System and Standards for Japanese Nutrition Labeling and Comparison with the International Situation

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Summary
In Japan, regulation of Nutrition Labeling was introduced along with a partial revision of “the Nutrition Improvement Law” in 1995. Many advanced countries such as the USA and the members of the EU had already introduced the nutrition labeling systems and Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling were therefore presented. The background to the introduction is the national nutrition policy to prevent chronic disease and obesity, with regulation of increases in processed foods and the international aspects of food stuffs.

When labeling the nutrients or energy of foods to be marketed, producers are required to abide by the nutritional labeling standards in Japan. Mandatory nutrition labeling is required for almost all processed foods in the USA. The system in the EU is similar to that in Japan.

When declaring the amounts of nutrients or energy, those of the principal constituents should be provided. When describing the quantities of individual components, the standards set down should also be followed. Nutrition claims are also carried out in the USA and the EU.

“Foods Specified for Health Use” in Japan and “Health Claims” in USA are permitted but not in the EU. Recently, international interest on functions of food components is increased, especially in the food industry. However, at present the regulation systems differ from country to country. There is also controversy about the need for creation of a new regulation category to cover the area between foods and pharmaceuticals.