



Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 6/24/2002

GAIN Report #JA2023

Japan

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Hundreds of Japanese Food Products Could be Affected by Recalls Due to Unapproved Additives in Food Flavorings

2002

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Report Highlights: In what could turn out to be one of the world's largest food recalls, hundreds of Japanese food products are expected to be pulled from the market because they contain one of three food additives which are not approved for use in Japan. The additives, Acetaldehyde, propionaldehyde and castor oil, are approved in both the EU and the United States, but not in Japan. They were contained in flavorings marketed by Kyowa Flavoring Chemical Company. To date, no imported food products have been affected by the recalls. This latest rash of food recalls will further heighten consumer concerns about the safety of Japan's food supply.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Tokyo [JA1], JA

175 Food Manufacturers Could Be Affected

According to press reports, 175 Japanese food companies purchased flavorings which contained unapproved additives from Kyowa Flavoring Chemical Company, one of Japan's largest suppliers of flavorings for the food industry. The additives were used at over 600 processing plants throughout Japan according to Kyowa Flavoring. The list of companies affected includes many of Japan's top food manufacturers, and the products involved include a wide variety of snack foods, dairy products, soups, sauces and candies.

The Japanese Ministry of Health has publicly stated that all three compounds have no ill health effects, noting that they have been approved in the United States and the EU. However, since the additives are not approved in Japan, food manufacturers are recalling products which contain them. The Ministry has ordered prefectural governments to do on-site inspections of all food additive manufacturers in their jurisdiction to make sure that no other illegal additives are being used in flavorings.

A chronology of the events which led to the recalls, as reported in the press, follows:

May 20: Tokyo Government asked Ibaraki Prefecture to investigate Kyowa Flavoring's Ibaraki plant based on an anonymous letter which claimed that "illegal flavorings have been used for a long time."

May 21-28: Local health officials investigated the Kyowa Flavoring plant

May 28: Ibaraki Prefecture stopped operations and shipments from the plant

Market Impact Spreading

To date, over 20 companies have started voluntary recalls of their products. Recalls have been ordered by leading companies like Meiji Seika, Ezaki Glico, Bourbon, Meito, (confectionary makers), Nichirei (frozen foods), Marudai Ham and Ito Ham. Three major flour mills have also announced recalls of products including pasta sauce, soup, and bread mix. As internal investigations continue, companies which first announced recalls earlier in the week have added additional products to their recall lists.

Details on Japanese Food Additive Approvals

A list of food additives and flavorings which are approved for use in Japan can be found on the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's website at the following address:

<http://www.ffcr.or.jp/zaidan/FFCRHOME.nsf/pages/e-info-foodchem>

END OF REPORT