

Current Status of Nutrition Labeling and Regulation of Health Foods in Japan

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The labeling of functional foods should be always based on scientific evidence and in harmonization with global international standards. Japanese scientific academy defined a functional food early in 1980's. It defined a functional food as a food, which has the tertiary (physiologically adjusting) function.

The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) set up "Foods for Specified Health Use (FOSHU)" in 1991 as the regulatory system to approve the statement of a label regarding an effect of food on the human body. FOSHU increased the total to about 410 items at the end of March, 2004. The Ministry enacted a new regulatory system, "Foods with Health Claims" (FHC) in April 2001, which consists of the existing FOSHU and the newly establishing "Foods with Nutrient Function Claims (FNFC)". Under FNFC, twelve vitamins (Vitamin A, B1, B2, B6, B12, C, E, D, biotin, pantothenic acid, folic acid, and niacin) and five minerals (calcium, iron, magnesium, copper and zinc) are standardized. An example of the claims is as follows; "Calcium is a nutrient which is necessary to form bones and teeth." The upper and lower levels in daily portion of consumption of these nutrients are also set up.

In their effectiveness and safety, applied products for FOSHU are evaluated scientifically by the Council of Pharmaceutical Affairs and Food Hygiene under MHLW. The form of FOSHU is deregulated to accept the form of capsules and tablets. Most of the statements of Japanese FOSHU are close to the category of Structure/Function Claims in US or the Other Functional Claims of Codex.