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Japan

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Japan expanding labeling requirements for processed food

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Report Highlights:

Japan will amend the Law Concerning Standardization and Proper Labeling of Agricultural and Forestry Products (the JAS law) to expand labeling requirements to processed foods traded among dealers. The new regulation will go in effect on April 1st, 2008. In addition, Japan recently decided to establish a food labeling law that would combine food labeling regulations that are currently stipulated under multiple laws into one law.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Trade Report
Tokyo [JA1]
[JA]

The Law Concerning Standardization and Proper Labeling of Agricultural and Forestry Products (the JAS law) provides Quality Labeling Standards (QLS) applicable to all foods.

The QLS requirements for labeling of processed foods were previously expanded to include use-by date, GMO ingredients, and origin of ingredients for 20 kinds of designated category of processed foods, hereinafter referred to as "processed foods under coverage"..

The targets of those requirements were manufacturers and distributors of end products intended for public consumption. In other words, processed foods traded among dealers as end-product ingredients were not subject to mandatory labeling up to this time.

Meat Hope was a manufacture of ground meat in Hokkaido that over the past 8 years had been commingling pork, lamb, chicken meat and offal with beef and deceptively labeling it as 100 percent ground beef. Since they had been selling their products to other manufacturers that used the meat to produce foods for sale to consumers the JAS Law could not be applied to Meat Hope. However, those manufacturers that purchased the meat from Meat Hope and resold it in their product to the public became unwitting victims. Another law, the Act Against Unfair Competition was applied against Meat Hope. MAFF wants to expand JAS Law to cover all processed foods traded among dealers so that the law will apply to processed foods across the entire range of distribution. Both the Quality labeling Standards for Processed Foods and Fresh Foods will be amended.

The same mandatory labeling items required for prepackaged foods will be required for food ingredients traded among dealers in accordance with other relevant legislation. Those requirements include the name of the food, names of ingredients, net content, use-by date, storage instructions and name and address of manufacturer, dealer or importer. For domestic foods, place of origin is also required if the food ingredient is used to produce any of the processed foods under coverage, which can be accessed through the following link and in the Attached Table 2 on page 12 of the Quality Labeling Standard for Processed Foods. Also, place of origin is required for 4 types of processed foods such as pickles, frozen vegetable, dried bonito shavings and processed eels. With regard to imports, the country of origin remains required for any processed food as before.

Quality Labeling Standard for Processed Foods (English)

http://www.maff.go.jp/soshiki/syokuhin/hinshitu/e_label/file/Labeling/QLS_processed_food.pdf (Use this link only to refer to Table 2 because an English version is currently not available)

Quality Labeling Standard for Processed Foods (Japanese current version)

http://www.maff.go.jp/j/jas/hyoji/pdf/kijun_02.pdf

Labeling information can be written on invoices and other commercial documents such as the specification sheet as well as on containers or packages. In order to prevent the disclosure of trade secrets, the new regulation does not require dealers to put the information in commercial documents distributed to third parties. The labeling information can be written in any language and there are no requirements for letter size, color, and printing in the block, although required for consumer labeling. Processed foods served in restaurants and in-store sales will be excluded from these regulations. There will be no new or no additional requirements under the revised QLS for imported food.

This revision process is developed in accordance with Japanese legislations and the WTO/TBT Agreement and will be effective on April 1, 2008. Although this revision is made to address Japanese domestic issues and so far does not appear to affect imports, we will continue to follow the issue to determine whether there is any negative effect on imports.

In addition to the above changes, the Japanese government decided recently to establish a food labeling law that would unify multiple food labeling regulations under a single law. There are two key points: (1) The new law would turn the current dual labeling system for expiration dates -- "best by" used for confectionaries and the like and "use by/expiration" used for perishables -- into one -- "use by/expiration"; and, (2) mandatory origin labeling of specified ingredients processed in Japan even if the ingredients constitute less than 50% of the total weight of a processed product. The Government Council (Kokumin Seikatsu Shingikai) will be submitting a proposal to the Prime Minister by the end of March, 2008 and the bill is expected to be sent to the Diet for deliberation in the extraordinary session later this year for passage.

End of report.