

Food Safety Commission of Japan

Annual Steering Plan for Fiscal Year 2011 (Excerpt)

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Foreword

This Annual Steering Plan has been approved by the Food Safety Commission of Japan (FSCJ) after undergoing deliberation at the Expert Committee of Planning which is responsible for planning the overall activities of Food Safety Commission.

Risk assessment

1. Steady implementation of risk assessments requested by risk managers

FSCJ's core principle is to conduct science-based risk assessments in an objective, neutral and impartial manner. FSCJ urges risk managers to provide relevant dossiers needed for risk assessment in timely manner, and the submitted dossier is examined in details while adhering to the following points.

(1) Assessment requests made during FY 2010

These assessments are expected to be done by the end of FY 2011. However, when it is difficult to meet the deadline due to such reasons as data inadequacy or absence of assessment guidelines, this assessment timeline is not applied.

The Expert Committee may halt assessments in case of data inadequacy and wait for responsible risk managers to submit additional data to close the information gap.

(2) Assessments requested by risk managers in connection with applications received from private companies (Company-related assessments)

For company-related assessments, FSCJ strives to complete assessments within a year after submission of data in compliance with 'guideline of standardized assessment terms for company-related risk assessment' (FSCJ notification, July 16, 2009).

(3) Assessment of substances regulated by the positive list system and assessment for soft drink standards

FSCJ continues to prioritize items that should undergo assessment, and assesses one after another in a systematical fashion.

(4) Food additives which are broadly used internationally

Food additives which are broadly used internationally should be addressed in response to the indication provided by the Government Revitalization Unit on "simplifying and streamlining the authorization process for food additives".

2. Risk assessment guidelines

To ensure consistency in the content of each assessment and to maintain the transparency and facilitation of risk assessment deliberation, FSCJ develops assessment guidelines for each hazard. Guidelines in process of creation include those for pesticides, veterinary drugs, feed additives and apparatus / food container and package. To finalize those guidelines, necessary procedures should be promptly taken. The outcomes of relevant FSCJ's grant researches may be reflected on the guidelines.

3. Risk assessment on FSCJ's own initiative, so-called 'self-tasking assessment'

Currently, several self-tasking assessments are committed by FSCJ. Assessment titles, status and the year of selection are described below.

Risk assessments of food-poisoning microorganism (selected in FY 2004)

In line with the 'Risk assessment guideline for food-borne pathogenic microorganisms (provisional edition)', we keep collecting information needed for the assessment of three high-priority items, namely E.coli O-157, Salmonella Enteritidis, and Noroviruses. Also we promote preliminary survey and discussion about the feasibility of future assessments on other microorganism and viruses.

Risk assessment of beef and beef offal imported to Japan from countries with no BSE report (selected in FY 2007)

The work has been completed for eight countries out of 15 countries concerned. Assessments of other five countries will be followed up as necessary data becomes available at the FSCJ Expert Committee for Prion.

Risk assessment of lead in food, apparatus / containers and packages (selected in FY 2007)

This assessment is under way at the FSCJ Lead WG of Expert Committee for Chemicals and Contaminants.

Risk assessment of arsenic (inorganic and organic) in food (selected in FY 2008)

This assessment is under way at the FSCJ Expert Committee for Chemicals and Contaminants.

Risk assessments of ochratoxin A (selected in FY 2008)

This assessment is under way at the FSCJ Expert Committee for Natural toxins and mycotoxins.

Risk assessment of trans-fatty acid (selected in FY 2009)

This assessment is under way at the FSCJ Expert Committee for Novel foods.

Risk assessment of aluminum (selected in FY 2009)

FSCJ will continue to collect the information necessary for assessment.

For selected self-tasking assessments of acrylamide for fiscal 2010, FSCJ will continue to collect and analyze the information.

Monitoring of implementation of regulatory policies established by risk managers after FSCJ's assessment

1. FSCJ monitoring of implementation of regulatory policies taken up by risk managers after FSCJ's assessment

After completion of assessment, FSCJ carries out a follow-up monitoring of risk managers' regulatory actions based on the risk assessments notified by FSCJ. For fiscal 2011, FSCJ will implement monitoring survey of this kind twice. FSCJ is also endowed with the right to issue recommendations based on assessment results and other opinions to the risk managers. Monitoring results are also to be summarized (around October 2011 and April 2012) and reported at FSCJ meetings.

2. Food safety monitoring activity

Currently, 470 individuals are registered as FSCJ food safety monitors. FSCJ encourages these monitors to report information related to risk management policies developed based on FSCJ's assessment. Information about daily-basis food safety concerns is also welcomed. Monitors are also asked to take active roles in delivering food safety information to the locals. Regional food safety monitors' meetings are annually hosted by FSCJ. FSCJ prepare informational materials to facilitate the provision of information by the food safety monitors.

Survey and research programs regarding food safety measures

In order to keep conducting latest science-based food safety assessment, FSCJ promotes effective and efficient survey and research programs. To that end, we take the approach provided in “The Direction for Survey and Research Program for Securing Food Safety,” in which objective and accomplishment of survey and research programs in the next five years are expressed (adopted by the Commission on December 16, 2010).

The subjects of “self-tasking” assessments should be also taken into consideration when selecting the prospective subjects of survey / research and utilizing their results.

1. Promoting researches that contribute to the improvement of risk assessment techniques

FSCJ provides competitive grant programs for advancing assessment methodologies to promote science-based risk assessment.

2. Promoting studies on ensuring food safety

FSCJ carries on studies on collecting, processing and analyzing data necessary to conduct risk assessment, through which extensive information and analytical examinations become available over a variety of food hazards. In fiscal 2011, we decide the subjects of the studies by May 2011. The subjects should be selected flexibly in the context of actual situations linked to food safety issues; therefore if an immediate study is required in the middle of fiscal year, additional subjects shall be selected as appropriate.

Promoting risk communication

1. Opinion exchange meetings to communicate risk assessment outcomes

To foster public understanding of FSCJ's risk assessment, FSCJ hosts opinion exchange meetings in various locations and styles. Meetings are assigned for selected assessment items based on the following points and 'the guideline for implementation and review of opinion exchange meetings':

- Items that especially catch public attention;
- Items that require the detailed explanation of their scientific concept and assessment processes.

Those meetings are organized in collaboration with local governments and regional consumer groups so that they may become interactive among parties and focused on the topics familiar to the participants.

Moreover, on the topics of opinion exchange meeting, prior notification and invitation shall be made through free e-mail newsletters, website and other tools to make risk communication fruitful.

2. Prompt information and consultation service as to food safety risk assessments and food safety-related issues

(1) FSCJ's website

In order to promptly provide accurate information in easily understandable way, FSCJ monitors the public's interest and effectiveness of FSCJ's past risk communication. The information distribution tools used by FSCJ include website, free e-mail newsletters, quarterly journal, brochures, and food safety glossary book. Particularly swift action is essential for emergency response. FSCJ engages in increasing number of registered recipients for e-mail newsletter.

In addition, further improvements should be achieved to upgrade our Internet site by extending web contents with visualized, illustrated information, updating data swiftly, and issuing free e-mail newsletters in a timely manner linked with web-update. Information about assessment progress and outcome should be provided especially in a reader-friendly fashion. Visually-assisted materials and movies are also expected to facilitate efficient communication with public about assessment concept, processes, and outcomes.

We reviewed the content of home page and renewed its layout in July 2010. However, further improvement is expected, for example, by employing multi-layered structure that allows visitors to easily navigate from general information pages to more specialized contents as necessary.

Also in announcing the selected subjects of “Self tasking assessment”, we are encouraged to explain the public in an easy-understanding manner why they have been selected and why other candidate topics were eliminated.

(2) Enhancing the relationship with the media

Items with high public concerns are discussed based on the severity at round table conference, with the participation of various stakeholders including media and consumer groups. Other effort opportunity includes elaborate cooperation with media representatives through the timely delivery of press releases by e-mail or courteous response to the request of media coverage interview. Also in cases where incorrect or incomplete information spreads among the public regarding food safety issues, FSCJ proactively provides accurate and supplemental information.

(3) Food Safety Hotline

FSCJ continuously receives questions and comments from outside through its food safety hotline. Those questions and comments should be properly handled, and the information gained through this hot line is made into Q&A-style presentation on the website. Along with the comments received from food safety monitors, all the information is available for the risk managers.

3. Public education on scientific knowledge and science-based way of thinking about food safety

FSCJ sends lecturers to local governments and educational institutions, and hosts educational gathering with school children, as well as use DVDs and enlightening materials to increase understanding FSCJ’s activities and food safety.

4. Assisting risk communicator’s training session

FSCJ has provided lecture programs for participants wishing to become a risk communicator. The communicators are given opportunities to assist opinion exchange meetings to promote local-level risk communication. FSCJ hosts seminars and utilizes mail box to provide information to help local risk communicators acquire advanced knowledge so that they can preside risk communication meeting at each local community.

5. Cooperative relations with other ministries/agencies and local governments on risk communication

Bi-monthly information exchange meetings among risk managers and Consumer Affairs Agency are the venue for intra-governmental risk communication, and FSCJ’s risk communication officer is

among the regular participants of this meeting. Other cooperative activities of FSCJ regarding risk communication include jointly operated opinion exchange meetings with related government agencies.

To closely cooperate with local governments, FSCJ holds liaison conferences with local public entities (e.g. prefecture, health center-establishing city including government decreed cities and other core cities/wards). Via those entities, information from FSCJ can be transferred to the local consumer groups and residents. The educated communicators can also join in FSCJ's opinion exchange meetings co-hosted by local government at FSCJ's request.

Information collection, process and utilization to secure food safety

For use in assessments, emergency response and deliberation on critical food safety issues, FSCJ collects and process information of domestic and international food safety-related topics in cooperation with risk managers and the Consumer Affairs Agency, aiming to respond to various needs of consumers and risk managers.

The collected information is unified under the FSCJ's web-based database called 'Comprehensive Information System for Food Safety', so that the other food safety-related agencies can also use this database and comprehensively share the information. Through the database and "Hazard Report Sheet" which is compiled every other week, relevant information is provided for the public in an appropriate and understandable way.

Registered information is used by FSCJ to update fact sheets, or to be used for self-tasking assessment. When a food crisis occurs, rapid and precise response is a key for a successful management of situation. In preparation for such a prompt response, condensed hazard information is created and updated on a daily basis.

Promoting international cooperation

Experts from FSCJ attend international conferences such as Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR), Codex committees and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) task force conferences. The Commission is updated with all information from those conferences.

FSCJ also invites distinguished researchers and experts from overseas under FSCJ's international invitation program to gain scientific up-to-date knowledge contributing to food safety-related policy setting. Periodical meetings with international agencies such as EFSA and FSANZ are aimed at aligning and cooperation.

We improve and refine our English webpage. In addition, FSCJ promotes our international contribution through information exchange with international organizations and other countries' government bodies. To that end, we strengthen our capacity to globally disseminate information, which includes publishing the summaries of our risk assessments in English.