

Japanese Food Safety Report Summary

As a result of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, serious concerns arose regarding whether Japanese food may have become contaminated by radiation. In response to these early reservations, the Co-op made the decision to delete all stock lines of Japanese sea vegetables, and there was vigorous debate about whether we should continue to stock any Japanese products at all.

In May of 2012, board director Larry Buttrose arranged to have Helen Caldicott (anti-nuclear activist), speak to Co-op members on the topic of whether it was safe to be consuming foods of a Japanese origin. Dr. Caldicott urged the Co-op to stop ordering “all” foods cultivated in Japan. However, foods from Japan are popular among Co-op consumers, so in an effort to make the most informed choices concerning the safety of Japanese products, the decision was made to have specific samples individually tested by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) for radioactivity.

We investigated international limits for Caesium radiation content in foodstuffs, and compared these to the quantities present (where applicable) in seven products of Japanese origin, sold by the Co-op.

International Limits for Radioactive Caesium	General Foodstuffs (Bq/kg)
Japan (current limits - since April 2012)	100
Australian Post Accident Limits	200
European Union	1250
United States	1200
World Health Organisation (Codex Alimentarius)	1000
Dr. Helen Caldicott	0
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)	0

Products Tested	Result (Becquerels/Kg)
Bonsoy	Less than 2
Kukicha Tea	Less than 2
Doowa Crackers	Less than 2
Soba Noodles	Less than 2
Umeboshi Puree	Less than 2
Genmai Miso	Less than 2
Shiitake Mushrooms	4.12 + or – 0.49 *

Note: The + or – value allows for human/mechanical error and a potential for the influence of background radiation.

The chart above shows wide variations in what are considered safe levels of radioactive caesium in food ranging from 0 to 1250 Becquerels/Kg. Given that the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency only tests to the lowest tolerance of 2 Bq/Kg, and that there is doubt about whether there is any safe level of radioactive caesium in food, it cannot be categorically concluded from our investigations that food from Japan is either, safe or unsafe for consumption.

In the interest of the safety of our members, the following recommendations can be made:

- Monitor and minimise consumption of shiitake mushrooms.
- Consume foodstuffs from Japan in moderation, and observe overall intake of these foods.
- If in doubt, avoid foods of Japanese origin.
- Consider overall exposure to radiation (e.g. flying, medical scans, mobile phone use, TV)

The Co-op Board will meet regularly to discuss the Japanese food safety issue, and will keep the larger Co-op community informed as to any further decision making. If you wish to make a comment regarding Japanese food safety please email us on hello@bmfoodcoop.org.au

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