

From tradition to transformation South Korea bans dog meat by 2027

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South Korea marked a historic milestone by deciding to phase out its dog meat industry, reflecting a major cultural and legislative transformation. The government, in 2024, passed a law that will outlaw the breeding, slaughter, and sale of dogs for human consumption by 2027. This decision aligns with the changing values of a nation where public sentiment increasingly favours animal welfare.

Consumption of dog meat, once a part of South Korean tradition, has been steadily declining. A 2023 Nielsen Korea poll revealed that 86 per cent of South Koreans do not plan to consume dog meat in the future, and 57 per cent support a complete ban. Additionally, over six million dogs now live as household pets, highlighting a shift toward embracing dogs as companions rather than food.

The ban comes as the appetite for bosintang, a traditional dog meat soup often consumed during the hottest days of summer known as BokNal, continues to wane. Once a staple during this period, dog meat restaurants report significant drops in reservations and sales, particularly in Seoul's Bosintang Alley.

Currently, South Korea has over 1,500 dog breeding farms and 200 dog slaughterhouses, with approximately 2,300 restaurants still serving dog meat. However, demand for dog meat has significantly declined.

To aid the transition, the government has set aside 100 billion won (\$75 million) in incentives for farmers, breeders, and restaurants. Farmers will receive compensation of up to 600,000 won (\$452) per surrendered dog, ensuring animals are either adopted or sent to shelters. Vice Agriculture Minister Park Beom-su emphasised that safeguards are in place to prevent the remaining dogs from being processed for consumption during the industry's phase-out.

Advocacy groups like the World Dog Alliance (WDA) have played a critical role in this legislative victory. Through campaigns, documentaries such as EatingHappiness, and global advocacy, they have highlighted the cruelty of the dog meat trade and rallied for change.

South Korea's decision represents a significant step toward improving animal welfare and aligns with a global movement advocating for ethical consumption and the humane treatment of animals. The nation's efforts, supported by financial incentives and advocacy, demonstrate a compassionate approach to cultural transformation while honouring public sentiment.