

## Fukushima farmers: “Our vegetables are safe to eat, yet we still battle stigma”

Six years after the Fukushima disaster, farmers from the region still struggle with selling their food – although it has been deemed safe for consumption by authorities.

Tokyo | Asahi Nakamura, a vegetable farmer from Fukushima, notes that all his products are carefully checked by official food-safety regulators. “My vegetables are not contaminated by radioactivity”, he says, “the levels lie well below the permissible limit.”

His offer of the week includes rice, carrots and strawberries, which he assures contain no detectable radioactivity. The bags of beans he sells contain a dose of radiation, “but this dose is negligible compared to the natural radiation that is present everywhere”, he says.

Yet, as if the 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant wasn’t traumatic enough, the word “Fukushima” on a supermarket label is often enough to discourage shoppers from buying a product.

“The level of radioactivity in the beans I sell is negligible”

- Asahi Nakamura, Fukushima farmer

Allaying fears about contamination was a core theme discussed during a recent event in Tokyo focused on the role agriculture could play in Fukushima’s recovery.

The event gathered representatives from organizations such as Oxfam Japan to speak about



the challenges facing producers in Fukushima, along with some of the major success stories.

(hw/tp)

## Below legal limit of 100 Becquerels per kilogram, yet Fukushima’s farmers still battle stigma

Six years after the Fukushima disaster, farmers from the region still struggle with selling their food – although it has been deemed safe for consumption by authorities.

Tokyo | Products from Fukushima are carefully checked by official food-safety regulators. Food products may contain no more radioactivity than the permissible limit of 100 Becquerels/kg to be safe to eat - the level found in vegetables from Fukushima lies well below this limit.

This week, rice, carrots and strawberries from Fukushima are on offer in supermarkets – containing no detectable radioactivity. Some bags of beans contain 6 Becquerels/kg - a negligible dose of radiation compared to the natural radiation that is present everywhere.

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## Nuclear emergencies: 20 to 40 percent less protection if iodine pills taken too early

**Iodine pills might soon be available in all Belgian households to prevent the development of thyroid cancer in case of a nuclear emergency. But for the pills to be effective, waiting for official instructions is crucial.**

**Brussels** | By 2018, every Belgian should have preventive iodine pills at hand to protect him- or herself in case of a nuclear emergency. This is what Maggie De Block (Open VLD), minister of Public Health, said in spring 2017. Should the new regulation be adopted, iodine pills will soon be available from pharmacies all across the country.

However, it is important to take iodine pills only when advised to do so by authorities, officials stress, as a

premature ingestion of preventive iodine may not result in the desired protection. Yet, many citizens are unaware of these consequences.

The impact of iodine pills is reduced by more than 40 percent if taken too early.

While people may instinctively assume that taking iodine pills as fast as possible is the safest option, officials warn that the impact of the pills is reduced by more than 20 percent if taken one hour too early, and by more than 40 percent if taken three hours before advised to do so.



People are thus urged to wait for official instructions before taking iodine pills or giving them to children in case of an emergency.

(hw/tp)

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“Iodine pills protect far less if taken too early”

- Julie Deckers (42), teacher

“Like many people I assumed that taking the pills as fast as possible is the safest option”, says Julie Deckers, teacher and mother of two, who witnessed an official demonstration of the pills’ functioning, “but that’s not the case. Iodine pills protect far less if taken only one hour too early.”



People are thus urged to wait for official instructions before taking iodine pills or giving them to children in case of an emergency.

(hw/tp)