

Countermeasures for Plastic Resource Recycling in Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Industries and Food Industry

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Food Industry Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

1. Purport

- The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 include “By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse” and “By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.”
- While Canada and European countries endorsed an ocean plastic charter at the G7 summit held in Charlevoix in June 2018, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared his intention to take up the issue at the G20 summit that Japan will chair next year. As a result, deliberations on the question of plastics have become active in the government. For example, the Central Environment Council of the Ministry of the Environment is continuing studies to work out a “plastic resource recycling strategy.”
- As the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries and the food industry use plastic products extremely familiar to consumers such as food containers and packages, fishing gear and covering materials for protected horticulture, trends in them are drawing strong attention. The industries therefore need to aggressively address the case in question.
- Under the circumstances, Japan has already introduced legal systems for 3Rs -- reduce, reuse and recycle -- of food and other containers and packages and has put waste processing systems into operation. For example, more than 80% of PET bottles are recycled. In addition, individual industries and companies are working to reduce, recycle and reuse waste in manners matching their operations and conditions.
- Focusing on voluntary programs taken by individual companies and industry groups, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries first encourages the food industry and companies utilizing plastic products, such as containers and packages, in various forms, to facilitate responses to the case in question, based on the above-mentioned situation, from the viewpoint of further increasing the awareness of the programs and promoting them. To this end, the ministry also ties up and cooperates with cross-sectional moves within the government and industry.
- To contribute to the responses, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries will

convene meetings of an expert panel to examine the direction of industrial programs from a variety of perspectives and proactively disperse information on them. The ministry will expand the programs in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries and food industry.

2. Programs expected of the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries and the food industry.

- Referring to the following points of view, individual companies and groups will be encouraged to examine and work out voluntary programs. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries will then summarize them and disperse information on them whenever possible in order to expand them in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries and the food industry.

(1) 3Rs

○Reduction of plastics

Plastics have been used in a variety of ways in the food industry because of their user-friendliness. From the viewpoint of whether they have been used more than necessary, questions are whether the use of them can be curbed, whether a shift to alternative materials (on the assumption that the use of them does not increase environmental burdens) is possible and whether programs, such as the collection of user fees, are possible.

○Promotion of recycle and reuse

Recycling systems are playing large roles for containers and packages such as PET bottles. To further reduce their generation, one question is whether studies are possible for effective recycling mechanisms such as the use of a single material for easier recycling, utilization of recycled materials (PET bottles are recycled into food trays, etc.) and collection of used plastics at stores.

(2) Research and Development

○Technological development, support for surveys and joint development

To promote 3Rs of plastics through the introduction of alternative materials among other means, technological development and improvement and basic surveys on material makers and others are indispensable. One question is whether the food industry, a principal user of plastics, can proactively promote programs in such forms as support and joint development.

○Use of biodegradable plastics

For the question of marine debris, the reduction of generation, needless to say, is indispensable. In the case that the spill of waste is unavoidable, a shift to biodegradable materials is an important option. While biodegradable plastics are still at the stage of

technological improvement, one question is how to shift them to practical use in cooperation with material makers.

(3) Promotion of popular understanding

The national awareness of 3Rs, which is declining, needs to be increased for settling the problem of plastics. It is also indispensable for consumers to set in place the stance of separating containers and packages when they throw out their trash, as cores of plastic recycling and avoiding illegal dumping. One question is whether the food industry can increase the awareness of such activity among consumers.

(4) International cooperation

Japan has achieved certain results concerning the treatment and recycling of wastes, such as the development of related technologies and establishment of collection systems to realize the high rate of recycling PET bottles. One question is whether companies and groups can work together and cooperate, utilizing the knowledge, in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and other regions.

3 Schedule for the present (unfixed)

October 29 ○(1st meeting of) expert panel

- Current state of plastic resource recycling
- Responses to Food Industry by Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
(Examples of voluntary programs by companies and groups in the food industry)
- Introduction of program by individual groups and companies

October 30 ○Start of solicitation of voluntary programs from food companies and groups

Late November ○ (2nd meeting of) expert panel

- Introduction of voluntary programs solicited from food companies and groups (interim report)
- Measures to promote voluntary programs by food companies and groups

→Announcement of voluntary programs from food companies and groups (in sequence)

March 2019 ○(3rd meeting of) expert panel

- Introduction of voluntary programs solicited from food companies and groups
- Summarize the direction of programs involving the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industry and the food industry.

(To be convened as occasion demands)