

Summary of the report of the committee meeting on the promotion of a healthy and sustainable food environment 1/2

Introduction

- With the challenge of further extending healthy life expectancy in Japan, there is an urgent need to promote a food environment that can nudge people to practice healthy eating, regardless of their health consciousness.
- In promoting such improvements in the food environment, the focus should be not only on health and nutrition, but also the sustainability of the food environment. From February to June 2021, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare convened a committee to discuss how multisector collaboration between industry, academia and government can effectively promote a healthy and sustainable food environment, in collaboration with the relevant ministries and agencies*.

*Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry; Ministry of Environment; Consumer Affairs Agency

Participants in this committee included representatives of industry, media, civil society, consumer organizations and academics.

Background: issues and trends related to the promotion of a healthy and sustainable food environment

I. Social conditions surrounding the food environment

1. Aging society with declining birthrate in Japan

- Facing the upcoming “100-years of life era”, extending healthy life expectancy is a major challenge.

2. Major nutritional issues

The following nutritional issues need to be addressed, with their potential impact on all generations and affecting people throughout their lives.

【Excess salt intake】

- High salt intake is the leading dietary risk factor for deaths related to non-communicable diseases and affects disability-adjusted life-years in East Asia (including Japan).
- Japanese salt intake is still higher than the global average, and is about double the intake recommended by the WHO (World Health Organization).
- The largest source of salt is from home cooked meals (about 60% is from seasoning), while in Western diets most of the salt is from processed food.
- The majority of people with high salt intake are not conscious of the importance and necessity of salt reduction.

【Thinness in young women】

- Japan has the highest percentage of underweight young women in their 20's and 30's among the major developed countries, and this has been gradually increasing.

【Nutritional disparities associated with socioeconomic status】

- Household income is a factor associated with food choices and dietary intake.
- Yet, high salt intake is a common concern across different socioeconomic groups.

II. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global trends related to food environments

1. International organizations

【SDGs and nutrition improvement】

- Good nutrition is essential to achieve all the 17 SDGs, not only for the specific SDGs related to nutrition: “Goal 2: zero hunger” and “Goal 3: good health and well-being for all the people”.

【Report on the connection between diet and climate change】

- Climate change could lead to a decrease in the nutritional value of food, higher food prices and greater nutritional disparities.
- Public health policies that aim to improve nutritional status could change food demand, and this could also contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

*IPCC Special Report “Climate change and Land”(2019)

【Food-related initiatives that involve health and environmental aspects】

- “Sustainable healthy diets: guiding principles” (FAO and WHO, 2019)
- Incentivizing Food Systems Transformation (World Economic Forum and McKinsey & Company, 2020) etc.

【International meetings on food systems and nutrition】

- United Nations Food System Summit (September, 2021)
- Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit (December, 2021)

2. Industry experience examples

- Some food-related companies are growing their businesses by setting clear action goals to monitor their progress in solving social and environmental issues.

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New directions to promote a healthy and sustainable food environment

1. Basic concept

- This new initiative should encourage industry to provide healthier food products which consumers, regardless of their level of health consciousness, can choose and purchase at affordable prices and use easily in their daily diet.
- In promoting this initiative through multisectoral collaboration, not only the nutritional aspects, but also the environmental aspects are important to enhance the sustainability of the food environment.
- While aligning with global trends, this initiative should be promoted with the understanding of the uniqueness of the diets and nutritional issues in Asian countries.

2. Priority issues to be addressed

- 1). Nutritional issue: The priority is salt reduction, a particularly important issue in Japan because of its disease burden. Other issues, which can have potentially far reaching impact throughout life, include thinness in young women, and for all generations, the nutritional disparities associated with socioeconomic status.
- 2). Environmental issues: The focus is on the environmentally-friendly activities* implemented by the business sector.

* Those that contribute directly to environmental protection, and those that affect environmental protection indirectly, for example, through provision of information and disclosure.

3. Target meals and foods

- Given the sources of salt intake in the Japanese population, this initiative targets home-cooked meals (meal preparation at home) and away-from-home meals (pre-packaged meals from delis, etc.). For specific food products, the target includes processed foods that are used in those meals or for food preparation.

* Restaurant meals will be considered as another target in this initiative after several years of implementation.

Strategies

1. Main actions expected from each sector

- a. Food manufacturers: Development and mainstreaming of healthier and environmentally-friendly products. Company-wide efforts on nutritional and environmental issues.
- b. Food distributors: Sales strategies (shelf allocation, price, etc.) to attract and nudge consumers to better food choice regardless of their health consciousness.
- c. Media: Public relations activities, also with food manufacturers and distributors.
- d. Business sectors: Development of recipes with less salt, and dissemination of information on healthy and sustainable diets. Help to raise health awareness.
- e. Academics: Conduct health research on how to improve the food environment, and use these results to support the efforts of business from a neutral standpoint.
- f. Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare: Preparation of scientific data to support business sector, and promote research among academics.
- g. Professional associations and civil society: Constructive suggestions for business and appropriate mediation between consumers and industry.

2. Ensure the effectiveness of the initiative

- This initiative will be launched in the summer of 2021, with the participation of the business sectors on a voluntary basis.
- Business sectors wishing to participate are required to set their own action targets and indicators to monitor their progress. These are for annual self-monitoring and will be reported.

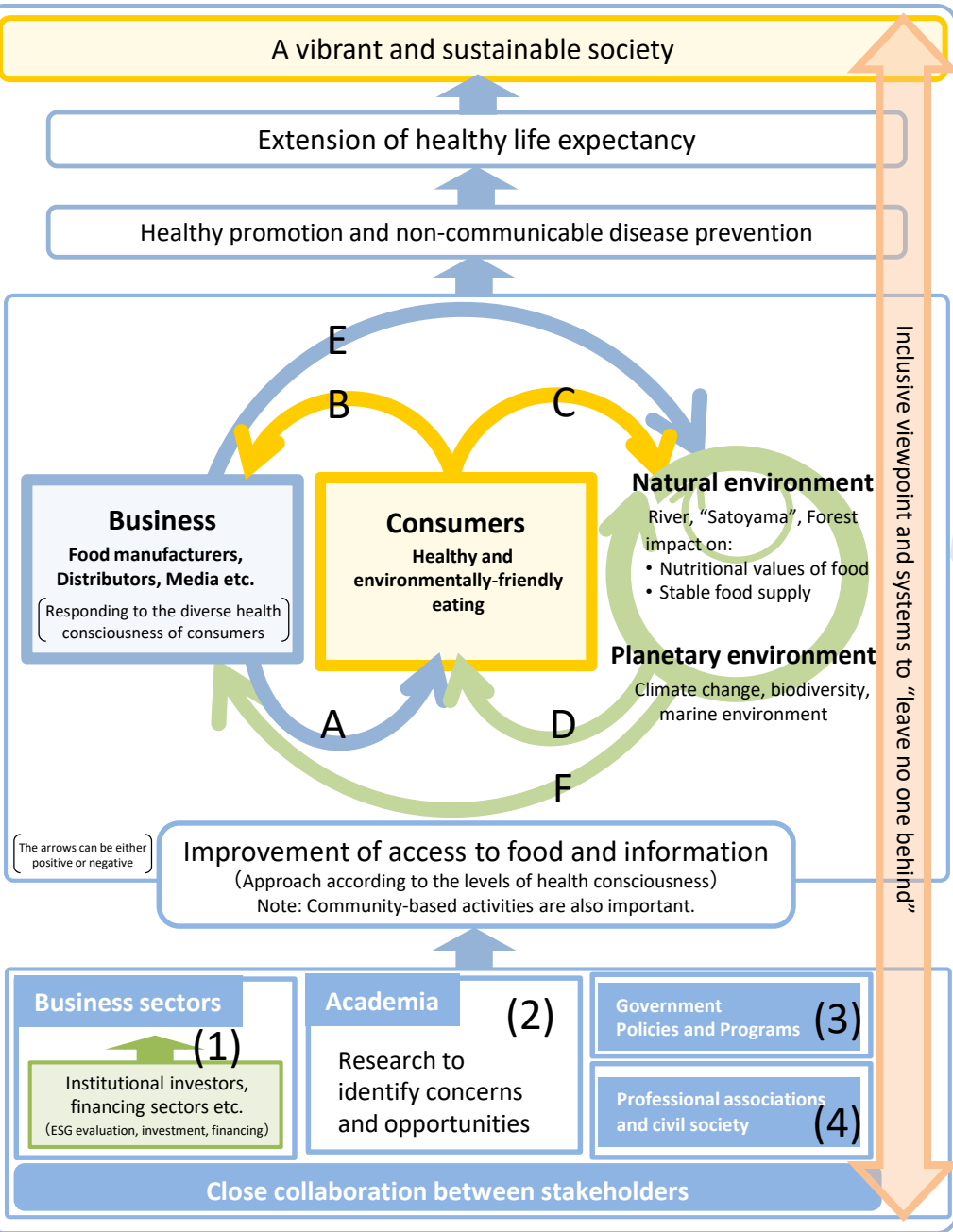
3. Incentives for participating businesses

- The action targets and monitoring processes will be published, which will help improve ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) evaluation and expand opportunities for business.
- * Future consideration will include a disclosure system which business sectors can use for food labeling.

Conclusion

- Globally, it has been well recognized that it is important to promote a healthy and sustainable food environment. This initiative follows this trend by supporting healthy eating, which can also contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. This initiative is expected to be shared with other countries, especially in Asia, for instance, through the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021.
- This initiative is expected to last until 2030 along with the SDGs, after which other efforts would be required to expand the expected achievements.
- The committee hopes that this initiative would be an essential part of building a more vibrant, healthy, and sustainable society.

Framework of the current initiative for promoting a healthy and sustainable food environment



Cycle around actions by businesses and consumers

A. Businesses to consumers

- Developing and mainstreaming healthier and environmentally friendly products
- Providing healthy food at affordable prices to address nutritional disparities
- Supporting behavioral change by providing information

B. Consumers to businesses

- Increasing the use of healthier and environmentally friendly products
- Improving the image of participating businesses

Cycle around consumers' actions and the environment

C. Consumers to the environment

- Practicing environmental conservation activities in daily life, including diet

D. The environment to consumers

- Reducing the risk of natural disasters
- Improving the quality of life in its various aspects, including health

Cycle around businesses' actions and the environment

E. Businesses to the environment

- Developing and mainstreaming healthier and environmentally friendly products
- Acceleration of other environmental conservation efforts

F. The environment and business

- Stable procurement of raw materials
- Reduced risk of natural disasters

Main actions expected from each sector

(1) Business sectors

- Food manufacturers: Development and mainstreaming of healthier and environmentally friendly products as well as company-wide commitment to nutritional and environmental issues
- Food distributors: Sales promotion of the above products
- Media: Provision of information on how to practice healthier and sustainable diets

(2) Academia

- Research to improve the food environment from a neutral position
- Appropriate support for the business sectors and provision of appropriate information to consumers
- Training of professionals such as dietitians who will play a key role

(3) Government (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare)

- Development of overall program and coordination among stakeholders
- Improvement of the environment for promoting health/nutrition research

(4) Professional associations and civil society

- Constructive suggestions to businesses and appropriate mediation between consumers and industry

Note: this framework is only for illustration purposes to describe the associations between businesses, consumers and the environment, and does not intend to illustrate the physical placement of these actors.