

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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## Japan

**Post:** Tokyo

### Japan Finalizes Revisions to GE Food Labeling System

**Report Categories:**

Biotechnology and Other New Production Technologies

Agricultural Situation

Grain and Feed

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**Report Highlights:**

Japan's revised GE labeling system is expected to become effective Japanese Fiscal Year (JFY) 2023 (April 1, 2023). The revised GE labeling system establishes a new definition for "non-GE" labeling (which will be allowed only when GE elements are not detectable).

## General Information:

In April 2017, Japan's Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA) initiated a public discussion in the Expert Committee to review Japan's GE food labeling system (see [JA7067](#)). The Expert Committee, consisting of nine members (public health experts, consumer group representatives, scientists, industry representatives), held 10 public meetings culminating in a revised labeling proposal in March 2018 (for additional information, see, [JA8017](#)). The Expert Committee's discussion focused on: 1) the scope of foods subject to mandatory labeling and 2) the method of labeling.

- 1) The scope of foods subject to mandatory labeling – Requirements remain unchanged
  - Japan's current requirements for the types of crops/foods to be labeled remain unchanged - eight crops (soybean, corn, potato, canola, cottonseed, alfalfa, sugar beet and papaya) and 33 processed food items (see [JA7121](#) for a complete list) are subject to mandatory labeling.
  - Japan's current requirements for labeling GE ingredients also remain unchanged - the ingredient is required to be labeled when it is among the top three ingredients (by weight) in a product and accounts for more than five percent (by weight) of the total product.
- 2) The Method of Labeling – “Non-GE” labeling is permissible only when commingled GE contents are not detectable<sup>1</sup>
  - Japan's labeling system currently allows for a product containing up to five percent of GE components, which are unintentionally comingled into the product, to be labeled as “non-GE.” This requirement led the majority of committee members, especially consumer group representatives, to conclude that the use of “non-GE labeling” may be misleading.
  - Although some industry participants commented that any change to Japan's “non-GE” labeling rules could pose a risk of trade disruption, the committee agreed to create:
    - i. New labeling language for Identity Preserved (IP) products containing up to five percent of unintentional comingled GE components (e.g., “Identity preserved to avoid comingling of GE ingredient,” “Segregated to avoid comingling of GE,” etc.); and
    - ii. A zero percent threshold for voluntary “non-GE” labeling.

The Expert Committee's proposed revision was further discussed by the Food Labeling Committee in the Cabinet Office to ensure its validity. After five Food Labeling Committee meetings (including a period for public comment – see [JA8082](#)), the Food Labeling Committee agreed to accept the Expert Committee's proposed revision on March 13, 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> Requirements for “not segregated” products without identity preservation remain unchanged.

On April 4, 2019, the Cabinet Office released an official announcement on the revision to Japan's Food Labeling Standards (see [https://www.cao.go.jp/consumer/content/20190404\\_toushin.pdf](https://www.cao.go.jp/consumer/content/20190404_toushin.pdf), in Japanese). The revised GE labeling system is expected to become effective in JFY 2023 (April 1, 2023).

On April 25, 2019, the CAA released a supplemental document providing guidance for the new, voluntary labeling of IP products, which contain up to five percent of unintentional commingled GE components. The document advises that the labeling language should focus on whether the product is managed to preserve its identity through the distribution channel for the separation of GE and non-GE. The document also advises that language which may have multiple interpretations should be avoided. For example, language like "Almost free from GE corn," "Minimized the comingling of GE soybean with identity preservation handling," and any other language which may lead a consumer to believe a product is free from GE should be avoided. The CAA did not specify the language to be used, but provided for flexibility in permissible language used for IP products so long as the language does not mislead consumers.

Examples of acceptable labeling provided by the CAA include:

- Language inside of the product labeling section: "corn (identity preserved)," "corn (IP managed product)," "soybean (segregation to prevent comingling of GE soybean)," etc.;
- Language outside of the product labeling section: "we use soybean managed separately from genetically engineered soybean" or "corn used as ingredient was managed with identity preservation to prevent comingling of genetically engineered (corn)."

Importers who have questions about what constitutes acceptable language for the CAA are encouraged to contact:

- Consumer Affairs Agency's Food Labeling Division at 03-3507-8800 (Monday to Friday, 9:30 am to 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm to 5:30 pm)

#### **Reference Materials:**

JA7067: Japan Initiates Review of GE Food Labeling Requirements – May 22, 2017

[http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20Initiates%20Review%20of%20GE%20Food%20Labeling%20Requirements\\_Tokyo\\_Japan\\_5-22-2017.pdf](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20Initiates%20Review%20of%20GE%20Food%20Labeling%20Requirements_Tokyo_Japan_5-22-2017.pdf)

JA7093: Second Review Meeting for GE Food Labeling Requirements – July 14, 2017

[http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Second%20Review%20Meeting%20for%20GE%20Food%20Labeling%20Requirements\\_Tokyo\\_Japan\\_7-14-2017.pdf](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Second%20Review%20Meeting%20for%20GE%20Food%20Labeling%20Requirements_Tokyo_Japan_7-14-2017.pdf)

JA7121: Japan Sees Little Reason So far to Revise GE Labeling – September 29, 2017

[http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20Sees%20Little%20Reason%20So%20far%20to%20Revise%20GE%20Labeling\\_Tokyo\\_Japan\\_9-29-2017.pdf](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20Sees%20Little%20Reason%20So%20far%20to%20Revise%20GE%20Labeling_Tokyo_Japan_9-29-2017.pdf)

JA8014: Japan to Decide GE Labeling Requirements Soon – March 2, 2018

[http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20to%20Decide%20GE%20Labeling%20Requirements%20Soon\\_Tokyo\\_Japan\\_3-2-2018.pdf](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20to%20Decide%20GE%20Labeling%20Requirements%20Soon_Tokyo_Japan_3-2-2018.pdf)

JA8017: Japan Set to Modify its GE Food Labeling System – March 20, 2018

[http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20Set%20to%20Modify%20its%20GE%20Food%20Labeling%20System\\_Tokyo\\_Japan\\_3-20-2018.pdf](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20Set%20to%20Modify%20its%20GE%20Food%20Labeling%20System_Tokyo_Japan_3-20-2018.pdf)

JA8082: Comments Invited on Proposed Revisions to GE Labeling Requirements – October 17, 2018

[http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Comments%20Invited%20on%20Proposed%20Revisions%20to%20GE%20Labeling%20Requirements\\_Tokyo\\_Japan\\_10-17-2018.pdf](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Comments%20Invited%20on%20Proposed%20Revisions%20to%20GE%20Labeling%20Requirements_Tokyo_Japan_10-17-2018.pdf)

52nd meeting of Food Labeling Committee -- March 13, 2019

(The site contains all materials used in the five meetings, including minutes and conclusions, in Japanese)

<https://www.cao.go.jp/consumer/kabusoshiki/syokuhinhyouji/bukai/052/shiryuu/index.html>

Cabinet Office's official report of the revision to the Food Labeling Standards -- April 4, 2019, in Japanese

[https://www.cao.go.jp/consumer/content/20190404\\_toushin.pdf](https://www.cao.go.jp/consumer/content/20190404_toushin.pdf)

[https://www.cao.go.jp/consumer/content/20190404\\_toushin\\_betsu.pdf](https://www.cao.go.jp/consumer/content/20190404_toushin_betsu.pdf)

CAA's supplemental document for the new GE labeling rule -- April 25, 2019, in Japanese

[https://www.caa.go.jp/policies/policy/food\\_labeling/quality/genetically\\_modified/pdf/genetically\\_modified\\_190425\\_0002.pdf](https://www.caa.go.jp/policies/policy/food_labeling/quality/genetically_modified/pdf/genetically_modified_190425_0002.pdf)