

Labelling of country of origin for foods and ingredients of foods in Japan

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1. Japanese government's proposal of labelling of country of origin for the main ingredient of all processed foods.

Since 1998, Japan has introduced a legal obligation of the labelling of country of origin for food, and has gradually expanded categories of foods to be subject to the obligation. However, in recent years, the majority of consumers (77%) prefer to know the country of origin of ingredients of processed food. Taking into account of this trend with consumers, the government of Japan has conducted studies in view of expanding the obligation of labeling to cover ingredient/s of all processed foods.

On 29 November 2017, an interim report of the consultative meeting organized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Consumers Affairs Agency has been open to the public. While this report will be further studied, the final report is expected to be finalized, in principle, in line with this report. Later on, the final report of the government will be incorporated in the food label standards within the framework of the Food Labelling Law.

In Japan, the obligation of labelling of country of origin has been already introduced for all perishable foods, all processed foods, and for the main ingredient of certain processed foods. The labelling of country of origin will cover very wider range of foods by the introduction of the new arrangement.

With respect to rice, rice itself and rice as an ingredient of processed food(including sake) are subject to the labelling of country of origin by the Rice Traceability Act since 2009. With regard to wine, the labelling the main ingredients are also compulsory under the labelling standards for fruit liquor including wine of 2015 (enter into force will be 2018).

The outline of the labelling of the main ingredient of all processed foods is as follows, in the interim report.

(1) Processed food to be subject to the obligation

All processed foods which are produced and processed within Japan are subject to the obligation.

However, in the following cases, this obligation labelling is not applied.

- ① In case that the food is sold in the place where the food is produced and processed.
- ② In case that the food is transferred to unspecified people or to a large number of people, except in case of the food is sold.
- ③ In case that the food is sold without packaging or container.

(2) Ingredients which are subject to be labelled

The ingredient which is subject to be labelled is the top one in terms of weight contained in the food, considering the ability of labelling with the industry operators concerned.

(3) How to label

It should be in principle labelled by descending order in terms of weight and by country (here in after, referred to as “by weight order and by country”. However, in case that the adoption of “by weight order and by country” is difficult, the exception is allowed on condition that the prevention measure/s from misunderstanding by consumers is to be made clear.

Examples

Name of processed food	Pork Sausage
Names of Ingredient	Pork(Canada, USA), Pork fat, Protein with hydrolytic degradation、 Reduced millet jelly、 Sault, Spice

The third countries and following countries in weight descending order of ingredients are possible to state as “other/s”

Name of processed food	Pork Sausage
Names of Ingredient	Pork(Canada, USA, Other/s), Pork fat, Protein with hydrolytic degradation、 Reduced millet jelly、 Sault, Spice

(4) Exceptions in the obligation of labelling

① Labelling of possibility

In case that the change of containers or packages is expected, if the labelling by “ by weight order and by country” is used, a labelling in accordance with the past result (here

in after referred to as “ Possibility labelling”) is possible.

Examples

Name of processed food	Pork Sausage
Names of Ingredients	Pork (Canada or USA), Pork fat, Protein with hydrolytic degradation, Reduced millet jelly, Salt, Spice

The order of the place of production of pork is based on the average result in OOOO

Name of processed food	Soy sauce
Names of ingredient	Soy bean (USA or Canada or Brazil), Wheat, Salt

The order of the place of production of soy beans is based on the result of 2 years from OOOO.

Name of processed food	Pork Sausage
Names of Ingredient	Pork (Canada or USA or other/s), Pork fat, Protein with hydrolytic degradation, Reduced millet jelly, Sault, Spice

The order of labelling of origins of pork is to be labelled on the basis of the planed weight by the end of OOOO

② Import labelling

In case that more than 3 labellings of foreign origin are expected to be changed, if the labelling by “ by weight order and by country” is used, a label of “ Import labelling” is allowed.

Examples

Name of processed food	Loin ham
Names of ingredients	Pork chuck (import), Sugar (millet jelly, sugar), salt

Name of processed food	Loin ham
Names of ingredients	Pork chuck (domestic, import), Sugar (millet jelly, sugar), salt

③ Import labelling + Possibility labelling

Only when a change of containers or packagings is expected, even if the “Import labelling” is used, a “ import labelling + Possibility labelling is allowed to use.

Example

Name of processed food Wheat flour

Name of ingredient Wheat(import or domestic)

The order of the production place of wheat is based on the actual order in OOOO

④ Labelling of the place of production for processed ingredient

When the ingredient which is subject to the obligation is processed ingredient, the place of production of the processed ingredient is to label as “ produced in OO”.

Examples (labelling of place of production of processed ingredient)

Name of processed food Soft drink

Names of ingredients Apple juice (produced in Germany)、Syrup of fructose and glucose, Fructose

Name of processed food Chocolate cake

Names of ingredients Chocolate (Produced in Belgium)、Wheat flour, Millet jelly、Sugar、Shortening, Vegetable oil, Egg, Cacao powder, Apricot paste, Salt

Name of processed food Bread

Names of ingredients Wheat flour (Domestically produced) , Sugar, Rice flour、Yeast of bread, Skimmed milk powder, Salt

Name of processed food Soft drink

Names of ingredients Apple juice (produced in Germany or domestic)、Syrup of fructose and glucose, Fructose

Example (labelling of origin of ingredient of the processed ingredient)

Name of processed food Soft drink

Names of ingredients Apple juice (Apple (Germany, Hungary)) , Syrup of fructose and glucose, Fructose

Note: names of food additives are omitted in these examples above.

2. Process of the compulsory labelling of the country of origin in Japan

(1) Introduction of compulsory labelling of country of origin for certain foods (1996 and 1998)

At the middle of the 1990s, the consumers were more and more concerned about the safety of imported food, when it was disclosed that prohibited pesticides have been used in imported foods. In responding to the strong requests from producers which were supported by consumers, the Government introduced a compulsory indication of country of origin for the limited products in 1996 (ginger, garlic, taro, broccoli and Chinese mushroom). In 1998, the covered products have been extended.

(2) Obligation of labelling of country of origin for all perishable foods (2000)

In 2000, by the adoption of the quality labelling standard for perishable foods, the indication of country of origin became compulsory for all perishable foods (fruits, vegetables, meat and fish). The imported perishable food has to declare the name of the country of origin and the domestic food has to declare, in principle, the name of the prefecture of origin.

(3) Labelling of country of origin for ingredients contained in certain processed foods (2002 , 2004 and 2013)

As for the processed food, the consumers were worried about safety and quality of imported ingredients contained in processed food, even if the final products are fabricated in Japan. Of this fact, since 2002, the Government introduced the compulsory indication of country of origin for ingredients of certain processed foods (8 products). Besides, in 2004, by the amendment of the quality labelling standard for processed foods, the 20 categories of processed food have been subject to the indication of country of origin for their main ingredient. In 2013, 2 categories of processed food were added.

(4) Labelling of country of origin of rice and rice contained in certain processed foods (2009)

The Government was still examining the extension of processed food to be subject to the indication of country of origin of their ingredient, especially taking into account of the request of consumers.

Regarding rice, in 2008, it was exposed that some contaminated rice, which had been sold by the Government for only industrial purposes, was actually traded for the human consumption in the distribution chain. The government, then, introduced a law on compulsory traceability and indication of the origin of rice in 2009, with a view to assure food safety and consumers' confidence (Rice traceability law). The obligation of the indication of country of origin will come into force in July 2011. This obligation shall be applied not only to rice, but also to rice ingredients contained in certain processed foods, such as rice flour, rice meal, bentou, onigiri, steamed rice, packed steamed rice, rice cake, **sake**, **shochu** and mirin, etc. The detailers and restaurants and other like facilities should declare the country of origin of rice. For the rice produced in Japan," the name of Japan or the name of place of origin should be declared, and for imported rice, the name of the country of origin should be declared.