

Food Safety Commission of Japan Annual Work Program for Fiscal Year 2013 (Excerpt)

Food Safety Commission of Japan (FSCJ) has compiled its annual work program of fiscal year 2013. As FSCJ marks the 10th Anniversary of the establishment, in July 2013, it will continue to develop and improve its assessment approaches for the next decade, in accordance with Food Safety Basic Law.

The work program for 2013 focus on, among others, the following key strategic objectives:

1. Risk Assessment Related
 - Effective implementation of risk assessments.
2. Survey and Research Program Related
 - Encouraging selective survey and research program
3. Risk Communication Related
 - Strategic promotion of risk communication with stakeholders.
4. Emergency Response Related
 - Enhancing capacity for emergency response.

1. Risk Assessment Related

1.1. Risk assessments requested form risk assessment organizations¹

- FSCJ performs risk assessments, upon requests made by risk management organizations, for reliable conclusion, in a timely manner.
- FSCJ performs risk assessments, upon applications submitted from industries through risk management organizations, within a fixed time of period after receiving dossiers. (Generally the time is one year excluding time required for collection of additional data and documents requested by relevant expert committees).
- FSCJ performs risk assessments on agricultural chemicals on “Positive-list” according to the risk assessment guidelines for pesticides and others with Provisional Standards.
- Toward effective assessment of pesticides and others, FSCJ will proceed with preparation to participate in Global Joint Reviews.

¹ Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA), Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and Ministry of Environment (MOE)

1.2. Risk assessment guidelines

To facilitate FSCJ's risk assessment procedure and ensure its transparency, FSCJ will develop hazard-specific risk assessment guidelines on priority basis. For FY 2013, draft guidelines for establishing ARfD of pesticides shall be developed based on the outcome of researches conducted in FY 2011 and 2012.

1.3. Self-tasking risk assessments²

FSCJ will continue to plan and implement self-tasking risk assessments, taking public opinions and experts' views on food safety into account. It will also continue periodically to review the short list of the hazard-items so far selected, so as to adequately meet demands for protection of public health.

➤ Selecting hazard-items for self-tasking risk assessment

In selecting hazard-items for self-tasking risk assessments for FY 2014, FSCJ will follow the schedule below:

- In July, FSCJ will call for public opinions and experts' views and requests on food safety hazards for its self-tasking risk assessments, then compile their opinions and requests;

- In August, FSCJ Secretariat will prepare a draft short list of hazard-items for self-tasking risk assessments;

- From September FSCJ will proceed with selection of hazard items in priority from the short list above; and

- In March 2014, FSCJ will finalize the list of hazard-items for self- tasking risk assessments for FY 2014.

➤ Implementing risk assessments

For the hazard-items on the list, selected before April 2013 but the assessment remained incomplete, FSCJ will continue the following process for the assessments:

- FSCJ continues discussion at relevant expert committees on: lead in foods, apparatus and food containers/packaging materials; BSE potential risks in cattle meat and offal imported from countries as soon as FSCJ receives their answer to FSCJ's questionnaire; and ochratoxin A.

- FSCJ continues to collect data and information on aluminum, acrylamide, cadmium, arsenic (both inorganic and organic) and *Kudoa (Kudoa septempunctata)* for future discussion at relevant expert committees in FY 2014.

² FSCJ's self-tasking risk assessment is defined as a comprehensive process comprising the following steps: i) identification and selection of hazard-items in priority; ii) generation and collection of relevant data and information; iii) elaboration of a risk profile to each hazard-item selected; and iv) assessment of risks to the selected hazards and publication of outcomes. However FSCJ does not necessarily go through the entire process for all the hazard-items selected.

- Outcome of self-tasking risk assessments, when they become available, shall be disseminated to public in appropriate manners, e.g. convening public meetings and/or issuance of formal publications.
- Where necessary and appropriate, FSCJ prepares “Fact-sheets” and/or FAQs (frequently asked questions) on the hazard-items, which have not been selected finally for self-tasking risk assessments, to be placed on FSCJ’s website.

2. Encouraging survey and research projects

2.1. Explore risk assessment methodologies

FSCJ will continue to promote research projects which are expected to improve risk assessment methodologies. The Committee on Planning and Coordination of research/survey project is responsible for better identification of subjects and matters fit for the purpose above.

2.2. Prioritizing areas of survey and research projects

FSCJ will select new survey and research projects based on the FSCJ’s five year plan as directed for precise identification of areas and subjects. The projects shall be fairly selected on priority basis to ensure their outcomes meet demands of food safety and public health. Call for research proposals shall consider open recruitment that ensures applicants from a large number of research institutes including universities.

3. Risk communication related

3.1. Promoting risk communication with stakeholders and mass media

FSCJ will hold public meetings to exchange views and information on risk assessment outcomes with stakeholders and mass media. To address issues of great public concern and interest, such meetings are arranged to be suitable for learning details of the outcomes and their scientific basis.

3.2. Full use of effective tools to effectively disseminate information

- FSCJ will make full use of various tools (e.g. FSCJ’s website, free subscription of weekly e-mail newsletters, quarterly journals and brochures) to effectively provide food safety related information on matters of great public concern.
- “Food Safety Hotline” is another tool, which has been operated to receive calls from consumers and directly answer their questions. Communication made on this Hotline is shared among relevant ministries (i.e. MHLW, MAFF and CAA) and summarized to be placed on FSCJ’s website as well as to be reported to the Commission meetings.
- FSCJ will continue to organize study sessions and/or round table conferences with participation of stakeholders including media and consumer groups, and facilitate exchange of view and information on risk assessments responsive to issues of great public concern. For better education on food safety, FSCJ provides expertise to educational seminars

arranged by local governments and/or institutes. Educational materials e.g. DVDs are used to help increase public awareness on food safety risk assessments.

4. Emergency response related

4.1. Enhancing capacity for emergency response

- FSCJ shall be prepared for any emergency situation to occur at any time. FSCJ will maintain or improve the structured networks, in order to collect quickly ready-availability-information.
- FSCJ will also annually organize a food safety emergency drill. The Steering and Planning Committee is responsible for reviewing and updating preparedness and emergency procedures of FSCJ. In 2013, periodical training program shall be provided to the Secretariat's staff-members in consecutive months between April to October. In addition, the annual drill on food safety emergency response should be held in November, to be followed by a wrap-up to review FSCJ's capacity to effective response to future events.

4.2. Quick review of scientific data as part of risk assessments (when emergency situation arises)

In a food safety emergency event e.g. a fatal food poisoning case, FSCJ shall closely work with relevant ministries and organizations so as to promptly provide public with relevant scientific and toxicological information. This information may be compiled in a comprehensive quick review and a risk assessment required for emergency response.

5. Others

5.1. Improving efficiency of information and data collection

5.1.1. Use of structured network

FSCJ will continue to collect, on a daily basis, the latest technical and scientific information on food safety available at domestic or international level. In doing so, FSCJ, using structured networks, should closely communicate with relevant experts and with concerned organizations, i.e. MHLW, MAFF, CAA, MOE as well as with international organizations. The collected information is analyzed and accumulated in a web-based database called the "Comprehensive Information System for Food Safety". The information is shared among stakeholders by compiling in a "Hazard sheet" to be available in a public domain.

5.1.2. International cooperation

The FSCJ will continue its effort to enhance international cooperation through the following activities:

- Convening regular meetings with food safety risk assessment bodies abroad, i.e. European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and Food Safety Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), based on the Memoranda of Cooperation as exchanged so far;

- Holding discussion with other organizations and exchange information and view on matters of interest, where necessary and appropriate;
- Timely providing up-to-date information on its activities including risk assessment reports, survey and research results in both English and Japanese mediums;
- Organizing an annual seminar or workshop on food safety inviting researchers and experts from abroad, with a view to learning the latest scientific knowledge as required for appropriate implementation of risk assessments.