

Executive Summary

- Report of Wider Application of the Quality Labeling Standards under the Law Concerning Standardization and Proper Labeling of Agricultural and Forestry Products (the JAS Law) -
by the Committee on the Future Course of Labeling of Foods Traded among Dealers¹

I. Encouraging accurate food labeling

1 Preventing false labeling by wider application of the Quality Labeling Standards

(1) Principles behind the amendments

The JAS Law provides for Quality Labeling Standards applicable to all foods which food manufacturers and other operators must comply, in order to provide consumers with information for informed choices. Processed foods traded among dealers prior to the sale for ultimate consumers are not subject to mandatory labeling at present, because the mandatory labeling requirement of prepackaged foods is considered to ensure accurate labeling. However, the deceptive and misleading practices by a meat dealer which were revealed this summer undermined consumers' confidence in food labeling. In order to restore consumers' confidence in food labeling, all processed foods traded among dealers prior to the sale for ultimate consumers will be also subject to mandatory labeling as fresh foods are currently are, thereby preventing deceptive and misleading labeling practices. Both the Quality Labeling Standards for Processed Foods and Fresh Foods will be amended.

(2) Means of communicating food labeling information by dealers

The new food labeling system will be an enforceable one and must minimize additional burdens for dealers as much as possible, by keeping a consistency with the other relevant legislations and taking into account current trade practices.

The same mandatory labeling items for prepackaged foods will apply to foods traded among dealers: a) name of the food; b) names of ingredients; c) net content; d) use-by date; e) storage instructions; and f) name and address of manufacturer, etc. Labeling of place of origin will also apply, where the food is used as a main ingredient for a processed food; and labeling of place of origin of the main ingredient is mandatory for the processed food. Those processed foods are 20 food categories of processed foods and 4 types of processed foods² which were already provided in the Quality Labeling Standard for Processed Foods and Individual Quality Labeling Standards. Those items other than b) above are already mandatory by the other relevant legislations such as the Food Sanitation Law.

As well as labels on containers and invoices, other commercial documents such as specifications are recognized as substitutes for labeling of name of ingredients and place of origin. The new regulation does not require dealers to disclose the information contained in commercial documents to the third parties.

(3) Points of concern for implementation

The immediate implementations of revisions are necessary for restoring consumers' confidence in food labeling, while the procedures in accordance with the domestic legislations and the WTO/TBT Agreement must be followed.

¹ The Committee is an ad-hoc advisory council established under the Food Safety and Consumers Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan.

² 20 categories of processed foods are provided for as Attached Table 2 of the Quality Labeling Standard for Processed Foods, which is available at:
http://www.maff.go.jp/soshiki/syokuhin/hinshitu/e_label/file/Labeling/OLS_processed_food.pdf
4 types of processed foods are pickles, frozen vegetables, shavings of dried bonito and processed eels.

II. Strengthening the guidance and surveillance system for food labeling

1. Current status

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan has been taking following measures since summer 2007:

- a) Keeping records of possible false labeling information and immediately responding to them;
- b) Clarifying the criteria to decide the operator in question is the one with nationwide activities or regional activities;
- c) Providing a manual for food labeling enquiry point; and
- d) Strengthening the cooperation among the local governments, regional offices of MAFF, and the police by regular information exchanges

2. Responses to issues accrued by the wider application of the Quality Labeling Standards

The followings are necessary for the wider application of the Quality Labeling Standards:

- a) Training of staff who are capable for surveying and appropriately advising operators;
- b) Inspection focusing on unannounced inspection for preventing deceptive and misleading labeling practices by operators; and
- c) Guidance for the operators who conducted inappropriate labeling practices to prevent similar misconducts.

III. Recommendations

1. Compliance by companies

Food manufacturing companies are encouraged to show their attitudes for compliance with legislations and publish quality policies valuing consumers, by a top-down initiative. The industry associations are expected to positively support small-and-medium-sized operators, taking into account that they share a large part of food manufacturers.

2. Communication between consumers and operators

In order to restore consumers' confidence in food labeling and food industries, operators are recommended to disclose information to consumers and provide consumers with an opportunity for communication for further mutual understanding.