Curbs on produce to be changed
Kyodo News

The government decided Monday to alter the way it restricts farm produce tainted by radioactive fallout from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

In response to the fallout, the government restricted shipments of farm products from four nearby prefectures. But the restrictions will now be imposed on a town-by-town basis instead of blanketing the whole prefecture, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said at a news conference.

In addition to breaking down the coverage into smaller areas, Edano said the government will lift the current curbs imposed on each item if they stay below the safety limit for three straight weeks.

With the latest change of rules, Edano said the government has ordered that shipments of spinach and other vegetables from three municipalities in Chiba Prefecture be stopped.

Some local governments have called for easing restrictions on radiation levels allowed in food, saying the tentative levels set by the health ministry after the nuclear crisis emerged are too conservative.

The advisory panel to the ministry's Pharmaceutical and Food Safety Bureau concluded that the consumption limit levels should be maintained until the leak of radioactive materials at the nuclear plant is contained.

The Food Safety Commission and the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency also consider the tentative limits appropriate.

On March 21, the government ordered the suspension of some farm product shipments from Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma prefectures after radioactive contamination exceeding limits was confirmed in some vegetables.

The leak of radioactive materials into the air and nearby sea water, caused by crippled cooling systems at the Fukushima plant's reactors, has also affected tap water.

The panel also recommended that the health ministry and relevant government organizations inform the public more about health concerns by providing easy-to-understand information.

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