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Japan Mandates Traceability for Beef 2003

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Report Highlights:

Japan's Diet passed legislation mandating traceability for domestically produced beef. Under the new traceability system, consumers will be able to trace Japanese beef from farm-to-table using a bar code on each piece of meat sold at the retail level, and possibly at some restaurants. Full implementation of the program is expected by December 2004. In July, the Diet is expected to consider a bill to require traceability for imported beef.

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

Japan Mandates Traceability for Domestic Beef

Japan's Diet passed legislation mandating implementation of a traceability system for domestic beef in June 2003, as part of its ongoing response to the detection of BSE in Japan in 2001. The law establishes a farm-to-table traceability system based on a ten digit cattle ID number assigned to each animal at birth. This system builds on an existing ear tag ID program implemented shortly after the detection of BSE. Traceability requirements also apply to imported live cattle once the animals reach Japan.

Diet Considering Bill to Require Traceability for Imported Beef

In July 2003, the Diet is expected to discuss a draft bill from opposition parties that would require traceability for imported beef. The bill, currently called "The Bill Concerning Information Disclosure Related to Quality Assurance of Imported Beef", seeks to develop a traceability system similar to that just passed for Japanese beef. Under the proposed legislation, countries could be classified as to whether or not they are implementing a traceability system. For countries with a traceability system, the same labeling requirements as for domestic beef would apply. For countries without a traceability system, the legislation could require a label stating "This beef is from a country with no traceability program". Interest in traceability is running high in the Diet. During deliberations on the traceability bill for domestic beef in May, opposition parties attempted unsuccessfully to amend the legislation to include imported beef.

Timing

The domestic traceability law went into effect after it was approved in June 2003, and full implementation is expected by December 1, 2004. The provisional timetable is as follows:

1. Implementation of traceability measures covering farm to slaughterhouse by December 1, 2003.
2. Implementation of traceability measures extending from slaughterhouse to processors, distributors, and retailers by December 1, 2004.

Included in the legislation is a provision requiring the Government to review the traceability system three years after implementation and make any necessary adjustments.

Elements of the Domestic Traceability System:

1. **Management of Data:** The Livestock Improvement Center (LIC), an organization affiliated with MAFF, will manage the database for individual cattle based on ten digit cattle I.D. numbers.
2. **Information Covered:** Each piece of meat sold in Japan will have a code on the label that corresponds to the individual I.D. number of a particular animal, making it possible to track the date of birth, gender, breed, producer(s), transfer records, date of slaughter or death, and other information such as date of import for live cattle. Information on transportation of cattle will not be required.
3. **Type of Beef:** The traceability requirements will apply to all domestically produced beef muscle meat sold at retail establishments. Offals, trimmings, ground beef, and processed beef, will reportedly be excluded from the traceability requirements.

4. **Entities Subject to Traceability Requirements:** The proposed law covers all entities involved in the production, processing, distribution and sale of beef. Requirements for food service establishments are not specified in the legislation but some restaurants that serve raw beef to prepare at the table may also be required to provide information on traceability.
5. **Information Requirements:** Meat wholesalers/distributors and retailers/restaurants will have the option of providing traceability information by individual cattle I.D. numbers or by lot numbers.
6. **Enforcement:** MAFF plans to establish a new organization to enforce the traceability requirements. MAFF also plans to establish an entity within the enforcement mechanism to address mislabeling abuses.
7. **Penalties and Fines:** Violators will be subject to warnings and directives to fix or address any problems. If compliance is not improved, violators will be subject to fines and penalties, and the names of offenders will be announced to the public.
8. **Government Financial Assistance:** MAFF will provide retailers, wholesalers and food service companies low interest loans and credits to defray the expected costs of implementing the traceability system, which will require specialized computers, software, and labeling equipment.