

# Stricter labeling mulled for genetically modified food

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The government is considering expanding the scope of mandatory labeling of ingredients containing genetically modified crops from the current 33 food items, according to sources in the Consumer Affairs Agency.

Imports have been increasing in Japan of genetically modified crops and food products containing them.

In 2015, 11.8 million tons of corn and 2.33 million tons of soy were imported from the United States, and over 90 percent of it was believed to be genetically modified, according to the agriculture ministry.

The government plans to convene a panel of experts on the matter, including people from the food industry and consumer groups, in the next fiscal year, the agency sources said.

The two sides are expected to engage in a tug of war over where to draw the line.

“Food products should be labeled so that it is clear to everyone whether genetically modified crops are used or not, and allow consumers to choose,” said Mariko Sano, an executive at Shufuren, a consumers group. “But that’s not the case and the government should revise the labeling.”

Currently, eight genetically modified crops are subject to the labeling requirement in Japan. By comparison, the European Union mandates labeling in principle of all food products containing genetically modified organisms.

The government mandates labeling in Japan if the three largest ingredients of a food product by weight contain substances from genetically modified crops and account for 5 percent or more of all ingredients.

Labeling is not required for items where genetically modified organisms cannot be detected, such as fermented food.

Some consumer organizations call for mandatory labeling of all food items containing genetically modified organisms. Consumers now eat products without sufficient information about their ingredients, the organizations say.

However, food product manufacturers are reluctant, saying they would have to throw away many of the product's packages need to be changed or thrown away.

But they also are willing to negotiate to meet the needs of consumers, an official at a food product organization said.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/01/02/national/science-health/stricter-labeling-mulled-genetically-modified-food/>