

Japan signals shift to U.S. corn imports amid trade tensions

25 June 2025 | News

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has hinted that Japan may ramp up U.S. corn imports—particularly for ethanol and biomass use—as part of ongoing trade talks with Washington. Speaking in parliament, Ishiba maintained that Japan won’t compromise its domestic agriculture for tariff relief on automobiles, but left the door open to energy-related corn imports, citing Japan’s poor suitability for corn cultivation.



Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has hinted that Japan may ramp up U.S. corn imports—particularly for ethanol and biomass use—as part of ongoing trade talks with Washington. Speaking in parliament, Ishiba maintained that Japan won’t compromise its domestic agriculture for tariff relief on automobiles, but left the door open to energy-related corn imports, citing Japan’s poor suitability for corn cultivation.

The move could help offset Japan’s limited progress in securing exemptions from steep new U.S. tariffs, including a looming 24 per cent auto tariff starting July. The U.S., reeling from an 80 per cent drop in corn exports to China, shipped \$2.8 billion worth of corn to Japan in 2024—highlighting the strategic value of this trade lever.

Behind the scenes, Japanese negotiators are working to avoid economic fallout, with top trade envoy Ryosei Akazawa recently making a second visit to Washington for consultations. With energy security and trade pressure intersecting, corn-for-cars may emerge as a critical bargaining chip in the months ahead.