

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Japan Sees Little Reason So far to Revise GE Labeling

Report Categories:

FAIRS Subject Report

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

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Report Highlights:

On September 27, 2017, the Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA) of the Government of Japan (GOJ) held its fifth committee meeting on labeling of food containing genetically engineered (GE) food and ingredients. This meeting covered two issues, the specific food items for mandatory labeling and the range of food items for mandatory labeling.

General Information:

After four general meetings with stakeholders, the committee started to review potential labeling revisions. CAA proposed two issues with four specific points.

Issue 1: Scope of mandatory labeling

Point 1: Consideration of food items for mandatory labeling

Point 2: Consideration of the range for the food items for mandatory labeling

Issue2: The method of labeling

Point 3: Consideration of “Genetically Engineered” and “GE non-segregated” labeling as easily and correctly understood by consumers

Point 4: Consideration of the condition of food to be labeled as “non-GMO”

The committee discussed Points 1 and 2 in its fifth session.

Point 1: Consideration of food items for mandatory labeling

Currently GE labeling is required for eight crops (soybean, corn, potato, canola, cottonseed, alfalfa, sugar beet and papaya) and their 33 processed food items (See the attached reference). Products such as cooking oil and sugar without remaining foreign DNA are exempted from the labeling. For details on current labeling requirements see [JA6050](#).

Consumer group representatives expressed their view that all food items, such as cooking oil, should be included for mandatory labeling. However, they also expressed some level of understanding that overly strict GE labeling rule might increase food business risks and costs, especially given Japan’s reliance on imports. Industry experts expressed doubt about the business feasibility of such a labeling regime, especially for foods which cannot be scientifically validated as GE or non-GE. Also, some experts explained the risks and costs of including products with no foreign DNA for mandatory labeling list from the perspective of regulatory inspection.

The list of foods requiring labeling may be expanded to include corn flakes, recognizing that DNA from corn flake was indicated as detectable in first committee meeting (see [JA7067](#)). The chair of the committee concluded that the current GE regulation for the scope of food shall be considered to be reasonable based on the view from the majority of committee members.

Point 2: Consideration to the range of food items for the mandatory labeling

Current regulation requires the labeling of an ingredient when it is among the top three ingredients (by weight) and more than five percent (by weight). Consumer group representatives indicated a need to expand the range of food items for mandatory GE labeling to respond consumers’ right to know. Industry experts explained two points of technical difficulty for the expansion: space limitations due smaller package size for individual serving sizes, and important food safety related labeling such as allergy being less noticed by increased GE labeling which is not a food safety issue.

The chair concluded that the current GE regulation of the range for the food items for mandatory labeling is reasonable.

All materials provided in the committee meeting can be found in the site below (in Japanese).
http://www.caa.go.jp/policies/policy/food_labeling/other/genetically_modified_food.html

Next Steps:

Although a date has not yet been fixed, a sixth CAA committee session is expected in the next few weeks to discuss remaining issues.

The expert committee is expected to summarize its review by the end of this calendar year and provide a mid-term report. The report may contain draft new regulations for the mandatory labeling for GE food. Proposed revisions could be finalized by the end of JFY2017 (March 31, 2017).

The proposed revision will be further reviewed by the Food Labeling Consumer Committee in the Cabinet Office in JFY2018. After the Food Labeling Consumer Committee agrees to the draft proposal from the expert committee, if necessary, CAA would likely have a domestic and WTO notification period for comments before the official announcement of new regulation.

Reference

Products of mandatory GE labeling

Items subject to labeling	Ingredient to be labeled
1. Tofu (soybean curd) and fried tofu	Soybean
2. Dried soybean curd, soybean refuse, yuba (soybean milk skin)	Soybean
3. Natto (fermented soybean)	Soybean
4. Soy milk	Soybean
5. Miso (soybean paste)	Soybean
6. Cooked soybean	Soybean
7. Canned soybean, bottled soybean	Soybean
8. Kinako (roasted soybean flour)	Soybean
9. Roasted soybean	Soybean
10. Item containing food of items 1 to 9 as a main ingredient	Soybean
11. Item containing soybean (for cooking) as a main ingredient	Soybean
12. Item containing soybean flour as a main ingredient	Soybean
13. Item containing soybean protein as a main ingredient	Soybean
14. Item containing edamame (green soybean) as a main ingredient	Edamame
15. Item containing soybean sprouts as a main ingredient	Soybean sprouts
16. Corn snacks	Corn
17. Corn starch	Corn
18. Popcorn	Corn
19. Frozen corn	Corn
20. Canned or bottled corn	Corn
21. Item containing corn flour as a main ingredient	Corn
22. Item containing corn grits as a main ingredient	Corn
23. Item containing corn (for processing) as a main ingredient	Corn
24. Item containing food if items 16 to 20 as a main ingredient	Corn
25. Frozen potato	Potato
26. Dried potato	Potato
27. Potato starch	Potato
28. Potato snacks	Potato
29. Item containing food items 25 to 28 as a main ingredient	Potato
30. Item containing potato (for processing) as a main ingredient	Potato
31. Item containing alfalfa as a main ingredient	Alfalfa
32. Item containing sugar beet (for processing) as a main ingredient	Sugar beet
33. Item containing papaya as a main ingredient	Papaya