

Fukushima/food contamination: fish, rice...

Saturday 13 August 2011, by [HONGO Jun](#), [Kyodo News](#), [Mainichi Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 10 August 2011).

Stop claiming food is safe, ministry told

Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto has committed an about-face on policy by telling his ministry to refrain from vouching for the safety of Japanese food.

The ministry stance changed after radiation-tainted beef was found to have been sold to consumers nationwide, sources said.

The contaminated meat is coming from cattle that were fed rice straw contaminated with cesium isotopes ejected by the disaster-crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

To handle surging concerns abroad about the food supply, the Foreign Ministry told embassies and other diplomatic offices overseas to brief local authorities, importers and media organizations on measures the government is taking to prevent contaminated food from making it into public distribution channels.

The ministry has also asked its diplomatic offices to repeat its stance of disclosing safety information in a timely manner.

On July 8, Matsumoto said that he wanted to dispel food safety concerns by explaining what the government is doing to prevent tainted food from making it into the food supply.

But several countries have since asked about the beef scare after several cattle suspected of being fed tainted straw were found to have been slaughtered and their beef shipped to market months ago to stores and restaurants.

Kyodo, August 9, 2011

* <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110809a1.html>

Fukushima fish radiation excessive, Greenpeace says

Radiology and marine experts from Greenpeace said Tuesday that four out of eight samples of various fish obtained last month at five ports in Fukushima Prefecture exceeded the government-set limit of 500 becquerels per kilogram of radiation.

Although fishery cooperatives in Fukushima have halted coastal commercial operations since March 11 and catches from the area are not being sold to retailers, the environmental group urged the government to conduct detailed checks on fish caught off the Fukushima coast to prevent their accidental sale.

A sample of “kuromebaru” rockfish hit 1,053 becquerels per kg, the group said.

“These were eight samples that were donated to Greenpeace, eight randomly taken samples” that were provided by local and amateur fishermen, Jan van de Putte, radiology safety expert of the NGO, said at a news conference in Tokyo.

But Van de Putte stressed that even the least contaminated fish showed traces of radiation.

Greenpeace said the government must work quickly to ensure the safety of consumers, including measures to trace the origin of such products.

“We have requested the Fisheries Agency and the Consumer Affairs Agency to label each fish with its origin as well as the level of radiation contamination,” Wakao Hanaoka, the oceans campaigner for Greenpeace Japan, said.

The farm ministry tags every cow with a 10-digit identification number that consumers can use to trace where the beef they purchase came from.

But a similar system for fish hasn’t been set up yet. “Under the current circumstances, consumers cannot purchase (fish) with complete knowledge that it is safe,” Hanaoka said.

Greenpeace revealed that it has also requested major retailers in Japan to take part in providing safe fish, possibly through establishing their own screening system for radiation and providing accurate data of the product to consumers.

Allowing only safe fish to hit the market will ultimately be the key to reviving Fukushima’s fisheries, Hanaoka said.

Samples of fish were obtained between July 22 and 24 and examined at laboratories in France that are certified by the French nuclear authority, Greenpeace said.

By JUN HONGO, *Japan Times* Staff writer, Aug. 10, 2011

* <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20110810a4.html>

Rice farmers, wholesalers worry about radioactive cesium tests

Rice farmers and wholesalers are uneasy about tests for radioactive cesium in rice crops and how those tests will affect shipments following the government’s announcement of testing standards on Aug. 3.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) announced on Aug. 3 standards for cesium tests on this year’s rice crop in 14 eastern prefectures that together produced 3.5 million metric tons of rice last year, about 40 percent of the country’s total yield of 8.48 million metric tons.

In Tome, Miyagi Prefecture, where rice straw feed has been suspected as the cause of radioactive cesium contamination in cows, 50-year-old rice farmer Akira Sudo pulls weeds with a grim expression. “If our rice passes the nation’s double inspections, it will allow us to promote it as safe. But it’s really tough harvesting my rice without knowing whether I’ll be able to ship it in the end.”

He added, "All I can do is pray."

Miyagi Prefecture's Agricultural Products and Horticulture Environment Division says that the prefecture, which is the source of the renowned rice "hitomebore," "has a duty to ensure rice safety as a major producer of high-quality rice" and the prefecture will conduct cesium tests in all its municipalities — estimated at over 200 locations.

However, "if too much time is taken on the cesium tests, rice harvesting will be delayed and quality problems such as the husks thickening could occur," worries Etsuro Sato, an official of agricultural cooperative JA Miyagi Tome.

In Tochigi Prefecture, where soil mixed with fallen leaves from the northern part of the prefecture was found to have high levels of radioactive cesium, Takao Noguchi, 55, of agricultural cooperative JA Tochigi Chuo Kai, says, "It's better to have more locations tested than fewer, but the more we have, the harder it is to make things go smoothly at all of them." Because testing could reduce product quality by forcing farmers to keep their crop shipments on hold, Takao says, "We want to find ways to get the tests done quickly."

In Ibaraki Prefecture, a major rice producer of the Kanto region, there is both anticipation and uneasiness over the tests.

Naoki Kakurai of agricultural cooperative JA Zen-noh Ibaraki says, "Passing tests conducted according to national standards will earn more trust than passing tests done independently." Still, he appears anxious about the test results. "If shipments are banned, it will be bad for both the farmers who produce the rice and we who sell it."

In Aizumisato, Fukushima Prefecture, part of the Aizu region that is second only to Niigata Prefecture in the production of high-quality "koshihikari" rice, 78-year-old Takami Suzuki takes a break from cutting grass and stares uneasily at the wavering rice plants in his paddy fields.

"Aizu is far away from the nuclear plant, but because we're in the same Fukushima Prefecture, I wonder if consumers will listen," he says.

Mariko Sano, chief secretary of consumer group Shufuren, notes that, "The paths rice takes to the market are complex, and for blended rice, the locations where all the rice was grown may not be clear. Labelers should make it easy for consumers to understand where the rice comes from and what the results of the cesium tests were."

"The government's actions on the radiation contamination problems have been reactionary, and consumers and farmers are paying the price. Rice is something we eat every day, so the government mustn't let rice that exceeds regulatory levels make it onto the market."

At a briefing on the tests held by MAFF on Aug. 3, farmers' organizations, major rice wholesalers, rice husk processors and other parties were in attendance. During a question and answer session, queries were raised such as, "Where is the evidence that tests are not needed in prefectures other than the 14 designated ones?" and demands such as, "We want the government to attach certifications of safety."

An employee of a rice wholesaler who was present at the briefing said, "We need the production side to carry out the tests properly. But even if the rice is below the tentative regulatory value of 500 becquerels, debate is still needed to decide if we as a company can treat rice that is, for example, 400 becquerels as being safe or not."

Mainichi Shimbun , August 4, 2011

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/04/20110804p2a00m0na018000c.html>

Japan to Ask Local Govts to Test Rice for Radiation

Tokyo, Aug. 1 (Jiji Press)—Japan's agriculture ministry plans to ask local governments near the stricken nuclear power plant to conduct radiation checks on rice, sources familiar with the matter said Monday.

The ministry will come up with standard procedures as early as this week to check whether rice is tainted with radioactive cesium from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

If rice contains radioactive cesium at levels above the tentative permitted limit of 500 becquerels per kilogram, the national government will ban shipments from the area in question.

Farmers in such areas will not be allowed to ship rice at all this year.

Rice grown in soil with radioactive cesium concentrations of more than 5,000 becquerels per kilogram is at risk of exceeding the permissible limit, according to the ministry.

Jiji Press, August 1, 2011

* <http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2011080100899>
