

Brussels, 8 April 2011

## Questions and Answers: Safety of food products imported from Japan

### Following a nuclear accident, what does the EU do as regards food safety?

During the years that followed Chernobyl, after scientific advice of the Group of Experts established under the Euratom Treaty (Article 31) the European Community adopted **maximum levels in feed and food following a nuclear accident or any other case of radiological emergency**. This was done in various Regulations (3954/87 Euratom, 944/89 Euratom and 770/90 Euratom).

The **maximum permitted levels of radioactive contamination** of foodstuffs adopted at the time, concern the levels of strontium, iodine, alpha emitting isotopes of plutonium and transplutonium, and other nuclides including caesium 134 and 137. The levels in question were confirmed in 1998 following additional analysis by scientific experts and have thus **not changed since in the past 24 years**.

These maximum levels of contamination concern infant food, dairy produce, general foodstuffs, liquid foodstuffs and minor foodstuffs.

The **levels in the Regulation** are based on the assumption that, if **10% of the food consumption of a person over a full year** would be contaminated at these levels, its annual exposure to ionising radiation would not exceed the additional **annual dose limit for a human being, which is 1 mSv (milliSievert)**. Moreover, the principles and criteria for setting the maximum levels foreseen in that EU Regulation are **in line with international guidelines** and recommendations on this issue (World Health Organization, FAO, Codex Alimentarius).

### What about EU legislation dealing directly with the Chernobyl aftermath setting different levels?

In the years that followed Chernobyl, the EU adopted a Regulation setting levels of **radioactive contamination of foodstuffs coming from areas**, which were concerned by the fallout of the world's largest nuclear accident. A recast version of the Regulation was adopted in 2008 (Council Regulation 733/2008) and its validity was extended until 2020.

### Why has the EU decided apply now the action levels established by the Japanese authorities instead of the maximum levels established by Regulation (Euratom) 3954/1987?

In the immediate aftermath of the accident, Japan has enforced lower values for foodstuffs put on their national market. It has to be considered that in the current situation in Japan, a much higher percentage (than the 10 % on which the EU levels are based upon) of the population's daily diet could be contaminated with significant levels of radio-nuclides. Moreover, these lower levels are probably the result of taking into account the **dietary data applicable to Japan**.

It now becomes likely that the action levels established by the Japanese authorities will be applied in Japan at least for a few months. The EU has therefore decided, in order to provide **consistency between the pre-export controls performed by the Japanese authorities and the controls on the level of radio nuclides performed on feed and food originating in, or consigned from, Japan when the products enter the EU**, to apply on a provisional basis the same levels both in the EU and Japan, as these are lower than the existing EU values (see Annex : table of maximum permitted levels to be applied on food imports from Japan).

### **Will the EU revise the maximum levels established by Regulation (Euratom) 3954/1987?**

A consultation of the Committee of scientific experts is foreseen in the near future, i.e. before 30 June 2011, to provide further scientific analysis of the levels established under the Regulation (Euratom) 3954/87. Based on this scientific analysis, the existing maximum levels might need to be revised.

### **What has been the EU's reaction to the Fukushima accident as regards safety of food products?**

The safety of food products imported into the EU has been a priority of the Commission since Day 1 of the disaster which struck Japan.

Less than four days after the accident on the nuclear plant, the Commission launched – on **15<sup>th</sup> March** - a notification via the RASFF (Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed) recommending to **check products from Japan for radioactivity**. This was done **on a precautionary basis** as at time there was not yet any evidence of the contamination of the feed and food chain.

The monitoring and checking of imports are the responsibility of Member States, which have to inform other Member States in case a contaminated product is found.

On 25 March, following evidence that the feed and food chain was affected, the European Union decided to reinforce controls on imports of food and feed from certain regions of Japan, where production could be affected by the accident at the Fukushima plant.

### **What are the measures endorsed by the Member States to reinforce the controls on imports from Japan?**

The measures apply to **all feed and food originating in or consigned from 12 prefectures of Japan**, including the four most affected by the accident. All products from these prefectures have to be tested **before leaving Japan** and will be subject to random testing in the EU.

Feed and food products from the remaining 35 prefectures will have to be accompanied by a declaration stating the prefecture of origin and will be randomly tested upon arrival in the EU.

In particular, the Regulation stipulates that each consignment of food or feed from the 12 prefectures has to be accompanied by a declaration –to be provided by the Japanese authorities– attesting that the **product does not contain levels of radio nuclides that exceed the levels established in Annex to the Regulation**. Radio nuclides are radioactive elements and the Commission regulation makes specific reference to the control of iodine-131, caesium-134 and caesium-137.

Upon arrival in the EU, the competent authorities of the Border Inspection Posts (BIP) – for animal products - or of the consignment's Designated Point of Entry (DPE) – for plant products – are to carry out document and identity checks on all food and feed consignments from Japan.

Physical checks, including laboratory analysis, will be carried out on **at least 10% of the consignments of food or feed coming from 12 prefectures mentioned above**. Physical checks will also be carried out on at least 20% of the consignments coming from the remaining 35 prefectures.

Pending the availability of the test results, products shall be kept under official control for a maximum of five working days. The consignments will be released when the importer will present to the custom authorities the favourable results of the official controls mentioned above.

**Products that are found to exceed the maximum permitted levels shall not be placed on the market and will either be safely disposed of or returned to Japan. As of Fri. 8<sup>th</sup> April, no Member State had reported any entry of contaminated products into the EU.**

### **Will the Commission update the measures on a regular basis?**

The Regulation on food imports from Japan stipulates that the measures have to be reviewed every month.

But if the situation was to evolve –for example if contamination with other radio nuclides would be found– the Commission would **strengthen its controls in 48 hours**.

Member States' experts exchange information on the situation on a daily basis and meet on a regular basis via the Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH).

### **Does the EU import a lot of food products from Japan?**

Japan is a minor trading partner of the EU when it comes to food products.

In 2010, imports to the EU of Japanese agricultural products (i.e. products of animal origin, fish and of plant products) stood at **€187 million** for agricultural products and **€29 million** for fishery products.

The main importing EU Member States of agricultural products, in terms of value of imports, are: The Netherlands €38 million; United Kingdom €37 million, France €34 million, Germany €32 million and Italy €13 million. And for fishery products: The Netherlands €13 million; France €7 million, Germany €4 million, United Kingdom €3 million, Italy €1 million.

Japan is authorised to **export to the EU only four products of animal origin**, namely: Fishery products; Bivalve molluscs; Casings; Petfood.

**Vegetables/fruits** may also be exported to the EU, but such exports from Japan into the EU are small in volume – they stood at about **9,000 tons** from all of Japan's territory in 2010.

Even if the aforementioned elements did not exist, it would be hard for Japan to export anything right now from those regions due to the damages caused by the devastating earthquake and the tsunami that followed. Also, according to the latest information from Japan, food from the affected area is not harvested.

Also see: [IP/11/362](#)

**Maximum levels for foodstuffs<sup>1</sup> (Bq/kg)**

	Foods for infants and young children	Milk and dairy products	Other foodstuffs, except liquid foodstuffs	Liquid foodstuffs
Sum of Isotopes of strontium, notably Sr-90	75	125	750	125
Sum of Isotopes of iodine, notably I-131	100 <sup>2</sup>	300 <sup>4</sup>	2 000	300 <sup>4</sup>
Sum of Alpha-emitting isotopes of plutonium and trans-plutonium elements, notably Pu-239, Am-241	1	1 <sup>4</sup>	10 <sup>4</sup>	1 <sup>4</sup>
Sum of all other nuclides of half-life greater than 10 days, notably Cs-134 and Cs-137, except C-14 and H-3	200 <sup>4</sup>	200 <sup>4</sup>	500 <sup>4</sup>	200 <sup>4</sup>

**Maximum levels for feeding stuffs (Bq/kg)**

	Feeding stuffs
Sum of Cs-134 and Cs-137	500 <sup>3</sup>
Sum of Isotopes of iodine, notably I-131	2000 <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The level applicable to concentrated or dried products is calculated on the basis of the reconstituted product as ready for consumption

<sup>4</sup> In order to ensure consistency with action levels applied in Japan, these values replace on a provisional basis the values laid down in Council Regulation (Euratom) 3954/87 as long as the action levels in Japan are lower.

<sup>3</sup> In order to ensure consistency with action levels applied in Japan, this value replaces on a provisional basis the value laid down in Commission Regulation (Euratom) No 770/90 as long as the action level in Japan is lower.

<sup>4</sup> This value is laid down on a provisional basis and taken to be the same as for foodstuffs, pending an assessment of transfer factors of iodine from feeding stuffs to food products.