
Food safety: the EU reinforces controls on imports from Japan

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Food safety: the EU reinforces controls on imports from Japan

In order to further limit possible risks to the safety of its Food Chain, the European Union decided today to reinforce controls on imports of food and feed from certain regions of Japan, where production could be affected by the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Member States endorsed, at a meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH), a Commission proposal to impose special import conditions. The measures apply to all feed and food originating in or consigned from 12 prefectures of Japan,¹ including the four most affected by the accident. All products from these prefectures have to be tested before leaving Japan and will be subject to random testing in the EU. Feed and food products from the remaining 35 prefectures will have to be accompanied by a declaration stating the prefecture of origin and will be randomly tested upon arrival in the EU. The Union will review these measures every month.

In particular, the regulation adopted today stipulates that **each consignment of food or feed from the 12 prefectures has to be accompanied by a declaration** – to be provided by the Japanese authorities – attesting that the product does not contain **levels of radionuclides** that exceed the EU's maximum permitted levels². Radionuclides are radioactive elements and the Commission regulation makes specific reference to *iodine-131, caesium-134 and caesium-137*.

Furthermore, importers are required to notify the national competent authorities two days before the arrival of each consignment of food and feed from Japan. Feed and food products that were harvested or processed before March 11 are not affected by the provisions of this regulation. Nevertheless, these products from all of Japan's territory would have to be accompanied by a declaration stating clearly that they were harvested/processed before March 11.

As regards food and feed harvested/produced **after March 11**, the measures provide that:

- **Upon arrival in the EU**, the competent authorities of the Border Inspection Posts (BIP) or of the consignment's Designated Point of Entry (DPE) will carry out document and identity checks on all food and feed consignments from Japan;
- Physical checks, including laboratory analysis, will be carried out on **at least 10% of the consignments of food or feed** coming from 12 prefectures mentioned above. Physical checks will also be carried out on **at least 20% of the consignments** coming from the remaining 35 prefectures;

- Pending the availability of the test results, products shall be kept under **official control for a maximum of five working days**. The consignments will be released when the importer will present to the custom authorities the favourable results of the official controls mentioned above;
- **Products that are found to exceed the maximum permitted levels** shall not be placed on the market and will either be safely disposed of or returned to Japan.

The Commission proposal, endorsed today by SCoFCAH, will be formally adopted tomorrow. The resulting implementing regulation will enter into force one day after its publication in the European Union's Official Journal. It is expected to be published in the OJ on Saturday, March 26.

Background

Currently, there is no evidence of risk for the EU consumer by increased radiation levels in food and feed products imported from Japan. However, the Commission decided to reinforce its measures in order to further limit possible risks to its own Food Chain and, thus, ensure better protection for the health of EU citizens.

The Commission has been following closely developments in Japan. On 15th March, it asked the Member States, through the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), to step up controls on food products arriving from Japan.

Food safety risks for EU citizens due to the Japan nuclear crisis are low for a series of reasons. They include:

- Japan is authorised to export to the EU only four products of **animal origin**, namely: **Fishery products; Bivalve molluscs; Casings; Petfood**.
- **Vegetables/fruits** may also be exported to the EU, but such exports from Japan into the EU are small in volume – they stood at about **9,000 tons from all of Japan's territory in 2010**.
- According to the latest information, the **Japanese authorities have taken the necessary measures** to ensure that food (and drinking water) testing above their established acceptable levels of radio-activity is neither sold to the Japanese public nor exported.
- Imports to the EU of Japanese agricultural products (i.e. products of animal origin, fish and of plant products) are relatively small. In 2010, the **total value of agricultural products imported to the EU from Japan stood at €187 million for agricultural products and €18 million for fishery products**.

¹ :

Fukushima, Gunma, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Miyagi, Yamagata, Niigata, Nagano, Yamanashi, Saitama, Tokyo and Chiba

² :

Council Regulation (Euratom) No. 3954/87 (OJ L 371, 30, 12, 1997, p. 11)