

AEC Holds First Meeting of Food Irradiation Subcommittee

On December 14, the Food Irradiation Subcommittee of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) held its first meeting, at which discussions were conducted about developments in food irradiation in Japan and abroad, as well as the domestic and foreign evaluation of its efficacy and safety.

After his selection as working group chairman, Prof. Mikiyo Tada of the Okayama University Graduate School greeted the other members by saying, "The challenge before us is great: how to connect safety with peace of mind. We ought to carry out our deliberations keeping in mind the viewpoint of the consumer." He thus demonstrated his intention of conducting the discussions from a variety of perspectives. The subcommittee is scheduled to meet several times, after which it will present a report to the AEC.

At the outset of the meeting, AEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo reflected upon the aims of the subcommittee's establishment, saying, "While irradiation is used widely in Japan, it was pointed out during the drawing up of the Fundamental Principles for the Nuclear Policy Program that we lag in some areas. The most prominent example of that is food irradiation. If, truly, Japan has been slow to develop applications of food irradiation, we need to analyze the causes of that, with the related parties sharing both the conveniences and the risks. I hope that your deliberations in this subcommittee will be instrumental in the discussions to be made by others in the future." After Kondo's greetings, Tada was elected the subcommittee's chairman.

The first meeting of the subcommittee then continued with an explanation by the AEC secretariat about the basic ideas related to radiation applications as incorporated in the Fundamental Principles for the Nuclear Policy Program, along with the status of its recent usage, the principles and usefulness of food irradiation in general, international developments in the area (both broadly and by country), its nutritional applicability, and inspection technologies, among other subjects.

The members then offered various comments. One person said, "Consumers are becoming more attuned to safety matters, so it is important to provide them with accurate information. I'd like to hear more from people in the field why the usage of irradiation in manufactured products has not been related to consumers." Meanwhile, someone else declared, "Cooperative societies (co-ops) acknowledge that less is known about food irradiation than genetic recombination, so I recommend we carry out deepened discussions. It will be necessary to investigate such matters as the conditions placed on food irradiation by foreign countries." Another person insisted, "It's important to move our discussions along, despite the difficulty of debating about the topics of safety and peace of mind." And another member spoke up by saying, "We need to review the chain of events by which an opposition movement was able to halt food irradiation from being put to practical use with onions. In addition, a big problem in actually promoting the utilization of food irradiation is how to label products."

Subcommittee chairman Tada also stepped into the discussion, saying, "Much debate has taken place about the merits accruing to producers and processors on account of food irradiation, but we need to stress the ways that consumers can benefit as well."

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