

JAPAN: Report on health claims roundtable discussions

Following the completion of a series of roundtable discussions on health claims led by the Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA) held from November 2009 to July 2010, the CAA recently published its summary report. Through its 11 sessions, designated panels discussed food labeling regulations and their enforcement for Foods for Specified Health Uses (FOSHU), for which CAA has approved to bear health claims after individual product evaluation, as well as for other health-oriented foods that are not regulated under the current legal framework (so-called “health foods”).

In the report, the CAA identified several areas where the agency should take immediate measures. Such areas include:

- For the FOSHU approval system, to clarify study design requirements for more transparent and speedier approval, and to expand FOSHU labelling requirements so as to convey more beneficial information on product usage to consumers
- For the “so-called health foods”, to develop guidelines for tightening regulatory control on false and misleading labelling/advertisement, and to explore the possibility of developing a new system permitting health claims for specific products that have accumulated a certain level of scientific evidences on their claimed functions.

CAA also identified some areas where current laws may need amendment, and the agency will forward them to the Consumer Commission for further discussion. Such areas include:

- For the FOSHU approval system, to consider the possible revision of the system to include judgment criteria for the re-evaluation or suspension of its approval status for already approved FOSHU products that have aroused safety concerns.
- For FOSHU and other health foods, to consider effective food labelling regulations and appropriate information-offering measures including the unification of relevant food-labelling laws.

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