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## Cattle Struggling to Survive in Fukushima as Radiation Taints Soil, Water

By Aya Takada - Apr 1, 2011

Cattle in [Japan](#)'s Fukushima prefecture are struggling to survive as radiation leaks from a crippled nuclear power plant contaminate soil and water and force farmers to evacuate the area.

"Farmers must make a very tough decision -- running away from their farms to protect themselves or staying there to take care of their livestock," Kenzo Sasaki, 70, who raises 25 cattle in Irisabara village in Fukushima, said in an interview. "Animals in the evacuation zone are probably dying without food and water as growers in the area have no option but to flee."

Cattle futures surged to a record in Chicago yesterday on speculation demand for U.S. beef would increase in Japan after radiation from the stricken nuclear plant contaminated food supplies. Tyson Foods Inc., the top U.S. meat processor, said the country may increase imports.

Hazardous radiation levels have been detected in areas outside an evacuation radius around the Fukushima Dai-Ichi power plant, site of the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. The [United Nations](#)' nuclear watchdog agency said that a potential uncontrolled chain reaction at the plant could cause further radiation leaks and increase the risk to human health.

Sasaki's farm is near Iitate village, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the plant, where the government discovered 163,000 becquerel per kilogram of radioactive cesium and 1.17 million becquerel of radioactive iodine in soil. Iitate is outside the 20-kilometer evacuation zone.

### Iitate Village

Iitate is a farming region in Fukushima for wagyu cattle -- a breed genetically predisposed to intense marbling, producing a high percentage of oleaginous unsaturated fat. Sasaki's herd does not include wagyu.

Fukushima is the 10th biggest producer of beef cattle in Japan, representing 2.7 percent of the total. Japan exported 677 metric tons of beef, including wagyu, in the year to March 31, 2010, government data show. [Vietnam](#) was the top buyer with 433 tons, then [Hong Kong](#) with 119 tons and the U.S. with 81 tons.

Radiation in beef produced in Tenei village in Fukushima prefecture was found to be within legal limits after re-testing today, the health ministry said. The ministry earlier said that beef from the village, about 70 kilometers from the Fukushima plant, had a combined 510 becquerel per kilogram of cesium-134 and cesium-137, exceeding the limit of 500 becquerel.

## Tainted Products

Countries from [Australia](#) to [China](#) limited food imports from Japan amid concern products may be contaminated by radiation. Prime Minister [Naoto Kan](#) has restricted milk and vegetable shipments from Fukushima and neighboring prefectures after tainted produce was discovered through random testing.

Some 137 products, including milk, beef, and vegetables, were found to be contaminated in [Tokyo](#) and five prefectures to its north and east as of late yesterday, up from 99 as of late March 26, according to a health ministry statement.

Sasaki, who produces about 200 kilograms of raw milk a day from his 20 cows, is destroying everything since the government imposed restrictions on shipments from Fukushima on March 19.

He spends about 400,000 yen (\$4,785) a month for feed, but can no longer earn money from raw-milk shipments, which brought him 1 million yen a month previously.

“I was told by my cooperative that the organization will pay for the lost income from next month as it will seek compensation from Tokyo Electric,” Sasaki said yesterday.

## Fewer Eggs

Damaged reactors at the Fukushima nuclear plant may take three decades to decommission and cost operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. more than 1 trillion yen (\$12 billion), analysts said.

Fukushima is the 13th largest grower of dairy cows with 17,600 animals in 567 farms, or 1.2 percent of Japan's total.

“It is still unknown how many of them were killed by the earthquake and tsunami,” said Hirofumi Yoda at the livestock department of the Fukushima prefectural government. “We cannot say how many are affected by the nuclear-plant accident as the crisis is still going on.”

Japan's biggest earthquake on record and tsunami that hit the Fukushima plant on March 11 also destroyed feed production facilities in the northeast, reducing supplies to livestock farmers in the region, said Yoshitaka Mashima, vice chairman for the National Confederation of Farmers Movements, which groups about 30,000 producers nationwide.

“Farmers in the quake-hit areas have reduced the amount of feed to their animals because of supply shortage,” Mashima said in an interview yesterday. “The reduction will lead to decreased production of milk, eggs, pork and beef eventually.”

Cattle futures on the [Chicago](#) Mercantile Exchange rose to a record of \$1.21 per pound yesterday and climbed 7.2 percent last month, the biggest gain since November.

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