

Establishment of the Food Safety Commission

Food is an essential part of our daily lives, however, there are no “absolute guarantees” in food safety. The foods we consume contain not only nutrients in abundance, but also agents that may potentially cause adverse health effects (called “hazards”). No matter what the food, there is always some level of risk. Therefore, it is important that we, first, be able to scientifically assess the probability and the severity of such an adverse health effect resulting from a hazard(s) in food (called “risk”). Then, these risks should be minimized by way of appropriate management based on the assessment.

In recent decades, the circumstances surrounding the dietary habits of the people of Japan have changed considerably. Japan has begun importing an extremely large amount of foodstuffs from overseas; there has been an emergence of new hazards, such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and enterohemorrhagic *Escherichia coli* O157:H7; and new technologies, such as recombinant DNA techniques for food productions. There has also been a spate of incidents which have threatened food safety and undermined public trust.

In order to respond adequately to these changes in circumstances and to public concern, the Food Safety Basic Law (refer to the end of this brochure) was enacted in 2003, and it was resolved to develop new administration for ensuring the safety of food. The basic principle of the law is that the protection of the health of general public in Japan is the top priority. The law clarifies the responsibilities of the state, local governments and food-related businesses from production to marketing (such as processing, wholesale, and retail). It also clarifies the roles of consumers. Furthermore, by introducing a new concept of “risk analysis”, the law also aims to comprehensively promote the guarantee of food safety.

Changes in the circumstances surrounding food safety administration

Changes in the circumstances surrounding dietary habits in Japan

- Increasing volume of international trade of food
- Changing human/animal interactions with potential for disease transmission, including *E. coli* O-157:H7, prions, etc.
- New food and agriculture technologies (recombinant DNA, etc.)
- Improvement of analytical technologies for detection of environmental contaminants, etc.

Occurrence of incidents threatening food safety

- Outbreaks of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE)
- Problems of pesticide residues in imported foods
- Use of unregistered pesticides within Japan

New approaches to food safety

- Ensure safety at each stage from farm to table
- Universalization of the concept (risk analysis) that there are no “absolute guarantees” in food safety, that assessment should be implemented on the assumption that risks do exist, and that the risks should be adequately controlled.
- Establishment of risk assessment organizations overseas
 - French Food Safety Agency (Agence Française de Sécurité Sanitaire des Aliments: AFSSA), 1999
 - European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), 2002
 - Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, Germany (Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung: BfR), 2002

Establishment of the Food Safety Basic Law