

Border Inspection and Animal Quarantine: Existing capacity, operation, gaps, challenges and solution

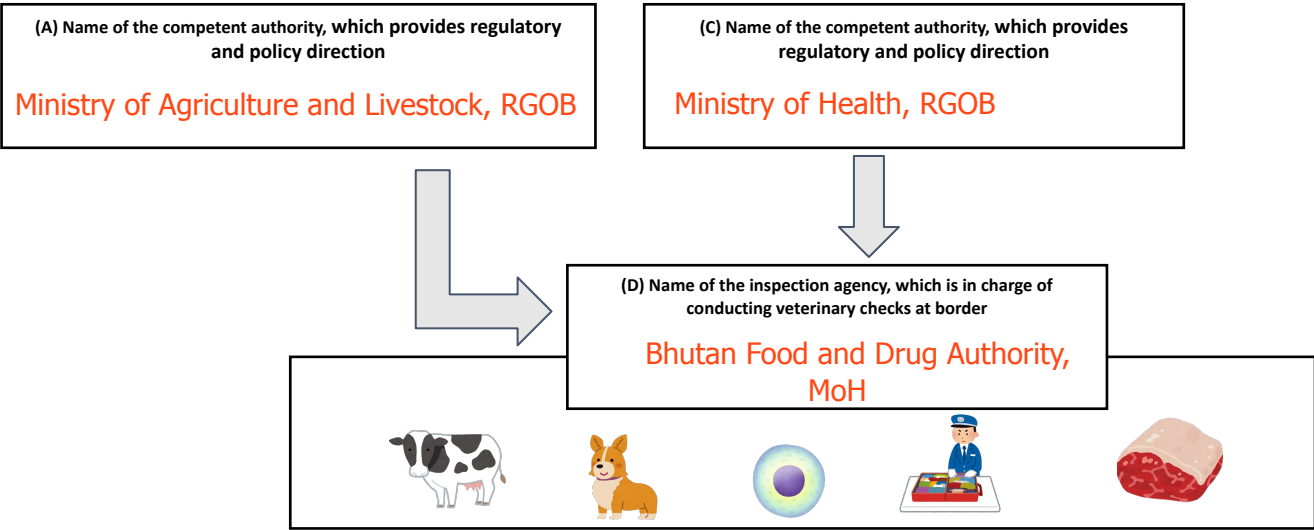
[Bhutan]







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1 – 3 July 2025
Chiba, Japan



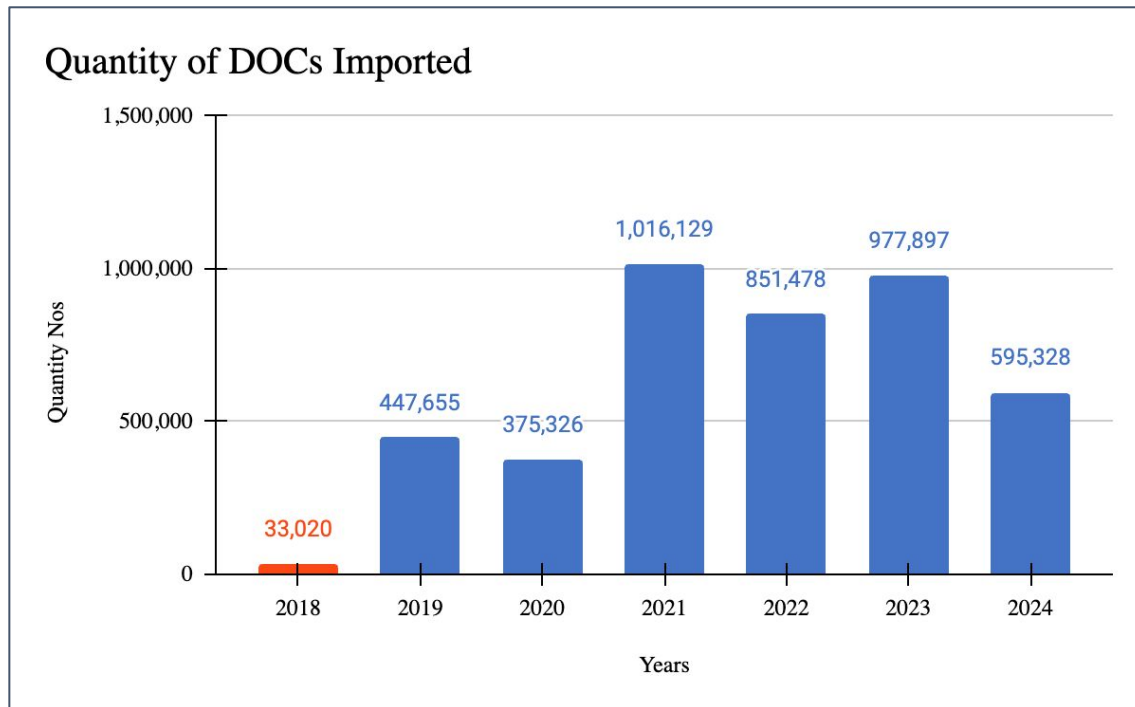
Organizational Structure for Veterinary Inspection at the Border Post



| Commodity | Document Check | Quarantine Isolation | Clinical Examination | Serological Test | Pathogen Detection (e.g. PCR) | Other Tests(e.g. visual, chemical) | Responsible Authority |
|--|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  Livestock (e.g. cattle, pigs) | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | BFDA |
|  Companion animals (e.g. dogs, cats) | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | BFDA |
|  Products of animal origin (e.g. meat, eggs) | Yes / No | Yes / No | N/A | N/A | Yes / No | Yes / No | BFDA |
|  Animal genetic materials (e.g. semen, embryo) | Yes / No | Yes / No | N/A | N/A | Yes / No | Yes / No | BFDA & DoL |
|  Aquatic | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | Yes / No | BFDA |
|  Passenger luggage | Yes / No | N/A | Yes / No | N/A | Yes / No | Yes / No | BFDA |

Top three animals with the highest import volume

1. Poultry Day Old Chicks

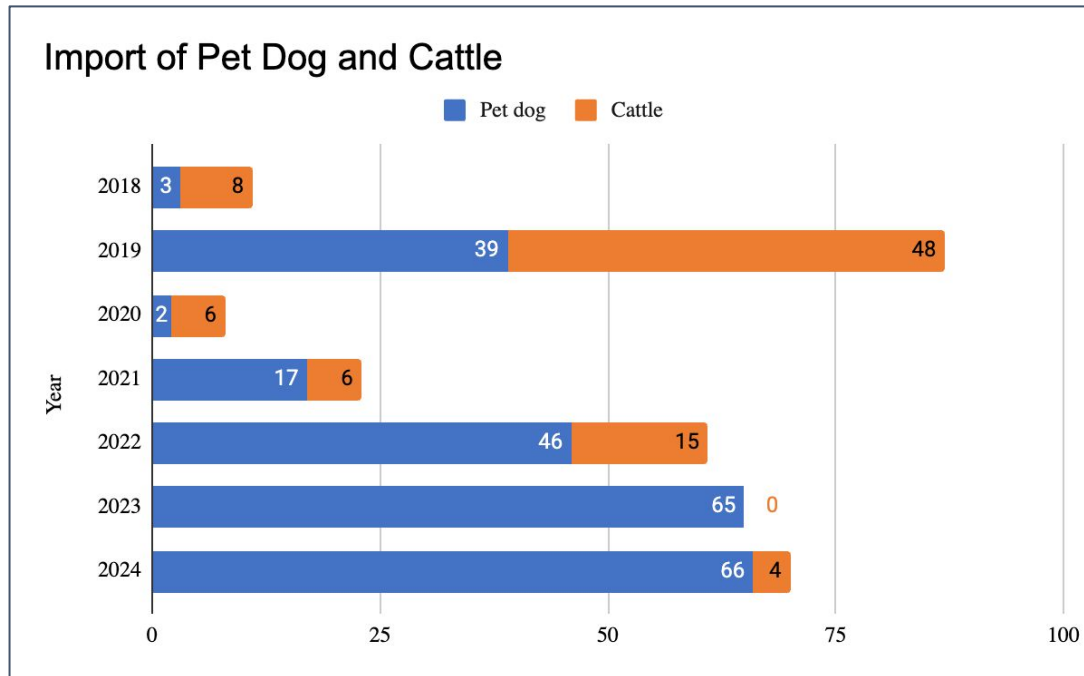


The sharp rise in the import of Day-Old Chicks (DOCs) in the years **2021, 2022, and 2023** can be directly attributed to the impact of the **COVID-19 pandemic**. During this period, Bhutan's **nucleus poultry farms were unable to procure parent stocks for both layer and broiler** due to severe limitations in international air cargo and flight operations.

As a contingency measure to meet the country's poultry production demands, **large volumes of DOCs were directly imported from India via road transport**. This temporary reliance on external supply was essential to ensure uninterrupted access to chicks for farmers and to maintain national food security. The spike in DOC imports seen in 2021 (**1,016,129 chicks**), 2022 (**851,478 chicks**), and 2023 (**977,897 chicks**) reflects this emergency response and the country's efforts to mitigate the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

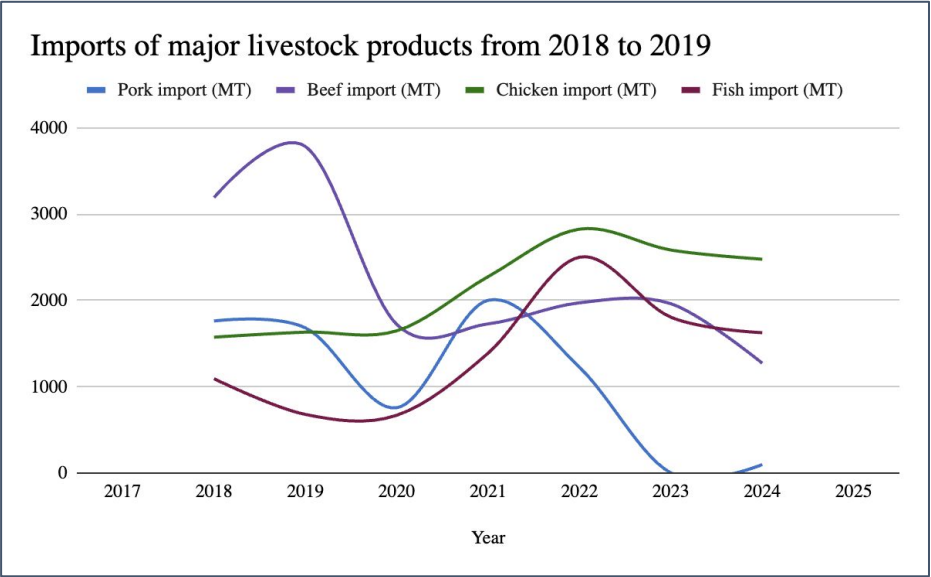
Top three animals with the highest import volume

2. Pet Dog and Cattle (Minimal Import)



1. Increasing pet ownership or replacement of aging animals by foreign breeds.
2. Pet also includes the sniffer dogs imported by police
3. Possible drivers: lack of domestic breeding and commercialization of such entities in the country

Top three livestock products with the highest import volumes



The drastic reduction in pork imports is primarily due to the non-fulfillment of stringent import conditions, including: Animal Health Certificate, ASF-free certification, Laboratory test reports for frozen pork. These measures have been enforced to prevent the introduction and spread of African Swine Fever (ASF) in Bhutan. While the country has made efforts to enhance domestic pig production, the decline in imports is largely regulatory in nature rather than a direct outcome of self-sufficiency in pork production.

| Year | Pork import (MT) | Beef import (MT) | Chicken import (MT) | Fish import (MT) |
|------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 2018 | 1761 | 3190 | 1574 | 1093 |
| 2019 | 1682 | 3783 | 1632 | 679 |
| 2020 | 756.19 | 1721.64 | 1647.7 | 669.39 |
| 2021 | 2001.45 | 1728.27 | 2275.17 | 1389 |
| 2022 | 1224.37 | 1972.34 | 2825.54 | 2500.65 |
| 2023 | 1.14 | 1961.36 | 2583.16 | 1804.72 |
| 2024 | 98 | 1272.106 | 2477.28 | 1625.826 |

Good Practices in Border Inspection and Quarantine

Approaches and innovations

1. Leveraging ICT technology

- Import application and permitting system made online
- Accepting veterinary certificates issued by exporting countries
- Online verification of the authenticity veterinary certificates
- Will be integrated into the National Single Window for paperless trade

2. Quarantine of animal at point of entry (screening of diseases)

- There are 5 Plant and Animal Quarantine Stations along Bhutan borders and 1 at Paro International Airport
- Live animals mandatorily quarantined
- Quarantine period: minimum of 15 days
- Clinically examined, samples collected and screened for transboundary and notifiable diseases

Good Practices in Border Inspection and Quarantine (BFDA)

3. Risk based inspection at border gates (Integrated Check Post)

- Integrated Checkpoints (ICPs) are manned by Royal Bhutan police (RBP)
- They are trained on how to carry out import inspections and technical clearance required from BFDA
- Live animal consignments and livestock products are referred to BFDA for clearance
- Risk-based inspections are applied for animal products

4. Reporting of notifiable and zoonotic disease

- Department of Livestock (DoL) is the national veterinary authority
- Detection of notifiable or zoonotic diseases are reported to DoL
- BFDA collaborate with DoL in enforcing the regulations in containment of notifiable or zoonotic disease outbreaks in the country

Lesson learned from past experiences:

1. Outbreak of FMD in PAQS Phuentsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar [2013-2014]
2. Brucellosis seropositive case was detected at the Animal quarantines station in SamdrupJongkhar. Positive animals were re-exported to the source.
3. Quarantine period extended, animals treated and released
4. Series of outbreaks of African Swine Fever linked to illegal movement of piglets and pork
5. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 bird flu outbreaks in bordering districts

African Swine Fever Outbreak in Bhutan

1. So far, there have been 27 outbreaks of ASF (till 2024)
2. 449 pigs have been affected directly by ASF
3. In response, 2898 pigs were culled
4. Total pig population – 22,954
5. 12.6% of pig population

Source of outbreak

1. Illegal movement of pig products
2. Feeding of kitchen waste (swill feeding)
3. Poor farm biosecurity
4. Movement of contaminants (flying birds, people)

Way forward:

1. No import of pork and strengthen border inspection at strategic points
2. Notification on restriction of kitchen waste from hotels/restaurant to pig
3. Farm registration and strengthen on farm biosecurity assessment
4. Government plan to provide subsidy support on farm biosecurity standards



Foot & Mouth Disease Outbreak In Quarantine Facility

1. Outbreak of FMD in PAQS Phuentsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar [2013-2014]
2. Mortality reported in calves

Source of the outbreak

Import of Cattles from India from breeding purposes

Control measures

1. Symptomatic treatment of all the affected cattles.
2. Extension of quarantine period until they are clinically free from FMD
3. Follow-up once the animals are released from Quarantine facility
4. Strict visitors policy

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 Bird Flu Outbreak

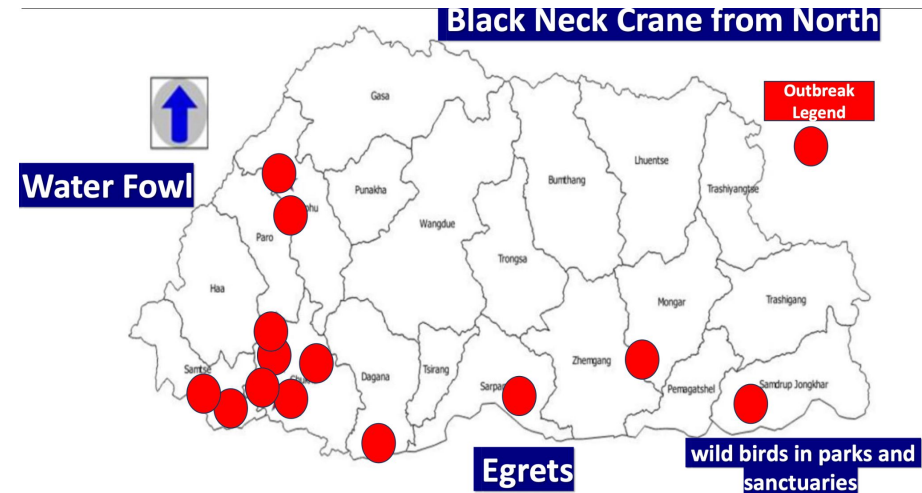
1. 17 HPAI outbreaks in Bhutan since 2010
2. Reported in backyard chicken and wild birds
3. No human cases reported
4. Almost 95% outbreaks reported in bordering districts

Source of outbreaks

1. Illegal movement of poultry and its product from border
2. Poor farm biosecurity (farms along the border)
3. Spillover infection from wild birds
4. Movement of contaminants

Way forward

1. Border inspection at entry points/strategic points
2. Strengthen farm biosecurity assessment with farm registration
3. Strengthen wild birds surveillance



Challenges and risks identified

Resource limitations

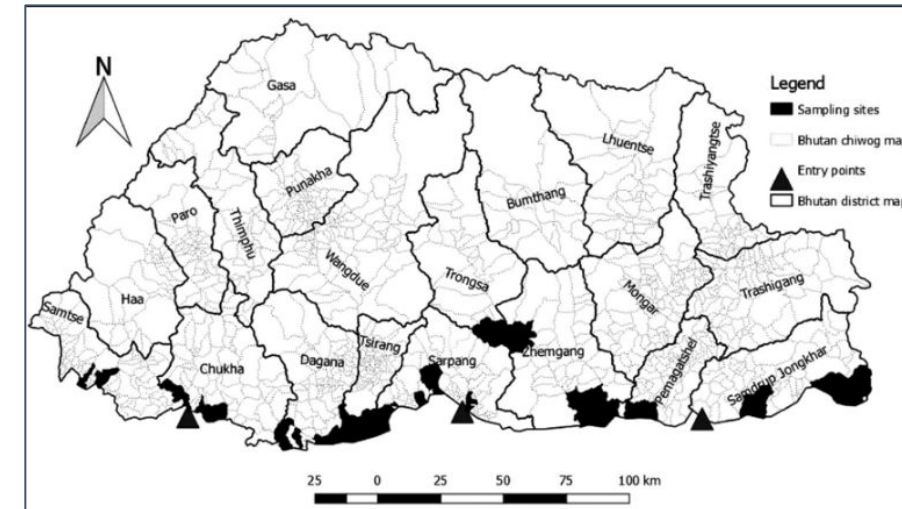
1. Proper inspection platform in dry ports,
2. Lack of cargo scanners at border entry points,
3. Regular loss of trained officials (high attrition rate) for greener pastures,
4. Inadequate resources/facilities to maintain the infrastructure in quarantine stations

Risk of transboundary animal diseases

5. Owing to lack of cargo scanners at border posts, illegally imported products hidden among other goods in huge truck loads could go undetected.
6. Illegal imports of live animals and animal products imported via unmanned porous entry routes pose the significant risk of disease outbreaks in the country.
7. Illegal imports of livestock products is fueled by vast difference in product cost in the country and across the border.
8. Bhutan's limited resources, long porous border, cost difference of livestock products in the country and across the border are some of the factors that contribute to this challenge.
9. The absence of proper biosecurity screening measures & on-arrival passenger declaration system at the international airport poses a significant threat, as the unchecked movement of agri-food items and animal products increases the risk of introducing transboundary and emerging infectious diseases into the country.

Challenges and risks identified

1. Bhutan shares more than 600 km of porous border in the South with India. Controlling illegal import of animals and animal products is a real challenge. Domestically produced pork products are more expensive compared to the ones available across the border. Despite repeated sensitization and notification to the general public not to import pork products from across the border, people indulge in illegally importing pork products. Such practice has resulted in repeated & series outbreaks of African Swine Fever in the country.
2. Due to the porous border and the presence of communities residing along it many of whom depend primarily on livestock farming for their livelihood—there is increased vulnerability to frequent outbreaks of notifiable and zoonotic diseases. The lack of proper farm biosecurity practices, uncontrolled movement of animals, presence of flying birds, and illegal entry of animals and animal products further exacerbate the risk of disease transmission in these high-risk areas



Collaboration with other agencies

1. Continuous efforts are made to coordinate among border control agencies to strengthen surveillance along the borders to curb illegal importers, and share information.
2. Border control agencies: Customs officials, Police, Immigration, Forestry officials, Border security officials
3. There is a MoU between Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) and BFDA signed on 20 Oct 2021 to manage the operational aspect of the BFDA's role and functions at the border/entry points of the country.
4. Informers recognized by issuing letter of appreciation
5. Collaboration with national media house for regular sensitization and awareness programs to curb illegal imports
6. There is a MoU between BFDA and EIC signed on 27th September, 2013 on the agreement of the recognition of export inspection and certification system.

Thank you

