the Agreement establishing the World Trade Organization to ensure orderly domestic markets and to designate revenues resulting from the sales of these products in Korea.” Instead, the items under the URAA tariffication are subject to a more explicit statement on the mark-up as “the Government of Republic of Korea or the designated state trading agent can impose mark-up on sales of these products in Korea in addition to the in-quota tariff.”

Agricultural products designated to state trading are all market access items, either through the MMA or through the CMA. The state trading items also can be classified into three categories: rice, GATT/BOP, and the URAA. The classification is summarized in Table 3.

4. The Operation of STE's

For the most part, the agricultural products put into the market access provisions have a large gap between domestic and international prices. The stated purposes of operating state trading are 1) to stabilize domestic market in the face of low-priced imports; 2) to ensure the implementation of UR agreements by fulfilling the committed market access quantities; and 3) to use the revenue from price difference for public objectives⁴. Seven importing STEs handle 17 agricultural products in Korea. Commodities imported by each STE are listed in Table 4. The STEs, except for the Cheju Citrus Growers Agricultural Cooperative (CCGAC) and the National Ginseng Cooperatives Federation (NGCF), are not involved in exporting any of the commodities they handle.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) is the designated importer for the TRQ of rice and barley. Rice is imported through an open bidding system

³ The artificial honey and cocoons were removed from the state trading items as of June 1996 and the silk is removed as of June 1997.

⁴ Country Schedule of the Republic of Korea

administered by the Supply Administration of the Republic of Korea (SAROK), a government agency procuring government supplies. Private companies registered with the SAROK participate in the bidding and the lowest price bidder meeting minimum quality or other characteristics wins the right to supply. The open tender announcement contains amount, bidding date, and the delivery date. As the result of straight-forward price bidding, low-quality rice has been imported under the state trading operation. For example, India and China supplied rice in 1995 and in 1996, respectively. In 1997, China and Thailand supplied the rice. As a result, for example, there were some problems in terms of the quality of rice in 1995. Imported rice is sold through an open auction system among rice processors. The revenue is added to the Grain Management Fund. Barley is directly imported by the private animal feed manufacturers who acquired the import license from MAF.

Agricultural and Fishery Marketing Corporation (AFMC) is designated as the agency administering import of tariff quotas of ten state trading items; pepper, garlic, onions, sesame, ground nuts, soybeans, beans, buckwheat, ginger, and potatoes. AFMC imports the TRQs of those crops. For soybeans, private companies import part of the TRQ. The items have shown large gap between international and domestic prices. Private importation would have incurred wind-fall profits and domestic market suffer from low-priced imports.

AFMC, established in 1967, is a semi-government organization that trades and stores in the domestic market. For imports, it announces a solicitation of bidding in the daily newspapers and on its web-site. The announcement is composed of the item name, delivery date, amount in tons and the arriving harbor. There is little restriction on the participation in the bidding. Among the import items, part of sesame and ginger are imported by the private sector. Also part of soybean is imported by the recommended end-users.

Most of the pre-WTO purchase and imports are now replaced by the TRQ imports. AFMC sells the imported items through the auction system in the public wholesale market. Domestic prices, determined by the auction, tends to be lower than local product prices due to the quality differences.

State trading of beef is administered by the Livestock Products Marketing Organization (LPMO). The administration of beef TRQ lasts until the beef market liberalization, which is scheduled to be in January 2001. The LPMO, established in 1988, aims to stabilize domestic livestock market. The LPMO imports part of TRQ by open bidding and the remaining beef is imported by private sector through the simultaneous buying and selling (SBS) system. Under the SBS system, part of TRQ is

imported directly by the wholesalers/end-user group (so called the “Super Group”). The proportion of TRQ quantity imported under the SBS system is scheduled to be increased from 30 percent in 1995 to 70 percent in 2000 by the ROU with the U.S.. The domestic sale price is determined through the auction in the wholesale market or by the LPMO considering import costs and domestic price. The net income of operation is pooled into the Livestock Development Fund.

The STE designated for the importation of oranges is the Cheju Citrus Grower’s Agricultural Cooperative (CCGAC), established in 1960. The CCGAC imports the TRQ specified in Korea’s Country Schedule and out-quota import was converted to tariff as of July 1997. The OCGAC buy oranges at the world price and earn monopoly rents in the domestic market by selling at the quantity constrained price. Net income from orange state trading operation is put into the Mandarin Industry Promotion Fund and partly used for the promotion activities of Cheju mandarin industry.

National Livestock Cooperatives Federation (NLCF), National Ginseng Cooperatives Federation (NGCF), and National Forestry Cooperatives Federation (NFCF) are designated STE’s for importing natural honey, ginseng, and pine nuts, respectively. Each federation is operating in a similar manner with other STE’s.

The methods of allocating import quantities may have different implications for Korean consumers, producers, importers and for revenue from quota itself. They also may have different implications for exporters. In each case when the import quantity is restricted opportunities for import quota rents are created and who receives those rents becomes an issue. It is useful in this regard to contrast the quota auction used for non-STE products with the low price bid used for rice and other STE items. With the auction, the Korean government maximizes the revenue earned from restriction on the import quantity but the specific qualities and product characteristics are possibly not the most demanded by consumers in Korea. Note, the outcome in this case is the same as if the tariffs were set at the quota auction price. The low-product price system would have identical results only if there were no product or supplier quality variation within the quota category. The low price bid system encourages the minimum quality within a category not the quality for which Korean customers would pay the largest differential. Thus the two systems may have quite different allocative and distributional conclusions.

With the implementation of state trading in Korea under URAA, a steady and increased flow of imports for previously restricted agricultural products occurred (Refer to Table 6). For example, substantial amount of the rice, barley, orange and potatoes are imported during 1995 to 1997 contrast to no imports during 1992 to 1994. For most of the remaining products, the total import volume as well as import by private sector

increased.

5. Importing STEs in Japan

Similar to Korea, Japanese Agriculture is characterized by small farms and the importance of rice. Average land area per farm in 1996 was 1.5 ha. Of 3,388,000 total farm households, only 354,000 farms (10.7 percent) had more than 2 ha in 1996. Unlike Korea, in 1996, 87 percent of farm households are part-time farms and the average proportion of non-agricultural income per farm was 74.6 percent. Rice is the most important crop in Japan followed by vegetables and livestock farming. For example, in 1996, rice represented 29.7 percent and vegetables represented 22.6 percent of agricultural gross income. Livestock farming in Japan is also dependent on imported feed grains. As a result, overall grain self-sufficiency rate is about 30 percent in Japan, the same as Korea.

Japan reported six STEs to the WTO⁵. Among them four STEs import agricultural products⁶. The Food Agency administers Japan's market access commitments for rice, wheat and barley. The Livestock Industry Promotion Corporation (LIPC) deals with the TRQ imports of dairy products such as milk powder, condensed milk, buttermilk powder, whey, and butter. Japan Raw Silk and Sugar Price Stabilization Agency imports the TRQ of raw silk. As of October 1996, LIPC and the Japan Raw Silk and Sugar Price Stabilization Agency merged into the Agriculture and Livestock Industries Corporation (ALIC)⁷. The Japan Tobacco Inc. (JTI), a recently privatized agency, imports leaf tobacco.

State trading activities are based on legislated import rights and, in some cases, by specific monopoly rights over domestic production and distribution such as the monopoly in domestic production of tobacco products by the JTI. In spite of recent liberalizing reforms by the Japanese government, STEs still monopolize imports of several commodities and limit imports.

Food Agency, the largest STE in Japan, monopolizes import and domestic markets of rice, wheat and barley, although any public traders are allowed to import if they pay import duties.

The stated reason for maintaining STE in rice, wheat and barley is "to stabilize

⁵ WTO, G/STR/N/1/JPN, 22 August 1995.

⁶ Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare and Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) are STEs for opium and alcohol, respectively.

⁷ WTO, G/STR/N/2/JPN, 30 October 1996.

supply and demand situations of prices for such staple foods and for promoting stability of national life and economy." Using the open tender system in purchasing foreign rice, the Food Agency collects a prior information on demand for the type and origin of rice. Then the Food Agency allocates the TRQ to exporting countries based on the information. Actual imports are administered by an open tender under the simultaneous buying and selling system, whereby importers and wholesalers offer simultaneous tenders for the buying and selling prices of each variety of rice. For example, U.S., Australia, Thailand, and China were the major countries supplied rice to Japan in 1998.

Under the Food Control Law all the rice is supposed to be collected by village agricultural cooperatives, which is either sold to the Food Agency (the so-called "government rice" channel) or sold to the licensed wholesalers (the so-called "free rice"). In order to establish rice selling rights through the legal channels, rice farmers have to divert a certain portion of their paddy field area away from rice production; this acreage control program was to maintain domestic rice price above the market equilibrium level.

This system has been the major source of institutional rent for both agricultural cooperatives and Food Agency. The rent partly goes to farmers through rice incentives. But it mainly goes to the Food Agency and the agricultural cooperatives.

Both the Food Agency and agricultural cooperatives are large national organizations. The Food Agency has branches in all 47 prefectures in Japan. Although the number has been decreasing since 1960s corresponding to the declining importance of rice, there are still 11,000 employees in the Food Agency. Agricultural cooperatives have the same problem of large staff relative to current activity.

Although leaf tobacco markets were opened in 1985, effective control over trade in commodity continues to be exercised by the JTI through its monopoly rights as the sole domestic producer of tobacco products. Although private traders can import leaf tobacco, this monopoly in effect renders all the importation of leaf tobacco dependent upon subsequent purchase of imported product by JTI.

In the same way, the decision by the Japanese Diet to eliminate the JTI's salt monopoly in April, 1997 has had no influence on the JTI's performance. JTI imports leaf tobacco taking into account demand and supply situations of manufactured tobacco. In domestic market, JTI annually make contracts with tobacco farms for the acreage of cultivation for each type of leaf tobacco and prices.

ALIC administers TRQ imports of dairy products and raw silk. Private traders can import dairy products and raw silk subject to over-quota tariffs. ALIC collects the tariffs and inspect the quality and safety of such imports. Similarly to rice, mark-ups on

the designated imported dairy products are bound in the Country Schedule of Japan. The bound mark-ups are to be reduced by 15 percent over 1995 to 2000. Domestic sales prices for dairy products and raw silk are determined on the basis of import prices, management costs and domestic prices for dairy products.

5. Summary and Conclusion

This paper describes the operation of importing STEs in Korea and Japan. In order to facilitate market access, the TRQs were created for agricultural commodities with previously limited or no imports. State trading is used as part of the market access under the URAA. Most of the existing importing STEs in Korea and Japan are reported as STEs. In some cases, new agencies are designated as STEs for a specific commodity.

Generally, STEs in Korea and Japan operate as importers of items with large international/domestic price gaps and important cash crops for farmers. For example, rice, beef, oranges and other horticultural crops in Korea and rice, dairy products and leaf tobacco in Japan are state-trading agricultural commodities. The operations of STEs in both countries are based on proper domestic legal arrangements.

The operations of STEs including purchasing, selling, pricing and revenue handling are reasonably transparent in terms of market principles and MFN.

Nevertheless, as is pointed out by Josling, et al., "First, the existence of the state trading activity itself often reflects precisely the desire to act in a discriminatory fashion. An import monopoly is presumably set up in order to behave differently from private traders. To force commercial rules on such a firm would conflict with domestic aims. Similarly, an export monopoly is set up to take advantage of its market power. Second, the task of discovering whether the state trader has conformed the Article is well-nigh impossible. By the nature of such enterprises, the test of commercial behavior is unlikely to be conclusive. The solution to this problem is likely to rest in the direction of a meshing of national antitrust legislation, international codes, and the new provisions on anti-dumping, subsidies, and dispute settlement procedures that have now been incorporated into the GATT/WTO (1996; p.241)."

Efforts to achieve more transparency and elimination of unnecessary items are required for both countries.

Table 1. Composition of Farm Household Agricultural Revenue in Korea, 1990 & 1997

<i>Crop</i>	Unit: percent	
	<i>1990</i>	<i>1997</i>
Rice	48.2	42.6
Barley	1.9	0.7
Horticulture	28.1	34.5
Miscellaneous crops	4.1	3.7
Livestock	17.7	18.0
Total*	100.0	100.0

* The total does not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: MAF

Table 2. Agriculture in Korean Economy, 1990 and 1997

<i>Percentage of Agriculture in</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1997</i>
Population	15.5	9.7
Gross Domestic Production	7.8	5.2
Urban Income*	97.4	85.6

* Agricultural household income as percentage of urban household income

Source: MAF

Figure 1. Market Access Scheme: Korea

Rice	URAA + GATT/BOP			
	Tariffication [A]	Minimum Market Access(MMA) and Current Market Access(CMA)		
		State Trading [B]	Quota Auction [C]	Import License [D]

Note: Bold letters indicate state trading items.

e.g.; A: Apple, Grape, Cheese, etc.

B: Beef, pepper, etc.

C: Dairy products, etc.

D: Feed Grains, orange juice, etc.

Table 3. Classification of Agricultural Products Imported by the STE's

	Minimum Market Access(MMA)	Current Market Access(CMA)
Special Treatment	Rice	
GATT /BOP	Onions, Garlic, Ginger, Pepper, Oranges, Natural Honey, Pine Nuts	Beef, Sesame Seeds
URAA	Barley, Potatoes, Ginseng Products	Buckwheat, Soybeans, Ground Nuts, Beans

Table 4. Importing STE's and Trading Items

STE	Commodity	No. in HS10	TRQ (tons)		Tariff		
			1995	2004	Inquota	1995 2004	
MAF	Rice	14	51,307	205,228	5	--	--
	Barley	1	14,150	23,582	20	333	304.1
AFMC	Pepper	2	4,311	7,185	50	300	270
	Garlic	3	8,680	14,467	50	400	360
	Onions	2	12,369	20,645	50	150	135
	Sesame	1	6,731	6,731	40	700	630
	Ground nuts	3	4,907.3	4,907.3	40	256.1	230.5
	Soybeans	1	1,032,152	1,032,152	5	541	487
	Beans	2	9,776.3	14,694	30	467.5	420.8
	Buckwheat	1	13.7	13.7	3	284.5	256.1
	Ginger	1	1,116	1,860	20	419.2	377.3
	Potatoes	1	11,286	18,810	30	338	304.1
LPMO	Beef	6	123,000	225,000*	43.6	44.5	40
NLCF	Natural honey	1	250	420	20	270	243
CCGAC	Oranges	2	15,000	57,000	50	99	50
NGCF	Ginseng	18	34.1	56.8	20	247.6	222.8
NFCF	Pine nuts	2	31.7	52.9	30	629.8	566.8

* TRQ in 2000.

MAF: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

AFMC: Agriculture and Fishery Marketing Corporation

LPMO: Livestock Products Marketing Corporation

NLCF: National Livestock Cooperatives Federation

CCGAC: Cheju Citrus Growers Agricultural Cooperative

NGCF: National Ginseng Cooperatives Federation

NFCF: National Forestry Cooperatives Federation

Source: Country Schedule of the Republic of Korea.

Table 5. Major Statistics on State-Traded Agricultural Commodities, 1997

Units: M/T, \$/ton

	<i>TRQ</i>	<i>Total Imports</i>	<i>Imports by STE</i>	<i>Import Price</i>	<i>Sale Price</i>	<i>Domestic Production</i>	<i>Purchase by STE</i>	<i>Total Consumption</i>
Rice	76,961	85,512	85,512	367	729	5,863,887	1,224,000	5,070,000
Barley	16,246	18,700	18,700	149		23,129	19,000	
Pepper	4,950	4,189	3,335	2,063		201,000	3,335	190,000
Garlic	9,966	12,939	9,966	644	1,427	393,834	9,966	440,000
Onions	14,208	27,367	13,730	410	750	740,187	13,730	670,000
Sesame	6,731	65,191	62,112	786	4,164	33,393	62,112	90,300
Groundnut	4,907	7,745	3,551	867	1,638	10,900	3,551	27,200
Soybeans	1,032,152	323,958	257,611	334	413	156,489	263,098	448,000
Beans	10,869	21,413	17,829	379	848	17,625	17,926	41,000
Buckwheat	837	1,161	837	250	682	4,730	837	6,000
Ginger	1,281	5,635	1,281	1,193	3,786	32,708	1,281	44,000
Potatoes	1,307	4,869	4,869	532	623	637,621	4,869	637,000
Beef	167,000	151,989	75,266	3,067	5,849	227,728	83,500	361,952
Honey	288	285	285	2,523	3,654	7,661		
Oranges	25,000	22,531	22,531	782	2,848	693,200	22,531	694,644
Ginseng	39	83	39	23\$/kg	103	11,259	99	9,097
Pine nuts	36	10.2	10.2	172,380	169,520	1,004		1,014.2

Note: 1) Total production and consumption of orange are mandarins.

2) Ginseng export in 1997 was 348 tons. NGCF exported 19 tons in 1997.

Source: MAF.

Table 6. Imports of State Trading Agricultural Products: Pre- and Post UR

Unit: ton

	<i>1992 – 94</i>			<i>1995 - 97</i>		
	STE	Private	Total	STE	Private	Total
Rice	0	0	0	213,780	0	213,780
Barley	0	0	0	83,850	0	83,850
Pepper	2,347	4,375	6,722	11,303	2,926	14,229
Garlic	39,392	4	39,396	24,234	3,993	28,227
Onions	61,794	4	61,798	67,293	27,907	95,200
Sesame	154,402	7,761	162,163	171,530	3,270	174,800
Peanut	30,379	12,948	43,327	9,886	22,203	32,089
Soybeans*	604,723	3,001,099	3,605,822	731,767	180,602	912,369
Beans	67,318	234	67,552	54,377	15,887	70,264
Buckwheat	4,852	0	4,852	2,394	2,381	4,775
Ginger	1,253	340	1,593	2,689	5,586	8,275
Potatoes	0	0	0	5,536	0	5,536
Beef	322,423	29,696	352,119	274,566	172,644	447,210
Nat. honey	0	0	0	801	0	801
Oranges	0	2,902	2,902	54,685	0	54,685
Ginseng	0	0	0	80	99	179
Pine nuts	0	0	0	29	0	29

Note: Soybeans imports for 1992-94 include feed use (HS 1201-00-0000). 1995-97 data are for edible soybeans only (1201-00-9000). Total soybeans imports were 1,435,000 ton in 1995, 1,467,000 ton in 1996 and 1,628,000 ton in 1997.

Source: MAF.

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