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Radiation checks reassure Fukushima residents on food safety

Tue, 11 Sep 2012 12:44 GMT

Source: [Member // International Federation Of Red Cross And Red Crescent Societies \(IFRC\) - Switzerland](#)



The juicy cucumbers, hanging from the trellised vine plant in Hisako Umezu's sun-drenched garden, used to be a source of unmitigated pride and enjoyment. But these days, they - and her other produce - including aubergines, spring greens and kiwi fruit, are tainted with a lingering anxiety.

"I want to know whether these vegetables are safe to eat. I am concerned over whether the radiation levels in them are high," says the retired local government worker in her 60's.

That's why she's diced the cucumber up as finely as possible, packed it in a polythene bag and brought it to the local government office, where it can be checked for radiation, using one of several scanners provided by the Japanese Red Cross Society.

A year and a half after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, about 80 kilometers away from this bustling prefectural capital, many people still share Mrs. Umezu's concerns.

The deputy director of the Azuma branch of Fukushima city government, Mr. Sato, says they get around 10 people a day bringing in food and water samples to be checked.

"In about one-in-ten cases, the radiation levels are higher than 10 becquerels,



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but well below the benchmark of 50-100 becquerels," he says.

Mrs. Umezu's cucumbers don't show any sign of untoward radioactivity, so she can add them to the list of other items in her garden which are safe to eat.

But people's feelings about the food they eat are a delicate matter, as Mr. Sato himself knows. Last year he, along with most other local people, broke off from his long-standing practice of sending a gift of the renowned Fukushima peaches to his relatives in Tokyo.

He fears that even if the fruit tests clear of significant radiation levels, his family in the capital may reject them.

That's grim news for the villagers in 'Fruit Row,' just outside Fukushima, with its orchards of squat peach trees, laden with fruit. That's where Mrs Umezu, her husband and mother-in-law live.

The fruit used to be an added attraction for the tourists, who once came to this area, where the air has a forest-laden freshness from the wooded mountains which surround Fukushima.

But nowadays, although the city seems busy with travelers and many of the hotels in the centre are fully booked. "I don't think many of those who come are tourists, they are researchers or they are police from other parts of Japan, who have come to back up the Fukushima force, so while they're here, they patronize the hot springs," Mr Umezu says.

Some normality is returning, but it's only a kind of normality. Mr Sato, at the Azuma branch says that as far as his own eating habits are concerned, things are starting to change. "We didn't eat any locally produced rice last year, but from the beginning of this year, we felt confident to start eating it again."

But he has no idea how long the food testing will need to continue. And will he start sending peaches to his relatives in Tokyo again? "I haven't decided yet," he says ruefully.

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