

Japan Gov't to slash upper limit on internal radiation exposure from food

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The government will tighten the provisional safety limit for annual internal radioactive cesium exposure through food intake from the current 5 millisieverts to 1 millisievert by around April 2012.

The ministry's move comes after the Food Safety Commission of the Cabinet Office reported on Oct. 27 that over 100 millisieverts of lifetime internal exposure to radiation would affect human health. The ministry is further set to review food classification, which is currently divided into five groups, and consider introducing safety standards for baby food at its council meeting convening on Oct. 31.

The new food safety regulations for cesium will be applied to agricultural products to be shipped sometime after April next year. The ministry will take transitional measures for newly cropped rice and other products that have already been distributed after clearing the current provisional safety limit, until next season's new rice is shipped. The ministry council will also review the types of radioactive materials subject to safety regulations, as no radioactive iodine has been detected in recent testing.

The Food Safety Commission's report on the 100-millisievert lifetime internal exposure limit — filed with the health minister on Oct. 27 — translates into 1.25 millisieverts of cesium per year if a person is presumed to live for 80 years.

The current provisional safety limit was drawn up by the Health Ministry with advice from the Nuclear Safety Commission immediately after the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant broke out in March.

A Health Ministry report released in July has revealed that each person in the country was estimated to have been internally exposed to an average of about 0.1 millisievert per year of radiation through food intake since the onset of the nuclear crisis.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/10/28/20111028p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Radiation research suggested as way to keep released livestock near nuclear plant alive

KORIYAMA, Fukushima — Pursuing research on radiation's effects on animals has been suggested as a way to keep livestock animals roaming the no-entry zone near the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant from being killed or starving in the harsh winter.

Nearly 2,000 cows and other livestock are estimated to still be in the 20-kilometer radius no-entry zone around the crippled power plant.

The plan is being pushed by members of the citizens' group "Kibo-no-Bokujo — Fukushima Project" (ranch of hope — Fukushima project). On Oct. 21, around 30 people including local livestock farmers, government legislators and veterinarians met in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, to discuss the issue.

Masami Yoshizawa, 57, who has about 330 high-quality beef cow at his livestock farm situated in the no-entry zone, said he cannot bear to abandon the animals.

Yoshizawa has gotten permission from the government to regularly return to his livestock farm to feed his animals. He says that every time, livestock other than his own also come seeking food.

There have also, however, been reports of cows and pigs that are now living wild making their way into residents' left-behind homes.

To keep the animals alive while preventing damage to resident's property, the Kibo-no-Bokujo — Fukushima Project is working on a plan to enclose the animals on Yoshizawa's farm, where researchers will use them to observe the effects of radiation on large mammals. They are planning to get help from universities and other research institutes.

Earlier, in May of this year, university researchers asked the central government to let livestock exposed to radiation in Fukushima Prefecture live for use in research. Senior Vice Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Nobutaka Tsutsui expressed support for the idea, but almost no concrete measures have been mapped out.

According to the Kibo-no-Bokujo — Fukushima Project, there were approximately 3,500 cows, 30,000 pigs and 680,000 chickens remaining in the 20-kilometer radius no-entry zone, which got that designation on April 22. On May 12, the government decided to slaughter all livestock in the zone, and it has so far killed about 300 cows. Most of the pigs and chickens are believed to have died from lack of water and food without people to look after them. Not counting any remaining chicken, there are estimated to be somewhat less than 2,000 animals left, mostly cows.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/10/25/20111025p2a00m0na012000c.html>
