

Japan's New Health Care Policy with Foods with Functional Claim System

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Japan is a country which has been considered not to make big decision that generates big controversy and objection. Food and nutrition area are not an exception. Implementation of new system that allows foods to make functional claims was obviously favored by dietary supplement industry in Japan but had been resisted by medical society and some consumer groups who are concerned about food safety and misidentification of such specific foods as alternative medicines.

In June 2013 Prime Minister Abe declared in a loud voice that the regulation on functional claim for health foods would be lifted and as promised the new functional claim system came into force in April 2015. As of October 5th, 98 products are registered as foods with functional claims. This new claim system is based on corporate liability and the government is not liable for the claims and the content of submitted dossier while the registration process has been working as if Consumer Affairs Agency's document screening is the approval process.

Prime Minister Abe also mentioned that Japanese government is aiming for world leading edge system, not assuming the system to be the same level as those of foreign countries such as US and Europe.

Prime Minister Abe's ear-catching message arose industry feeling of expectation but there were still a lot of skeptical people who did not believe that such a system will be effective and practical. Since its enforcement, surprisingly, consumer groups have been functioning as carefully monitoring the content of registered dossier on whether or not the information is legitimate enough for consumers to choose. Advanced registration process and information disclosure are epoch making for many stakeholders. People are now able to view registered dossiers including research reviews, safety info, information about customer relation department in the company, functional claims, and so on prior to the product launch so if there is any doubt the applicant is easily accused of its accountability.

Japan is facing growing aging society, with a high prevalence of fatal age related diseases. Just recently, the government announced that our annual medical costs exceeded the limit of JPY40 trillion this year and it is anticipated to reach JPY60 trillion in 2025. Expanding healthy life expectancy will lead to save medical costs. Therefore, prevention of diseases and social independence of individuals are very important. Amongst many risk factors of age related diseases good food intake can play an important role to reduce the incidence.

Foods with functional claims system would contribute to improve people's quality of life. In addition to social security, the system is stimulating local economy as it is not just applied to dietary supplement or processed foods but also to fresh agricultural foods whose functions are confirmed by scientific evidence.

AIFN (Association of International Foods and Nutrition) in Japan has been striving to tackle with many challenges relating to regulatory issues by working with the alliance group of industry associations, medical societies, American Embassy, ACCJ (American Chamber of Commerce), IADSA (International Alliance of Dietary Supplement Associations), etc. Now that it is extremely important to educate consumers to understand the benefit of taking foods with functional claims and have good knowledge about the safety and the efficacy and develop enough credibility about the benefit of taking dietary supplement. Consumers are beginning to recognize the new food category with functional claims and realize the efficacy of those products. I sincerely look forward to the continued improvement of this

new system and we industry people would need to contribute to soundness of the system by nourish health care professionals in order to achieve longer healthy life expectancy.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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