

Industry News - AM South Korean FMD leading to more vegetarians: reports By [Richard Smith](#) on 3/11/2011

Media in South Korea reported a number of people in the country were turning vegetarian as a reaction to the foot-and-mouth (FMD) epidemic.

However, major meat-producing countries' exporting organizations' representatives in South Korea told **Meatingplace** the articles give them no major concern.

Articles about vegetarianism appeared on the websites of *The Korea Times* and *JoongAng Ilbo* newspapers. As these are translations of articles in major vernacular daily newspapers, their appearance indicates a significant amount of interest in meatless diets in the country. Other Korean-language media may have carried such reports.

There are approximately 500,000 vegetarians in South Korea, about one percent of the population. Those ranks are swelling because of the 2008 BSE scare, when consumer groups led candlelit vigils against U.S. beef, and the current FMD epidemic, *JoongAng Ilbo* reported.

The number of visitors per day to the Korean Vegetarianism Union (KVU) website (www.vege.or.kr) rose from 3,000-4,000 to 15,000 after the media reported on FMD and the resulting mass cullings of cattle and pigs. "Many people have gone vegetarian after being shocked by scenes of unethical killing of livestock," KVU head Won-Bok Lee said.

There are 50 vegetarian restaurants operating in Seoul. As more people turn to vegetarianism, some go to group meetings and share tips on vegetarian recipes. Vegetarian clubs are already operating at Seoul National, Sogang and Hanyang universities. They usually have meetings at vegetarian restaurants near the schools and run seminars on vegetarianism.

Seoul National University's music department serves a vegetarian buffet with main dishes made of grains and vegetables. The menu included Korean corn pancakes, a mushroom and red pepper stir-fry, and rice cake soup. The soup was brewed with mushroom, instead of the conventional beef.

The non-profit organization Vegedoctor was set up last year by six doctors who shared the idea of vegetarianism as the best preventive medicine. The organization has grown to over 70 doctors, dentists and oriental medicine doctors, and plans to hold a founding ceremony soon, *The Korea Times* reported.

Vegedoctor took its inspiration from the U.S.-based Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, founded in 1985 to encourage people to become vegetarians, said Doctor Jin-Mok Kim, chairman of the organization's preparatory committee. Kim said Vegedoctor will devote itself to enhance the health of the public as its main activity by informing people of the "harmful effects" of meat diets and benefits of vegetarian diet.

Meat and Livestock Australia's Korea regional manager said such reports are just a reaction to FMD. Vegetarians are a rare breed in South Korea, Jim Lim said. "In the 20 years I've been in Korea, I've never bumped into a vegetarian," Australia-raised Lim said.

The U.S. Meat Export Federation's South Korea public relations' senior manager echoed Lim. "There is no serious anti-meat sentiment which causes any backlash against meat because of FMD," Min Park said. Still, the government has announced that it's considering requiring vaccinations against FMD every six months for 3-5 years. This comes on the heels of the nation's worst-ever outbreak, during which health authorities killed more than 2 million animals this past winter to contain the epidemic.

Beef + Lamb New Zealand's Japan and South Korea marketing manager said although a few articles have appeared in the media and some consumers seem to be reassessing their attitude towards meat, there is no evidence of any large-scale consumer backlash against meat because of FMD. "Moreover, the likelihood of any media-influenced negative campaign against meat seems slim," John Hundleby said.

Canada Beef Export Federation's Korea director said he expected FMD would cause such reactions against meat, but he does not think they are strong enough to seriously affect consumption. "But FMD spreading can affect meat consumption whether vegetarianism gets influential or not," Hwan-Kyu Kim said.