

Californian exporters are now one step closer to shipping their strawberries to the Chinese market after a recent draft protocol signing in Beijing, according to a release from the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine's (AQSIQ).

The protocol was signed by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Deputy Administrator for Plant Protection and Quarantine Osama El-Lissy, and AQSIQ's Animal and Plant Department Director Li Jianwei.

The officials also discussed opportunities for U.S. exports of avocados, nectarines, potatoes, sugar beet pulp and alfalfa to the Chinese market.

From the Chinese perspective, Li showed interest in U.S.-bound export possibilities for his country's citrus, broccoli and dates.

In a release, the California Strawberry Commission highlighted the announcement as an important milestone in a long process that began with the special market access China granted during the 2008 Olympics when athletes requested the fruit.

"We are honored that the Chinese have allowed California to be the first location in the world to ship strawberries to China," said commission president Rick Tomlinson.

The signing is progress toward the next step, when Chinese officials come to California for a final inspection in the spring. It is anticipated that shipments could begin in the summer.

China has significant domestic strawberry production, but its season usually ends during the month of May.

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