

Post 3/11: Food Safety in Japan

The Government of Japan

Over a year has passed since the Fukushima nuclear accident raised concerns about Japanese food safety. Japan remains committed to **ensuring a safe environment** for all of its residents and visitors. By utilizing lessons learned during post-disaster revitalization, Japan has further developed and implemented **leading global food safety standards** to restore public confidence in food grown and consumed in Japan. Reassured by these efforts, public concern over the safety of Japanese food products is gradually diminishing.

INITIATIVE-1: Intensive Public-Private Cooperation to Foster Transparency

This year, Japan has made important progress in ensuring that the public is informed of food safety initiatives, including stricter standards around radionuclides in food products and strengthened screening processes, through collaboration between the private sector and the central and local governments. The **Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA)** launched a **risk communications initiative**, supported by the **Food Safety Commission (FSC)**, the **Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare (MHLW)**, and the **Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF)**, hosting **140 town hall meetings** throughout Japan to explain the scientific foundations for new measures in partnership with **local governments** and **consumer associations**. Other efforts include the distribution of brochures in public places and retail stores in cooperation with various **retail associations** including the supermarket association. The CAA is also sending specialists to local seminars hosted by consumer associations.

The **Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters (NERH)** and **Nuclear Regulation Authority** are also involved in these efforts.

INITIATIVE-2: Strengthen Standards for Radionuclides in Food

On April 1, 2012 Japan enforced the new limits of radioactive cesium in food products that saw the permissible dose reduced from 5mSv to 1mSv per year¹. This decision was based upon the FSC's assessment derived from **scientific findings from more than 3,300 domestic and international reports** on the health impact of radiation, including from UNSCEAR, ICRP and WHO. For most foods, this means the new limit is one-fifth of the previous limits, while the figure has been cut to one-twentieth in the case of drinking water. A **new 'infant food' category** has also been created to protect those who are most vulnerable.

Category	Provisional regulation value	Category	Limit
Drinking water	200	Drinking water	10
Milk, dairy products	200	Milk	50
Vegetables	500	General Foods	100
Grains		Infant Foods	50
Meat, eggs, fish, etc.			

(Unit : Bq/kg)

¹ For further information on the new standards, please visit: www.mhlw.go.jp/english/topics/2011eq/dl/new_standard.pdf

INITIATIVE-3: Rigorous Screening Processes

Japan has been diligent in promoting **rigorous screening processes** to detect radioactive cesium. Food items are tested with specific emphasis placed on the 17 prefectures located closest to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The results proved that more than 98% items tested were below the permissible limits (April – October 2012). MHLW and MAFF also provide support to municipal governments for their monitoring efforts including subsidies for monitoring equipment.

- At production sites, various efforts have been made to reduce radiation risks including the decontamination of soil and cleaning of crops.
- The central and local governments are making important efforts to ensure that only products that have passed strict standards are distributed to the marketplace. For example, food items produced in the 17 prefectures are tested at least before they are placed on the marketplace. When contaminated items are found in more than one region, the distribution of these items from these regions is banned by national order .
- Over 2,500 food products have been tested since August 2011. Only a few product samples have been found so far to have exceeded the permissible limits.

INITIATIVE-4: Surpassing International Standards

Japan's new standards put the country **far ahead of some of the strictest recommendations by international bodies**. As outlined below, these efforts ensure that the levels of radioactive cesium permitted in food products in Japan are significantly lower than those allowed in other major countries.

Product	Japan	USA	China	Republic of Korea
Water	10	1200	--	370
Milk	50	1200	330	370
Meat and Meat Products	100	1200	800	370
Fish and fish products	100	1200	800	370
Vegetables	100	1200	201	370
Infant food	50		--	370

* unit: Bq/kg

RESULTS: Reduction of International Restrictions on Imports

As a result of vigorous efforts made by concerned people and authorities, including the Japanese Government, to promote better understanding of the safety of Japanese foods, many countries have lifted or eased restrictions on the importation of foods from Japan.

- So far, 9 countries (Canada, New Zealand, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Columbia, Guinea, Myanmar and Serbia) have completely lifted radionuclide-related restrictions on food products from Japan.
- In October 2012, the **European Union decided to substantially ease import restrictions** on food products and animal feed from 11 prefectures based on scientific data imposed after the March 2011 crisis.
- On December 7, **Brazil lifted import restrictions** from most prefectures, while only requiring certification from food produced in Fukushima.
- Other countries have also taken steps to ease regulations, while some countries still suspend import from Fukushima and surrounding prefectures.