

Japan: radiation-tainted straw produced far from Fukushima nuclear plant

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Finding that radiation-tainted straw was produced far from nuclear plant causes shock

Revelations that radiation-contaminated rice straw used as feed for beef cattle was produced far away from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant have sent shockwaves through the livestock farming community in Fukushima Prefecture.

Consumers have also been filled with a sense of growing distrust in the government over delays in responding to the problem of radiation-tainted beef.

Forty-two beef cows that ate rice straw contaminated with radioactive cesium were found to have been shipped from a livestock farm in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Asakawa from April 8. The rice straw had been supplied by a farmer in Shirakawa, about 75 kilometers away from the tsunami-hit nuclear power station.

“It’s unbelievable that this (contamination) occurred in an area so far away from the nuclear plant,” said a 34-year-old man who has run a livestock farm in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, for nearly 10 years.

On July 8 the government asked livestock farmers in the city to refrain from shipping beef.

“Fukushima-produced beef cows will no longer sell unless we switch to feed produced outside the prefecture and suspend shipments of beef cows until the safety of all feed produced in the prefecture is confirmed,” the Minamisoma farmer said.

Officials with the local governments of areas to which the cows had been shipped were busy confirming meat distribution routes until late on July 14.

Top officials of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government have consulted with officials in Tokyo’s Bureau of Social Welfare and Public Health over how to conduct follow-up surveys. Thirteen of the cows had been shipped to Tokyo by June 16.

The metropolitan government had just finished an investigation on July 13 into the distribution routes of six other contaminated beef cows which had been shipped from Minamisoma.

“We have no choice but to diligently track down tainted beef that has been marketed,” said a senior official.

Of the 42 cows shipped from Asakawa, 32 have been sent to slaughterhouses in Tokyo, Yokohama and Chiba — causing unrest among residents of the metropolitan area.

Keiko Endo, a 68-year-old woman who was shopping at a supermarket in Nakano Ward, Tokyo, expressed anger at the government’s slow response to the case. “I buy goods at store shelves, believing that they are safe. I wonder why the government failed to check the safety of cows before

their meat was shipped," she said.

A 40-year-old housewife who has 12- and 7-year-old children expressed worries about the safety of domestic meat while shopping at a supermarket in Mihama Ward, Chiba. "If something like this repeatedly happens, you become increasingly worried about food safety," she said. "I'll choose Australian meat for the health of my children."

At the same time, some consumers have expressed sympathy with farmers in Fukushima Prefecture who have been affected by the crisis at the crippled nuclear power station.

"I lately choose not to eat beef at barbecue restaurants. But I feel sorry for Fukushima people," said 74-year-old Akiko Suwabe, a housewife living in Tokyo's Nakano Ward.

"I don't think the farmer in question shipped the rice straw as feed while knowing it was contaminated with radiation. Experts say, 'If you eat the beef, it won't pose an immediate threat to your health'," said a 63-year-old woman from Chiba. "Consumers' overreaction will only make farmers suffer."

The livestock farm in Asakawa that shipped the 42 cows expressed an apology for the incident in an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun.

"I'm really sorry for this. I've been losing sleep since yesterday. I'm acquainted with the Shirakawa farmer who sold the rice straw to me," he said. "I can't immediately comment on the matter any further because I haven't resolved my feelings."

Mainichi Shimbun , July 15, 2011

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/15/20110715p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Fukushima town farm ships 42 cows after feeding cesium-contained straw

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) — A cattle farm in the town of Asakawa in Fukushima Prefecture has shipped 42 cows to Tokyo and other places after feeding them with straw containing high levels of radioactive cesium, the prefectural government said Thursday.

While the 42 cows were distributed between April 8 and July 6, 14 were shipped to Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, 13 to Tokyo, 10 to Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, and five to Chiba Prefecture, the Fukushima government said.

The straw was found to contain up to 97,000 becquerels of cesium per kilogram, about 73 times the government-designated limit. It was cut last year by a rice farm in Shirakawa in the prefecture and was left on an open field.

After the March 11 earthquake and tsunami disaster which fatally damaged the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station, the farm collected and sold the straw, according to the prefectural government.

The government conducted an on-site inspection at the cattle farm and asked it to halt the shipment

and transfer of cows. It also made the same request to other cattle farms and related parties in the prefecture until the inspection of the farms is completed possibly by Monday.

Meanwhile, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry asked the Tokyo, Yokohama and Sendai governments to trace the cows shipped from the cattle farm in Asakawa.

Beef produced from the cows shipped to Chiba has already been on the market, ministry officials said.

According to the Sendai municipal government, two of the 14 cows shipped to the city were already processed into beef, which has been delivered to dealers in Tokyo, Sakata, Yamagata Prefecture, Hanamaki, Iwate Prefecture, and Sendai. It has yet to confirm whether the beef has been sold to consumers.

A cattle farm in Minamisoma, also in Fukushima, was earlier found to have fed cows with straw containing 75,000 becquerels of cesium per kilogram.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries said Thursday it will examine straw stored at cattle and rice farms in eight prefectures — Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Chiba, Gunma and Saitama.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/07/15/20110715p2g00m0dm013000c.html>
