

Review

***Shokuiku* (Food and Nutrition Education) in Japan: A Comprehensive Review of the Basic Act's Evolution and its Promotion Challenges**

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ABSTRACT

The Basic Act on *Shokuiku*, enacted in Japan on June 17, 2005, is the world's first national law dedicated to “food and nutrition education”. It aims to promote healthy eating habits, food culture, and informed dietary choices throughout life. This paper analyzes the institutional framework of Japan's *Shokuiku* (Food and Nutrition Education) policies, focusing on the *Shokuiku* Basic Law and the Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku*. It examines the background of their establishment, structure, implementation systems, and current progress. In particular, special attention is given to the institutional design for promoting collaboration among government ministries, the need for cooperation among families, schools, and communities, and the evolving prospects of food and nutrition education in the digital age.

KEYWORDS

Shokuiku; Food Education; Public Health Policy; Nutrition Literacy; Sustainable Food Systems

1. Introduction

Shokuiku, meaning Food and Nutrition Education, is a Japanese word, where *shoku* and *iku* represent “food” and “education”, respectively. The history of *Shokuiku* in Japan dates back to prewar times, when it was passed down as “everyday wisdom” rooted in family education and rural lifestyles. However, with

the introduction of the school lunch program in 1947, *Shokuiku* came to be institutionally integrated into educational policy. Following Japan's period of rapid economic growth (1955-1973), dramatic changes occurred in people's lifestyles. This led to the emergence of various social issues related to food, including an increase in solitary eating and dining out,

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imbalanced nutrition, concerns over food safety, and the decline of traditional food culture.

Amidst these developments, *Shokuiku* began to regain national attention as an educational initiative aimed at fostering healthy minds and bodies through food. Particularly notable is the Japanese value system regarding food, which places great emphasis on

harmony with nature and seasonal awareness. The cultural practice of incorporating seasonal ingredients into meals and expressing gratitude for nature's bounty contributes not only to individual well-being but also to the formation of a sustainable society. Such values have been internationally recognized as a model food philosophy worthy of emulation.

Table 1: Timeline of Key Policies and Events in Japan's *Shokuiku* Promotion

Year	Event / Policy	Description	Responsible Ministry / Organization
2005	Basic Act on <i>Shokuiku</i> and First Basic Plan for the Promotion of <i>Shokuiku</i>	Established the legal foundation and national plan to promote food education across society.	Cabinet / Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF)
April, 2005	Nutrition Teacher System introduced	Introduced the nutrition teacher system in schools to provide food education.	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)
2009	Revision of the School Meals Act	Strengthened the <i>Shokuiku</i> through school meals to promote healthy eating habits.	MEXT
2011	Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of <i>Shokuiku</i>	Continued national <i>Shokuiku</i> promotion with new focus areas, such as local food and community ties.	Cabinet / MAFF
2013	Washoku registered as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage	Recognized traditional Japanese cuisine as a cultural heritage to preserve and promote.	MAFF
2016	Revision of the Dietary Guidelines	Updated dietary principles to reflect modern nutrition knowledge and lifestyles.	MEXT / MHLW / MAFF
2016	Development of the Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of <i>Shokuiku</i>	Promoted to enable citizens to maintain a healthy and culturally rich diet throughout their lives.	Cabinet / MAFF
2021	Development of the Fourth Basic Plan for the Promotion of <i>Shokuiku</i>	Promoted digital food education, sustainable food systems, and post-COVID dietary practices.	Cabinet / MAFF

This paper first clarifies the definition and significance of *Shokuiku*. It then reviews the

background, structure, and legislative process of the *Shokuiku* Basic Act, enacted in 2005. Subsequently, it examines the development of the Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku* and the structure and roles of the national, regional, and community-level systems that support *Shokuiku*. Finally, the paper considers the achievements to date and the remaining challenges, and discusses potential directions for creating more effective *Shokuiku* policies. Table 1 shows the key *Shokuiku* policies. Japan's Basic Act on *Shokuiku*, enacted in 2005, serves as the foundation for promoting food and nutrition education nationwide. It aims to foster a healthy mind and body through balanced dietary habits, respect for food culture, food safety, and sustainable food systems. The law emphasizes collaboration among families, schools, communities, and the government. Following its enactment, the Japanese government developed a series of *Shokuiku* Promotion Plans. The first plan (2006) focused on improving children's eating habits and promoting family meals. The second plan (2011) expanded efforts to local communities and emphasized food safety and local food consumption. The third plan (2016) responded to public health issues like lifestyle diseases and promoted food education across all age groups. The fourth plan (2021) addressed the impact of COVID-19, rising interest in food sustainability, and the importance of digital food literacy. Together, these efforts demonstrate Japan's commitment to fostering lifelong food literacy and healthy, sustainable dietary practices. As of now, Japan's Fifth Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku* has not yet been officially released, but discussions and preparatory work are already underway. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), expert meetings held in 2025 have outlined several key proposed directions and themes for the upcoming plan:

2. Definition and Significance of *Shokuiku*

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), *Shokuiku* is defined as “developing individuals who, through a variety of experiences, acquire knowledge about food and the ability to make appropriate food choices, and who can practice a healthy dietary lifestyle.” This concept is not limited to nutritional guidance, but is considered a fundamental component of education, alongside intellectual, moral, and physical development. It encompasses a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that promotes lifelong health, understanding of nature and life, and the preservation of traditional food culture.

3. Background of the *Shokuiku* Basic Act

Japan experienced a period of rapid economic growth from the late 1950s to the 1970s, during which its GDP increased dramatically and national income levels rose significantly. As a result of this economic development and expanded consumption, the Japanese diet underwent substantial changes, with high-fat, high-calorie foods becoming commonplace. Consequently, from the 1980s onward, disruptions in eating habits such as unbalanced diets and solitary eating became widespread, and the incidence of lifestyle-related diseases escalated. At the same time, a series of food safety issues—including Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE)—combined with a growing dependence on imported foods, a decline in the consumption of domestically produced ingredients, and the erosion of traditional food culture, created a pressing need across society to revisit and revitalize food-related education.

Along with economic globalization, Japan's food self-sufficiency rate (on a calorie basis) dropped sharply from 73% in 1965 to around 40% by the year 2000. As distribution systems emphasizing “low-cost, high-volume” supply became widespread, local agriculture declined, and the diversity of Japanese food culture was gradually lost. Moreover, the increasing burden of medical expenses on the national

budget drew attention to the importance of preventive approaches through improved dietary practices. Despite growing material affluence, challenges such as diminished mental well-being and difficulty in maintaining a healthy lifestyle underscored the renewed significance of *Shokuiku*. So, the "*Shokuiku*" policy aimed at fostering healthy dietary habits, food literacy, and sustainable food culture. Its promotion

system operates through a multi-level, collaborative framework involving government agencies, schools, local communities, and private sectors. This awareness led to growing calls for a comprehensive *Shokuiku* framework encompassing households, schools, and communities (MAFF. *What is "Shokuiku (Food Education)"*. <https://www.maff.go.jp/e/pdf/Shokuiku.pdf>).

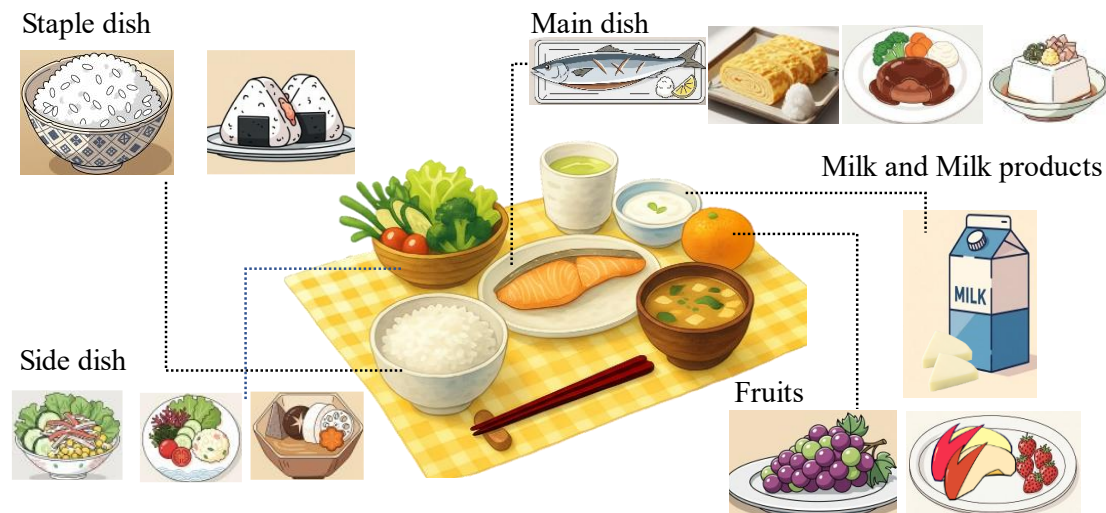


Figure 1. Example of Japanese dietary pattern

The “Japanese dietary pattern” refers to a nutritionally balanced diet centered around a staple dish—typically cooked rice—accompanied by a variety of main dishes, including fish, meat, eggs, and soybeans, as well as side dishes featuring vegetables, seaweed, beans, dairy products, fruits, and tea. This diagram was modified from the “Recommendation of Japanese Dietary Pattern” published on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), (https://www.maff.go.jp/e/policies/tech_res/shokuiku.html).

In response to these social and structural issues, the *Shokuiku* Basic Act was conceived as a legal framework to promote and disseminate *Shokuiku* nationwide through coordinated efforts among relevant government ministries and agencies. The law was not merely intended to address issues of nutrition and health; it also served as a form of cultural policy

that reexamined the question of how people should live meaningfully within a materially affluent society. Before the enactment of the *Shokuiku* Basic Act, ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), and MAFF had implemented independent food-related policies. However, coordination among these ministries was insufficient. For instance, school lunches fell under the jurisdiction of MEXT (*Japanese school lunches and Shokuiku*. https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20230920-mxt_kenshoku-000008678_2.pdf), lifestyle disease prevention was managed by MHLW, and the promotion of local food consumption (*chisan-chisho*) was overseen by MAFF. This compartmentalization, often referred to as “vertical administration,” hindered the development of integrated and coherent policies across education, health, and agriculture. The

Shokuiku Basic Act thus marked a critical turning point in overcoming these administrative barriers.

4. Legislative Process and Structure of the *Shokuiku* Basic Act

The legislative process leading to the enactment of the *Shokuiku* Basic Act began with a preliminary investigation conducted by the National Diet in 2002. In 2003, an interim report was published, and discussions on the necessity of legalizing *Shokuiku* were initiated within the Diet. In January 2004, the Liberal Democratic Party formally established a project team dedicated to drafting the *Shokuiku* Basic Act, with participation from relevant ministries such as MAFF, MEXT, and MHLW. The bill was subsequently deliberated by the Cabinet and the Diet and was officially enacted on July 15, 2005.

The *Shokuiku* Basic Act consists of 33 articles and is broadly divided into the following five structural components (MAFF. *Basic Act on Shokuiku (Food and Nutrition Education)* (Act No. 63 of June 17, 2005).

https://www.maff.go.jp/e/policies/tech_res/attach/pdf/shokuiku-19.pdf):

Part 1. Purpose and Basic Principles (Articles 1–8)

Article 1 defines the purpose of the law as “nurturing a sound body and mind and fostering rich humanity among the people,” and stipulates the comprehensive and systematic promotion of *Shokuiku* to achieve this goal. Articles 2 through 8 articulate the basic principles of *Shokuiku* from multiple perspectives, including the promotion of physical and mental health, cultivation of gratitude, and harmony with traditional food culture and nature.

Part 2. Responsibilities of Stakeholders (Articles 9–13)

This section outlines the responsibilities of various stakeholders involved in the promotion of *Shokuiku*: the national government (Article 9), local governments (Article 10), educators and agricultural,

forestry, and fishery workers (Article 11), food-related businesses (Article 12), and the citizens themselves (Article 13). These articles reflect the idea that *Shokuiku* is a shared responsibility across all sectors of society—not limited to administrative bodies or specialists.

Part 3. Implementation and Evaluation of Measures (Articles 14–18)

Articles 14 and 15 stipulate the legal and financial measures to be undertaken by the national government, as well as its obligation to submit annual reports to the Diet. Articles 16 through 18 outline the formulation and coordination of the Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku* at the national level and corresponding plans at the prefectural and municipal levels.

Part 4. Specific Policy Measures (Articles 19–25)

This section specifies the basic directions for *Shokuiku* initiatives to be implemented by national and local governments. Key measures include the promotion of *Shokuiku* within households (Article 19), educational activities in schools and childcare centers (Article 21), encouragement of regional agricultural and fisheries experiences (Articles 20 and 23), support for the preservation of food culture (Article 24), and dissemination of information and research related to food safety and nutrition (Article 25). These provisions are based on the philosophy that *Shokuiku* should be embedded in every aspect of daily life.

Part 5. Promotion Council and Institutional Framework (Articles 26–33)

Articles 26 and onward stipulate the structure, responsibilities, and operational policies of the *Shokuiku* Promotion Council, which is established within MAFF. The council is chaired by MAFF and comprises representatives from related ministries and agencies, as well as experts in the field. Local governments, including prefectures and municipalities, are also encouraged to establish their

own *Shokuiku* promotion councils, thereby laying the foundation for community-based *Shokuiku* initiatives. Altogether, the law's structure—encompassing its objectives and principles, stakeholder responsibilities, implementation measures, and institutional systems—forms a comprehensive framework that serves as the central legal foundation for Japan's *Shokuiku* policy.

5. Establishment of the Food Education Promotion System

Following the enactment of the Food Education Basic Act, Japan has gradually developed a systematic framework to promote food education across society (Figure 1). At the core of this promotion system lies collaboration and the sharing of responsibilities among various stakeholders, including the national government, local governments, private organizations, and educational institutions.

At the national level, the central coordinating body is the Food Education Promotion Council established within MAFF. Chaired by MAFF, the council comprises officials from related ministries such as MEXT, MHLW, the Consumer Affairs Agency, and the Cabinet Office, as well as academic experts on

food education. This council is responsible for developing the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Food Education, evaluating its implementation, and facilitating information sharing and research, thereby functioning as the policy command center for national initiatives.

At the local level, prefectures and municipalities are encouraged to establish their own food education promotion councils, tailored to regional circumstances. These bodies develop localized food education plans and implement age-appropriate initiatives in cooperation with public health centers, boards of education, agricultural departments, local agricultural cooperatives (JA), medical institutions, and schools.

Thus, Japan's food education system is characterized by a multi-layered network structure that promotes cooperation between central and local governments, as well as between public and private sectors. Families, schools, communities, industries, non-profit organizations, and civic groups are all expected to play a meaningful role within this collaborative framework.

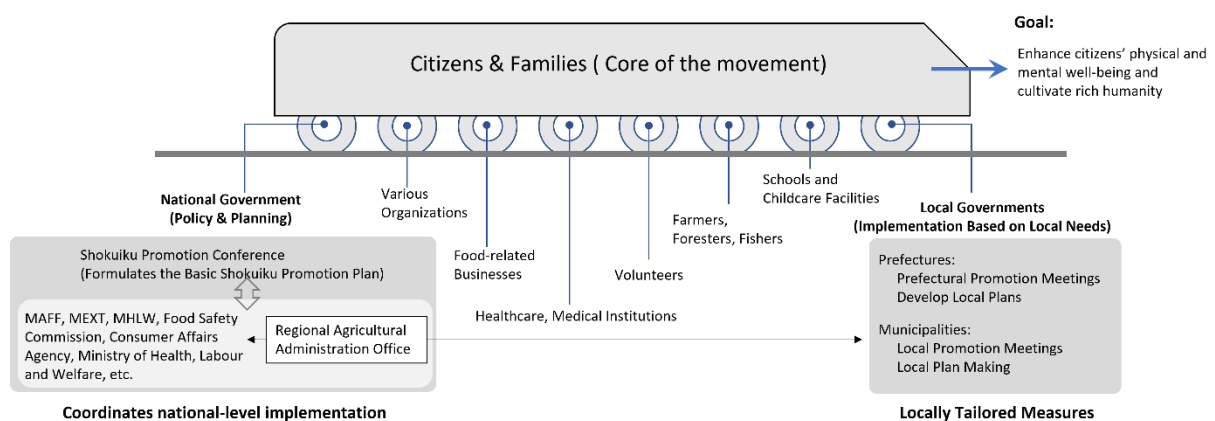


Figure 2. The Promotion System of Japan Basic Act on *Shokuiku*.

6. Development of the Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku*

In accordance with Article 16 of the *Shokuiku* Basic

Act, the Japanese government has formulated a Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku* every five years since 2006. As of 2025, the fourth plan is currently in

effect (MAFF, 2021). The Fourth Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku* (https://www.maff.go.jp/j/syokuiku/attach/pdf/kannr_ennhou-30.pdf). These plans set forth the medium-term direction of Japan's *Shokuiku* policy, establishing objectives and strategies in response to the changing social context and emerging challenges of each period.

First Plan (2006–2010):

The first plan served as the foundational strategy following the law's enactment, aiming to widely disseminate the philosophy and goals of *Shokuiku* among the general public. Key priorities included reducing breakfast skipping, promoting local production for local consumption (*chisan-chisho*), and strengthening *Shokuiku* in both households and schools. Twelve quantitative targets were introduced to measure progress. The plan also emphasized coordination with the newly implemented nutrition teacher (*eiyo kyōyu*) system, enhancing hands-on *Shokuiku* in schools.

Second Plan (2011–2015):

Building on the first plan's achievements, the second plan placed greater emphasis on promoting family meals, providing agricultural and fisheries experiences, and fostering healthy eating habits among young people. In the wake of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, food's role in regional reconstruction gained importance, leading to the promotion of locally rooted programs and the revitalization of community food connections. Information provision and food literacy—such as understanding food labels—were also identified as priority areas.

Third Plan (2016–2020):

The third plan prioritized extending healthy life expectancy in response to Japan's rapidly aging population. It focused on encouraging nutritionally balanced diets to prevent lifestyle-related diseases. The plan also emphasized the preservation of food

culture, exchange with rural communities, and promotion of environmentally conscious eating behaviors, thereby redefining the significance of *Shokuiku* from a multifaceted perspective. Additionally, evaluation mechanisms were strengthened through the introduction of key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess policy effectiveness, institutionalizing the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle.

Fourth Plan (2021–2025):

Formulated in response to social changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the fourth plan presents three central pillars: (1) promotion of lifelong *Shokuiku*, (2) harmony between sustainable food systems and the environment, and (3) innovation in *Shokuiku* through digital technology. Sixteen numerical targets were established, such as increasing the number of people who desire and practice family meals, raising the percentage of youth who eat breakfast daily, expanding the use of local ingredients in school lunches, improving vegetable and fruit intake, increasing the number of registered *Shokuiku* volunteers, fostering successors to traditional cuisine, and raising the proportion of individuals actively reducing food loss.

The plan also emphasizes digital approaches, including the development of ICT-based teaching materials, the implementation of online *Shokuiku* courses, and the dissemination of food-related information to younger generations via social media and apps. This highlights a shift toward digital innovation in *Shokuiku* (Cabinet Office, 2021). Now The main discussion points for the formulation of the 5th Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku* (Food and Nutrition Education) (2026–2030) are as follows: 1) Promotion of food education in the home; 2) Promotion of food and nutrition education in schools, nursery schools, and other educational institutions; 3) Promotion of food and nutrition education in local communities; 4) Development of food and nutrition

education promotion campaigns; 5) Promotion of interaction between producers and consumers, and revitalization of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries in harmony with the environment; 6) Support for activities to preserve and pass down food culture; 7) Promotion of surveys, research, information dissemination, and international exchange related to food safety, nutrition, and other aspects of dietary life (MAFF, 2025). Main Discussion Points for the Formulation of the Fifth Basic Plan for the Promotion of

Shokuiku

(https://www.maff.go.jp/j/syokuiku/kaigi/attach/pdf/r07_01-6.pdf (in Japanese)).

From now on, the promotion of food education is expected to play an increasingly important role not only within Japan but also in connection with the global environment, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and contributing internationally.

7. Achievements and Challenges

Two decades have passed since the enactment of the *Shokuiku* Basic Act, during which various initiatives centered around schools, households, and local communities have been implemented. One notable achievement is the institutionalization of *Shokuiku* within the school system. The establishment of the nutrition teacher system and the effective use of school lunches for educational activities have contributed to increased interest among students in food-related topics and greater awareness of nutritional balance. As of May 1, 2024, a total of 6,945 nutrition teachers were assigned to public elementary and junior high schools nationwide (MAFF, 2025). The 2024 White paper on Food and Nutrition Education in Japanese, (https://www.maff.go.jp/j/syokuiku/wpaper/attach/pdf/r6_wpaper-24.pdf). However, considering that there are currently over 28,000 elementary and junior high schools in Japan, the number of nutrition teachers remains insufficient. In addition,

community-based efforts utilizing local resources—such as the promotion of locally produced ingredients and the preservation of regional cuisines—have taken root, fostering a culture of *Shokuiku* that is integrated into regional life. Other positive developments include the promotion of family meals, increased public awareness of food loss reduction, and reported contributions to the extension of healthy life expectancy.

Nevertheless, several challenges persist. Socioeconomic disparities and differences in educational opportunities have created unequal access to *Shokuiku*, leading to what is now recognized as a “*Shokuiku* gap.” Some municipalities, particularly those with limited human or financial resources, struggle to formulate and implement effective *Shokuiku* plans. Moreover, outreach to adults and the elderly remains limited, and the concept of lifelong *Shokuiku* has yet to be fully internalized across generations. Notably, among men in their twenties, interest in food education falls below 70%, indicating a noticeable gap in awareness. In addition, evidence on the effectiveness of food education remains insufficient. Moreover, systems for quantitatively measuring its outcomes and evaluating the effectiveness of related initiatives are not yet fully developed. As such, the effectiveness of the PDCA cycle in *Shokuiku* is still a subject of concern. Going forward, there is a pressing need to design evidence-based policies and develop flexible strategies that can adapt to diverse lifestyles.

8. *Shokuiku* as a Framework for Global Food Education and Sustainable Development

Japan’s *Shokuiku* philosophy and policy framework extend far beyond basic nutritional instruction. At its core, *Shokuiku* redefines the role of food as a foundational element of “the power to live,” encompassing ethical, cultural, and holistic values. These include appreciation for food, harmony with

nature, and the preservation of traditional food culture—all rooted in the pursuit of physical, mental, and social well-being.

Implemented particularly through school-based programs, *Shokuiku* has demonstrated significant societal impact. It has contributed to the healthy development of children, enhanced academic performance, and fostered essential social skills. Moreover, initiatives such as the promotion of local production for local consumption (*chisan-chisho*) and hands-on experiences in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries have produced positive ripple effects in regional economies and rural revitalization efforts. By promoting healthy lifestyles and the prevention of lifestyle-related diseases, *Shokuiku* also supports increased healthy life expectancy and the reduction of healthcare costs, aligning closely with national welfare policies.

While Japan's *Shokuiku* provides a comprehensive and culturally embedded approach, similar efforts have been made internationally to integrate nutrition and education through school-based initiatives. The United States, for example, established the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in 1946 to improve children's nutrition and promote healthy eating habits through government-supported school meals (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2024). Both the NSLP and *Shokuiku* share the goal of enhancing children's health and food literacy, yet *Shokuiku* extends its scope further to include lifelong learning, community engagement, and the preservation of food culture—demonstrating a more holistic model of food education.

On the global stage, Japan's *Shokuiku* philosophy and institutional model offer universal applicability in addressing shared challenges. It aligns closely with several SDGs, particularly Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Furthermore, the spirit of *Washoku*—recognized by

UNESCO in 2013 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage—is intrinsically linked to *Shokuiku* and advances peace, human rights, and environmental awareness through food culture.

Thus, Japan's *Shokuiku* policy serves not only as a domestic model integrating health, education, culture, and regional development but also as a globally transferable educational framework. It offers a meaningful pathway toward building sustainable, resilient, and harmonious societies.

Grounded in legislation, *Shokuiku* is a comprehensive and evolving national initiative designed to empower individuals to make informed dietary choices while appreciating the cultural, social, and environmental dimensions of food. Each iteration of the national plan responds to emerging social changes and public health priorities, demonstrating adaptive policy development.

Promoting *Shokuiku* internationally fosters cross-cultural dialogue on food, health, and well-being, enabling diverse societies to pursue locally relevant yet globally connected approaches. Japan's experience provides a robust model for structured food education policies adaptable across different cultural and national contexts.

In today's increasingly interconnected world, where global health and environmental challenges are deeply intertwined, expanding the philosophy and practice of *Shokuiku* is not only timely—it is essential for nurturing a healthier, more informed, and sustainable global population.

Conclusion

Japan's *Shokuiku* policy provides a comprehensive, multidimensional framework that integrates health promotion, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. By positioning food as a core element of individual and societal well-being, *Shokuiku* extends beyond nutritional guidance to encompass ethical, environmental, and community dimensions

of dietary behavior. Its implementation across educational institutions and local communities demonstrates the effectiveness of a coordinated, policy-based approach to fostering lifelong food literacy and public health. Moreover, *Shokuiku* offers valuable implications for global food education initiatives, exemplifying how culturally grounded policies can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and promote resilient, health-conscious societies. As global challenges related to nutrition, environment, and health intensify, the *Shokuiku* model stands as a significant reference point for designing integrated food education systems worldwide.

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