

# the japan times

ALL THE NEWS WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR

INCORPORATING

The New York Times image: report

水 WEDNESDAY, JANUARY

## Caution as number of flu cases

Peak season for illness expected to extend through February, health ministry says

KYODO, REUTERS

An estimated 1.24 million people, mainly in southwestern and western Japan, caught

were considered external factors that weren't caused by the train companies themselves.

But the ministry has taken train efficiency in central Tokyo more seriously of late, setting up a working group specializing in improving punctuality. The group first published its research results in 2016.

"It's taken some time, but the ministry is now finally looking into the figures and analyzing what is causing train delays. This is a first step for the ministry," Umehara said.

Speaking to The Japan Times, a Railway Bureau representative who asked not to be identified said the ministry was providing funding and support to train companies, but that concrete countermeasures are being carried out by individual firms, because the reasons for delays tend to differ by operator.



A recent report issued by the transport ministry shows that train delays are frequent during Tokyo's morning rush hour. GETTY IMAGES

## Docomo to take bite out of food waste woes

ALEX MARTIN  
STAFF WRITER

NTT Docomo Inc., the nation's largest mobile carrier, will be the latest organization to take a bite out of food loss and waste, a global issue that amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars annually.

In an experiment starting Friday, users of Docomo's point-based membership program visiting a supermarket in Tokyo's Chuo Ward will be able to earn back around 20 percent of the purchase price of products with short expiration dates in the form of loyalty points.

That's 20 times the amount of "d-points" a customer can commonly accumulate through purchases. One such point is worth ¥1. The points can be used at roughly 30,000 stores nationwide. The carrier has over 63 million d-point users.

Hirofumi Yoshitani, a Docomo sales representative, said users will need to upload images of receipts and product expiration dates on EcoBuy, a smartphone app the company created, to receive the bonus points. For the test, slated to last until Feb. 28, 30 products sold in the Mini Piago Irifune 1-chome supermarket, including everyday staples like bread, milk and eggs, have been chosen. Users of e-commerce giant Rakuten Inc.'s Edy e-money service can also receive points.

"We will consider expanding the service to more stores after analyzing consumer behavior," Yoshitani told The Japan Times on Tuesday.

Docomo's move is part of an ongoing effort by Japan Inc. to reduce the immense quantity of food discarded by food companies and retailers each year.

The farm ministry estimates that 6.21 million tons of edible food was thrown out in 2014, of which slightly less than half came from households. That figure is almost twice the 3.2 million tons of food distributed by the World Food Program in 2015 to those unable to get enough to eat.

Food loss is a global phenomenon. The United Nations says 1.3 billion tons, or roughly one-third of the food produced in the world for human consumption, gets lost or wasted each year. That amounts to approximately \$680 billion in industrialized countries and \$310 billion in developing countries, it says.

In Japan, much of the blame is placed on a practice known as the one-third rule, in which manufacturers deliver goods to retailers before the first one-third term of the expiration date is up. Those that miss that deadline are generally discarded. The stores then typically sell products during the second one-third term. In the last term, goods are often sold with discounts or discarded.

Norihisa Saito, an official at the farm ministry's food recycle section, said the government has organized working groups to address the issue and has backed programs that, for example, extended the delivery deadline of beverages and snacks from one-third to half of the period before expiration dates.

Retail giant Aeon Co. last year announced

a goal to cut food waste in half by 2025. As part of its effort, it said that starting in April it plans to change how it displays the best-before date on processed food items from year, month and date, to just year and month. The move is expected to improve efficiency in managing inventory.

The change will apply to three products sold under Aeon's Topvalu brand with expiration dates exceeding a year or more after production, and will gradually extend to other products, it said.

The current situation has also spawned new kinds of businesses.

Tatsuya Sekito, founder and CEO of Glaucks Co., launched a website called Kuradashi.jp in 2015 that sells products with short expiration dates for hefty discounts.

By donating a percentage of the sales to various charities, the site appeals to companies' corporate social responsibility efforts while offering consumers very low prices.

Sekito said the website regularly features around 150 items and boasts a membership of approximately 43,500, while 420 companies are currently taking part.

On Tuesday, two boxes of snacks with a best-before date of Feb. 11 was on sale for ¥2,800, down from ¥6,000, or a 54 percent discount. Of the proceeds, ¥80 will be sent to a charitable organization.

Sekito said food waste is one of the issues the organizers are trying to tackle during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, and manufacturers are trying to be perceived as dealing with the phenomenon.