

What is “Shokuiku (Food Education)” ?



1. Background to enactment of the Basic Law on Shokuiku

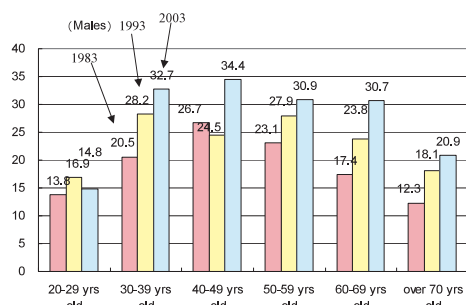
The Basic Law on Shokuiku (the 63rd law in the year 2005) was enacted in June 2005. What is “Shokuiku”, then ? The Basic Law defines Shokuiku as acquisition of knowledge about food as well as the ability to make appropriate food choices. Behind the law, there’re a variety of food and nutrition issues such as a lack of proper concern for food; an increase in irregular and nutritionally unbalanced meals; a rise in obesity and lifestyle-related diseases; an excessive desire for being slim especially among young females; outbreak of a series of incidents related to food safety; over-dependency on food from abroad; and, loss of traditional food culture in a globalization movement. Some might criticize that eating is such a personal thing that government shouldn’t regulate by a law. However, Japanese situation over food has already reached to a crisis point, and that a law had to be enacted in order to address these issues.

Let us first examine the nutritional balance issue. The Japanese dietary pattern, which consists of rice as a staple, combined with a variety of other food, such as fish, meat, vegetables, fruits and milk, was formulated by around 1980. This dietary pattern was well-balanced from nutritional point of view. However, today we find that the ideal dietary pattern has been totally eroded, especially among males in their thirties to sixties of age group who tend to consume excessive amounts of fat. According to the National Health and Nutrition survey in fiscal year 2003, about 30 percent of males in thirties to sixties of age group are overweight, and in all age groups, except for the twenties, overweight male is increasing. Meanwhile, excessive desire with acquiring a slim figure “the skinnier, the better” is becoming widespread mainly among young females, due to cultural influences from television and magazines, and has become a social issue.

With regard to a dietary habits, skipping of breakfast has surfaced as a problem. About 30 percent of males in their twenties start the day without breakfast, and this trend is also growing among children (see figure II). Skipping breakfast is thought to be associated to a number of negative effects, including disorder due to insufficient energy supply in the morning; the potential for overeating at other mealtimes, which could induce obesity and other lifestyle-related diseases; and many more problems.

Figure I

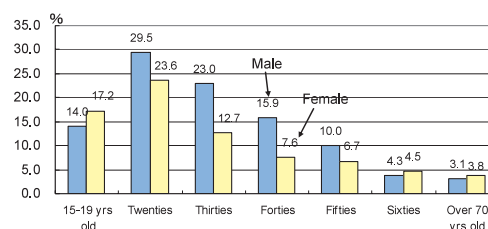
○Percentage of overweight male persons (with over 25 BMI)



Source: National Health and Nutrition Survey, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (fiscal 2003)
Note: BMI is calculated as follows: weight (kg) ÷ {height (m) × height (m)}

Figure II

○Percentage of breakfast skippers

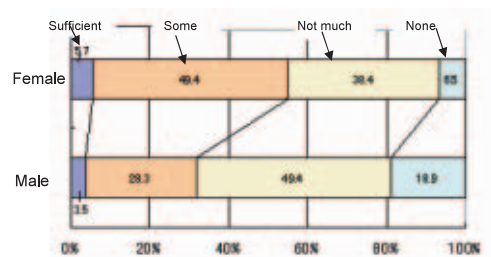


Source: National Health and Nutrition Survey, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (fiscal 2003)
Note: Meal skipping is defined as one of the following -- eating only confectionery and/or fruit; taking only nutritional supplements; or eating nothing on the survey day.

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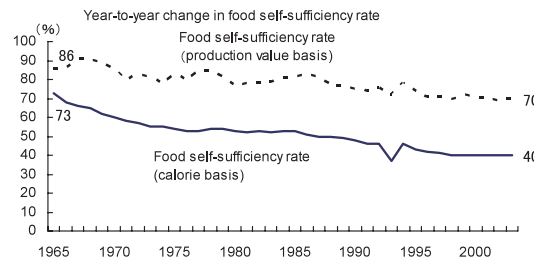
Figure III

○ Possession of food choice/preparation knowledge and skills



Source: National Nutrition Survey, Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labour (fiscal 1999)

Figure IV



Source: Food Demand and Supply, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

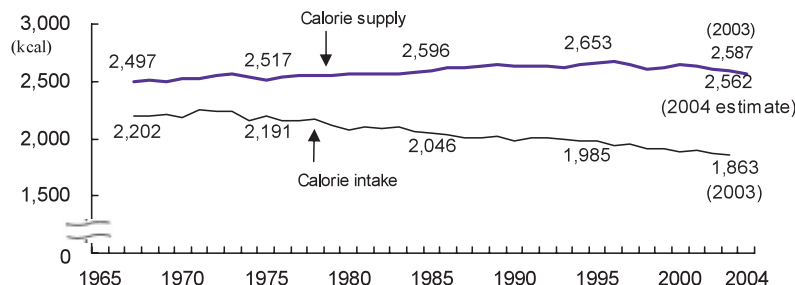
While public concerns over food safety has increased rapidly, many people especially younger people feel that they don't have enough knowledge and skills for making appropriate food choices and preparing meals, according to the National Nutrition Survey conducted in fiscal 1999. Only about 30 percent of males and about 50 percent of females in all age groups think that they have sufficient knowledge and skills for food choice and preparation (see figure III).

An estimate for fiscal year 2003 by Food Service Industry Research Center showed that 44.5 percent of Japanese people relied on ready-to-eat meals such as eating at restaurants, bento lunch boxes and/or delicatessen foods for all meals, indicating a steady year-on-year increase. Meanwhile, in a survey conducted in fiscal year 2004 by the Norinchukin Bank, 10.5 percent of all surveyed children in Tokyo Metropolitan area eat both breakfast and dinner alone. According to the Norinchukin Bank report, 14.1 percent of elementary school students and 36.2 percent of junior high school students eat breakfast by oneself. The results of these surveys indicate an increasing percentage of the population are less likely to shop for ingredients, cook them and dine at home together with other family members, highlighting the difficulty of having "Shokuiku" opportunities at home.

Furthermore, Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio on a supplied calorie basis stood at only 40 percent in fiscal year 2004, the lowest level among all developed nations (see figure IV). Despite low food self-sufficiency, an enormous amount of food such as leftovers and expired products is wasted in the food-related industries or in homes, in the situation of food satiation. In fact, the excess of per-capita calorie supply over actual consumed calories is steadily rising. This in turn raises the issues of wasting resources and inducing negative environmental effects (see figure V).

Figure V

○ Year-on-year changes in calorie supply and actual daily individual intake



Source: Food Supply and Demand, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; National Health and Nutrition Survey, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

(Note)

1. Alcoholic beverages are not included.
2. The difference between calorie supply and intake should be interpreted just as an approximate figure for leftovers and scrapped food because survey and calculation methods for these two figures differ significantly.

Needless to say, eating is integral to human life, regardless of age. However, we have gradually failed to feel about the importance of people who cook, transport or produce food for us. And also, we don't usually care about the benefits of nature like soil, the sun and the ecosystem that enable us to cultivate food. We humans have sought the convenience since ancient times and we've materialized it. However, the very convenience has tended to make us complacent and lazy, and has contributed to lose gratefulness toward nature and decline in good eating habits.

2. The aim of the Basic Law on Shokuiku

As mentioned above, the Basic Law on Shokuiku defines “Shokuiku” as acquisition of knowledge about food and nutrition, as well as the ability to make appropriate food choices through various experience related to food, in order to develop people in the ability to practice a healthy diet. In addition, the law calls for promotion of Shokuiku toward a richer lifestyle based on life-long cultivation of a healthy mind in a healthy body. Every person can't live without food so that the Act targets are not only children but Japanese nationals of all ages.

The basic concept consists of the following components:

- (1) Shokuiku should have the purpose of promoting people's health in body and in mind, as well as enriching human lives;
- (2) Care should be taken to induce people to develop greater appreciation for and understanding of their diets , including the various roles played by the natural environment and the people who produce, transport and prepare food;
- (3) Nationwide, voluntary movements for promotion of Shokuiku should be developed;
- (4) Especially Parents, educators and daycare providers should actively promote Shokuiku among children;
- (5) Understanding of dietary issues should be reinforced by taking advantage of all available opportunities, such as at home, in schools and in the community or everywhere, to offer a variety of food-related experiences and activities;
- (6) Awareness and appreciation of traditional Japanese food culture as well as food supply/demand situations should be promoted, and opportunities of interaction between food producers and consumers should be created, in order to revitalize rural farming and fishing regions, and to boost food self-sufficiency in Japan;
- (7) Appropriate information on food safety should be offered, in order to help people to practice proper diets.

Components of Shokuiku are so wide-ranging, that a single entity cannot cover all of these components. Therefore, collaboration among concerned parties is indispensable for Shokuiku promotion.

3. The Basic Plan for Promotion of Shokuiku

The law stipulates that Shokuiku shall be encouraged through formulation and implementation of the Basic Plan for Promotion of Shokuiku (hereinafter referred to as the “The Basic Plan”). The Basic Plan is to be formulated by the Shokuiku Promotion Conference, chaired by the Prime Minister. This process is underway and is due to be completed by March 2006. It should be noted that The Basic Law calls for prefectural, municipal, town, and village governments to come up with their own local-level Shokuiku promotion plans, based on the national basic plan.

The Basic Plan is expected to be formulated by four elements; fundamental policies, objectives, comprehensive measures for promotion of Shokuiku, and other requirements for comprehensive and consistent implementation of the plan.

The Basic Plan is expected to implement the following measures in the “Comprehensive measures for promotion of Shokuiku”: promotion of Shokuiku at home, in schools, in daycare facilities, and in the communities; development of a national Shokuiku movement; promotion of interaction between food producers and consumers; support for activities designed to preserve traditional food culture, promotion of research and studies on diet, including food safety and nutrition, and promotion of information offering and of knowledge exchange activities.

To promote Shokuiku, deep connection between concerned government offices, such as the Cabinet Office’s Food Safety Commission (FSC), and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF), is essential. It is worth noting that, under the leadership of the Cabinet Office (CAO), those government offices will share a common understanding about Shokuiku in order to develop and implement necessary measures in a comprehensive and consistent manner. Local governments are also expected to have appropriate connection between related departments or institutions to work on Shokuiku progresses.

From an international perspective, the comprehensive approach based on such a wide-ranging concept is considered to be unique to Japanese Shokuiku, whereas in the West, more limited approaches such as nutrition education programs aimed at reducing obesity and organized participation in agricultural education farms are practiced. For this reason, Japanese government transmits the concept of Shokuiku to foreign countries actively in accordance with the Basic Plan.

4. The role of farmers, fishermen and food-related businesses

The Basic Law on Shokuiku stipulates the “responsibilities and duties” of the national government, local governments, educators, farmers and fishermen, food-related business groups, and the Japanese public.

The law calls on farmers and fishermen, and their related organizations, to “offer opportunities for people to experience a variety of farming- , fishery- and forestry- related activities, in order to enhance their understanding of nature’s benefits and the importance of human activities in food production and distribution.” Farmers and fishermen are also expected to “make sincere efforts to promote Shokuiku activities by collaborating with educators and other concerned parties.”

From this clause, we can see that the law envisages a significant role for the farmers and fishermen who support our dietary lives, in counteracting the increasing tendency to devalue sensible eating in today’s busy social environment.

In some communities, there has already been a marked increase in the number of farmers and fishermen taking on this responsibility through direct selling to consumers; hosting educational tours by and providing on-site experience activities for local elementary school students; and supplying agricultural products for local school lunches. With the enactment of the Basic Law on Shokuiku, such exchange activities are expected to develop further, supported by expanded government assistance.

Meanwhile, food-related businesses are expected “voluntarily and actively promote Shokuiku in their business operations, while making sincere efforts to cooperate with national government and local governments measures on Shokuiku promotion” Those business, even if they themselves consider they haven’t promoted Shokuiku up to now can work on Shokuiku soon by reviewing their existing activities such as factory tours, cooking classes (using their products), and Web-based information on foods from Shokuiku point of view.

5. Shokuiku by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries

So far, MEXT has promoted Shokuiku through school programs, MHLW has worked to raise health consciousness, and MAFF has focused on the “food chain”, from production through distribution, manufacturing/processing to consumption.

In March 2000, these three ministries collaborated to make “the Dietary Guidelines for Japanese (see figure VI)”, and each of them has subsequently promoted PR activities about this guideline as a part of Shokuiku promotion.

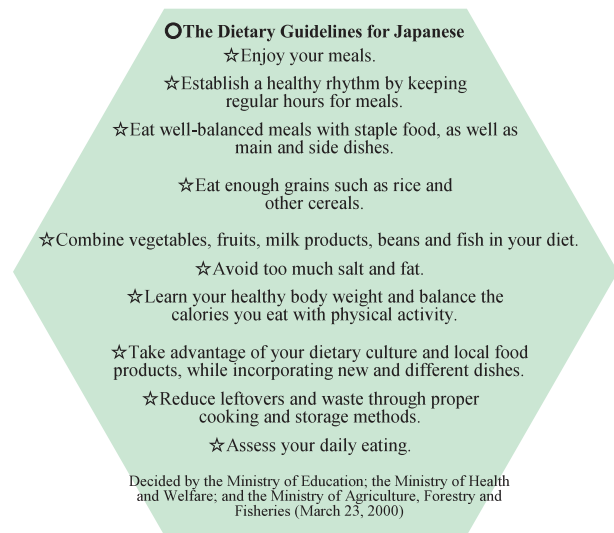
MAFF is working on Shokuiku by setting four specific aims:

- (1) Helping people to enjoy a healthy diet;
- (2) Promoting people’s understanding on agriculture, forestry, fishery and food industry;
- (3) Perpetuation of traditional food culture; and
- (4) Providing information on food safety

With these aims, MAFF has developed intensive nationwide programs. For example, it stages a “Nippon Shokuiku Fair”, which attracts more than 27,000 visitors over two days, and

conducts nationwide symposiums in January, which is designated “the Month to rethink diet” from 2003. MAFF also gives an award to outstanding Shokuiku activities through “Shokuiku Local Activities’ Competition.” And MAFF supports for the activities of private organizations, as well as funding for researchers who study and verify issues in Shokuiku. In addition, in fiscal year 2005, the Ministry held a “Shokuiku and Health Fair” in twelve locations across Japan. These fairs provide opportunities for local people to show traditional foods made from local agricultural products, so as to share their production experiences and difficulties, and to pass on ancestral knowledge and traditions on food.

Figure VI

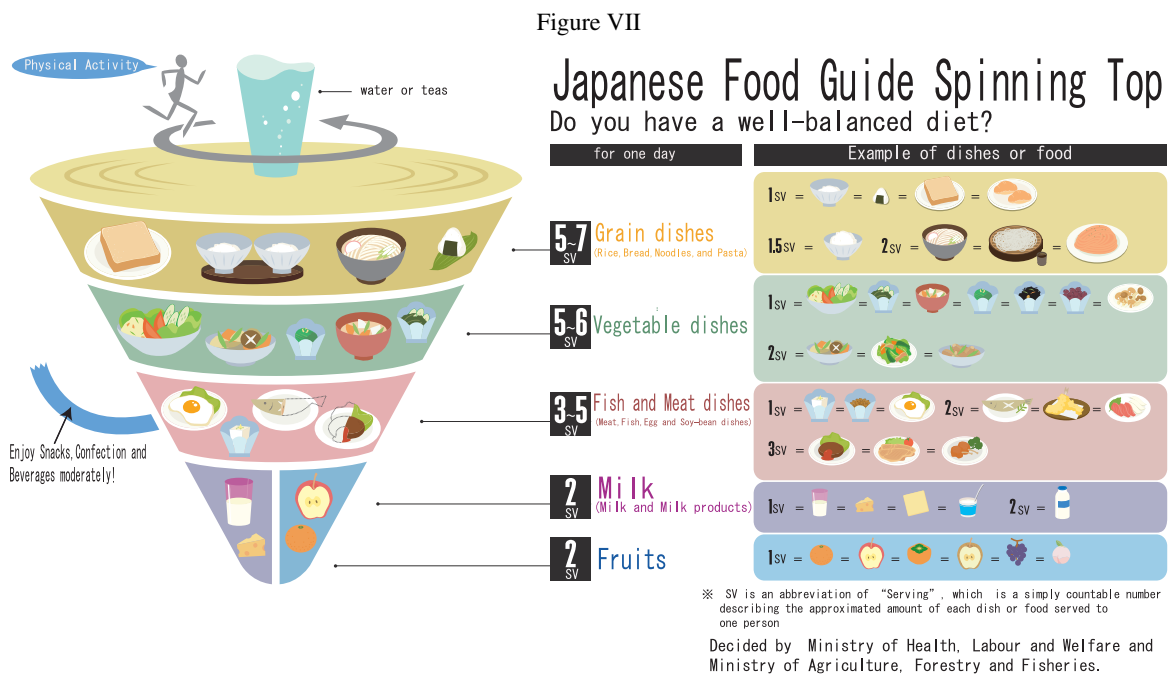


6. Establishing the “The Japanese Food Guide Spinning Top”

The above-mentioned the Dietary Guidelines for Japanese has been popularized and used for public awareness-raising by the MEXT, MHLW, and MAFF. However, public recognition of the guideline remains limited, accounting only for 22.3 percent, according to a 2005 survey by the Information Service Center for Food and Food ways, with little improvement occurring over the five-year period since the guideline was established. The guideline, which contains ten basic suggestions, was more a collection of slogans than a pointer to specific action plans. Therefore, a more specific and easy-to-understand tool needed to be developed, in order to encourage and help people to practice healthy diets.

In order to come up with such a tool, MHLW and MAFF in December 2004 collaborated to set up a “Food Guide Committee”, composed of fifteen experts drawn from nutrition study fields, food businesses, consumer organizations, and the media. The panel, chaired by Nobuo Yoshiike, the Chief of Research Planning and Evaluation at the National Institute of Health and Nutrition, was empowered to develop an illustrated, easy-to-understand food guide that shows what to eat in order to derive a given nutritional value. Following about six months of regular meetings, the panel submitted its report on July 5, 2005.

The illustration was named “Japanese Food Guide Spinning Top (Japanese Food Guide ST)” (see figure VII). It is a rotating inverted cone divided from the top down into food category layers: grain dishes; vegetable dishes; fish and meat dishes. At the bottom are milk and fruits, which are given equal importance. The nutritional chart is designed to resemble a spinning top, which is a well-known traditional Japanese toy. The top symbolism is intended to remind people of the importance of maintaining optimal balance in their diets. Moreover, the top, through its dynamic spinning motion, represents the significance of exercise in other words,



ongoing physical health relies not only on a sensible diet, but also on physical activities (exercise). The top axis represents water and tea, which are essential components of all diets. Snacks, confection and beverages, which are considered non-essential treats, are jointly represented as the string that helps give the top its spinning momentum (Japanese tops are activated by sudden, whip-like uncoiling of a string that is wound from bottom to top). This string carries the message: “enjoy snacks, confections and beverages moderately.”

Recommended daily servings are clearly shown for each category of the inverted cone with the number of servings, and illustrated with the equal number of servings of dishes. The daily intake suggestions are written in easy-to-understand language, e.g., “equivalent of four bowls of rice served to the brim of the bowl,” so that people can intuitively learn the recommended daily serving quantities. However, the illustration and serving suggestions are not intended to show a typical daily diet; rather, they are intended to explain what kinds of dishes are included in which categories. The serving chart (examples of dishes or food) is intended to help people confirm the actual number of servings they actually take each day, by counting on their fingers and comparing the number of servings with the recommended figures. There are some illustrated food guides produced in different countries, such as the U.S. My Pyramid, that show recommended daily servings with ingredients. What is unique to Japanese Food Guide ST is that recommended servings are illustrated and explained using specific dishes, which are considered to be the most straightforward point of reference for consumers.

7. Content of "Japanese Food Guide ST" and its future use

The criteria for each category in Japanese Food Guide ST are shown in figure VIII. The food guide shows the approximate recommended amount of dishes for a day, since for most people it is more practical to balance their daily nutrition over three meals by combining dishes, rather than to decide and choose dishes for each meal. Needless to say, a more long-term, habitual balancing of the diet, in addition to optimized daily intake, should also be considered from the perspective of balance between energy intake and consumption, as well as ingesting the appropriate amount of each nutrient.

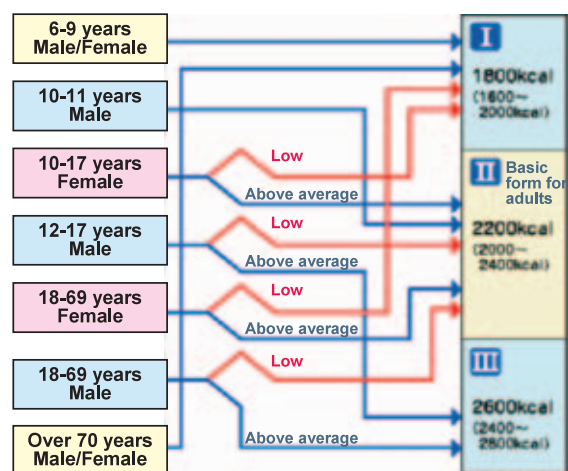
Figure VIII

Category	Cooking category	Criteria for one serving	Utilization of recommended daily intake
Grain dishes	Dishes that mainly include rice, bread, noodles and pasta (carbohydrate sources).	About 40 grams of carbohydrate	Grain dishes should be taken in each meal. Choose between rice, bread, and noodles along with other dishes you eat. If grain dishes are skipped in a meal, supplement the shortfall in-between the three meals.
Vegetable dishes	Dishes that mainly include vegetables, potatoes, beans (excl. soy beans), mushrooms and seaweeds (various vitamins, minerals and fiber sources).	About 70 grams of the main ingredients	Our daily diet tends to be dominated by fish and meat dishes, which can result in insufficient intake of vegetables. Make efforts consciously to eat sufficient amounts of vegetable dishes or double amount of meat and fish dishes each meal.
Fish and Meat dishes	Dishes mainly include meat, fish, eggs, soy beans and soy bean products (protein sources).	About 6 grams of protein	Be careful not to eat too much fish and meat dishes. Especially, greasy dishes could result in excessive fat and energy intake.
Milk	Milk, yogurt and cheese (Calcium sources)	About 100 milligrams of calcium	Recommended rough standard of daily intake is a glass of milk(200 ml).
Fruits	Fruits and fruit-like vegetables (Vitamin C and potassium sources)	About 100 grams of main ingredients	Make conscious efforts to eat an appropriate amount of fruits every day.

The Japanese Food Guide ST is designed for use by adults, providing guidelines for a 2200 kcal diet, with a 200 kcal allowance for individual circumstances. Users of the food guide should note that the recommended daily intake in each category differs according to age, sex, and amount of exercise (see figure IX).

Japanese government is now popularizing the Japanese Food Guide ST through national media, such as television and magazine advertising, in addition to Web pages, public service announcements, and a variety of events such as symposiums. The government also gives away user-friendly, entertaining items, such as pamphlets, posters, diet self-check sheets, and hand- straps for cell phones, in public places.

Figure IX



Low:
Above average:

Meanwhile, we expect supermarkets, convenience stores, restaurants, and similar establishments, which are visited daily by large numbers of people of all ages, to be ideal venues for providing information on the Japanese Food Guide ST. MAFF has compiled a manual, which explains how to display and utilize the food guide in supermarkets and convenience stores, based on the results of test events conducted at some of those establishments. Staff cafeterias at MHLW and MAFF have been offering some menus based on the Food Guide ST (see figure X) from August 2005. Based on the results of this trial, MAFF compiled a manual for restaurant industry

Figure X

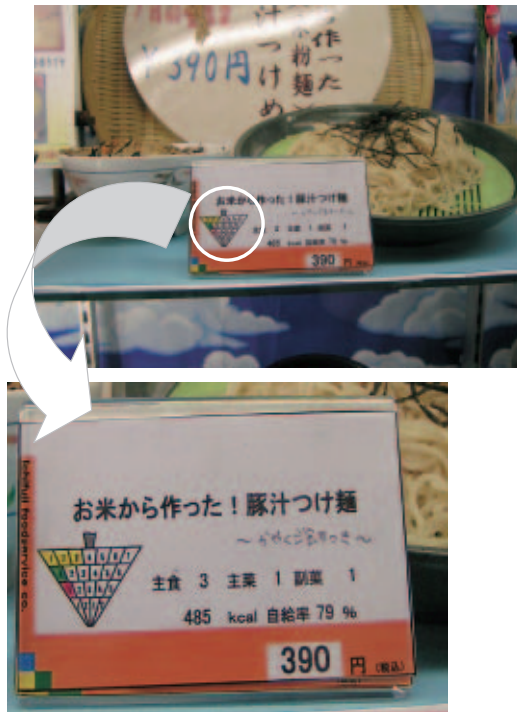


Figure XI



Figure XII



A menu example of Japanese dietary pattern

use. Voluntary activities by companies, such as the marketing of products based on the concept of Japanese Food Guide ST, gradually started appearing.

A useful feature of Japanese Food Guide ST is that under a set rule, dishes in the illustration can be substituted with alternative dishes. For example, Food Guide ST whose all grain dishes are replaced by rice is displayed on some packages of rice.(see figureXI) Menus can be changed by inserting seasonal dishes or local dishes that use locally produced, region-specific vegetables. We expect localized Food Guide STs be developed in this way in near future in order to help people to be conscious about their own food culture. In fact, some communities are considering compilation of localized Food Guide ST.

As more and more people become familiar with and use the Japanese Food Guide ST, we can look forward to the evolution of a healthier Japanese population, great prevention of lifestyle-related diseases, and revitalization of a Japanese dietary pattern that uses more rice that suit Japan's climate and culture, as well as greater utilization of locally-produced and seasonal ingredients (see figure XII), which would in turn contribute to improve Japan's food self-sufficiency.

8. An superior example of Shokuiku activity

Takinomiya Elementary School in Ryonan-cho, Kagawa Prefecture, which won the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister’s Award in the “Local Shokuiku Activity Competition” in fiscal year 2003, holds seasonal hand-made bento lunchbox days, as a concept devised by the school principal (see figure XIII). The rule for this event is that students have to make their own lunches, with no help from their parents, and bring their results to school. After learning cooking skills, including devising recipes to shopping, cooking, and presenting a bento lunchbox in classes during the first semester, students are required to make and bring their lunches once in each month, from October to next February. The school principal set six objectives for this bento cooking event: to revitalize students’ appreciation of shared family dining; to enable students to imagine “life” in food; to enhance student’s sensibilities; to take delight in pleasing other people; to be grateful for nature’s bounty; and to develop an analytical eye for the world around them. The principal’s goals were successfully achieved; the students learned not only cooking skills, but also genuine survival skills (see note 1). This educator became a principal of a junior high school in the neighboring town, and introduced the concept of the seasonal hand-made bento lunchbox days program in there, too. He also makes lectures all over the nation to popularize the bento day concept.

Figure XIII



Bento lunch made by students of Takinomiya Elementary School

9. Conclusion

As we have seen, implementation of Shokuiku can play an important role in the development of children’s all-round characters, as well as their survival skills. It is equally important that people of all ages are educated to care about their mental and physical health, so that they can live long, dynamic and happy lives. In this sense, the issue of Shokuiku is relevant to everybody. We believe Shokuiku as a national movement will ultimately have achieved its goals when every individual takes proper dietary actions in his or her home, in the communities and in other places.

Note 1: Winner of the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister’s Award in the Local Shokuiku activity Competition

