

# Only Extraordinary Measures for Rice Can Bring Prices Down

物価の上昇が続く中、日本ではコメの価格が深刻な水準に達しています。これを受けて政府は「随意契約」という方式で、特定のスーパーなどに直接備蓄米を売却する制度に踏み切ったそうです。消費者への影響を抑える一方で、農家の将来の安定はどう守っていくべきでしょうか。あなたなら、どんな支援策が必要だと思いますか？



## 1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

Rice prices have soared to twice the level of a year ago. That has created a serious situation that continues across the nation. Given the need to **respond** to the crisis facing consumers, it is appropriate for the government to take extraordinary measures.

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Shinjiro Koizumi has announced a new bidding method that will be used for the release of government **stockpiled** rice into the market. MAFF has bypassed traditional competitive bidding in this case. Instead, it is selling directly to major supermarkets and other retailers through discretionary contracts.

The aim is to have stockpiled rice on store shelves selling for about ¥2,000 JPY (\$13.80 USD) per five-kilogram bag by early June. This marks a departure from the policy of Taku Eto, Koizumi's predecessor as agriculture minister. Eto rejected involvement in setting prices based on the principle of government non-intervention in the market.

Continued on next page.

Source: Only Extraordinary Measures for Rice Can Bring Prices Down  
JAPAN Forward

# 1. Article

Koizumi's recognition that soaring prices "might accelerate the shift away from domestically produced rice" is certainly valid. Although the impact on farmers struggling with rising production costs must be considered, restoring prices to an [affordable](#) level makes sense.

Under the previous approach using preestablished contracts, the price could not be lowered even by releasing stockpiled rice. Next, the question is whether the government can deeply reflect on this point and implement a new system that resolves the problem without confusion.

Dealing with the rice issue is the core of the measures the Ishiba administration must take to combat rising consumer prices. It should not be overlooked that Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Minister Koizumi will bear a large share of the responsibility for its success or failure.

Under the previous competitive bidding system, stockpiled rice was sold to the highest bidder. That made it difficult for retail prices to fall. Under the no-bid arrangement, the government can determine the price and other terms and then choose willing contract partners at its discretion. That should improve the prospects for easing prices.

In addition to the introduction of discretionary contracts, under the new arrangement, buyers will also change from collection agents, such as the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations, JA ZEN-NOH, to large [retailers](#) closer to the level of actual consumers. We would like to see the government select suitable vendors to ensure that stockpiled rice is distributed nationwide.

In order to quickly get the stockpiled rice to consumers, distribution, milling, and other necessary operations must also proceed smoothly. The government should provide detailed support to retailers, not limited to the costs of shipping goods to rural areas.

The key will be whether or not the retail price of all rice, not just stockpiled rice, can be controlled. That would include brand-name rice. Prime Minister Ishiba intends to lower the average price for a five-kilogram bag, which is currently over ¥4,200 (\$29), to the ¥3,000 (\$20.50) range. However, wholesalers and other parties have stock that they [acquired](#) at high prices.

Will their prices fall enough to reach Ishiba's target level? Consumers will not accept a two-tier structure with sharply different prices for stockpiled rice versus other products.

## 2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. **respond** (～に) 対応する、反応する

The government **responded** to the situation immediately after the earthquake ended.

2. **stockpile** (～を) 備蓄する、蓄える

It is a good idea to **stockpile** a week's worth of food and water for an emergency.

3. **affordable** (価格が) 手ごろな、入手しやすい

The city needs to build more **affordable** housing.

4. **retailer** 小売業者

Older **retailers** have moved a lot of their sales online.

5. **acquire** (～を) 手に入れる、取得する

I need to **acquire** a better laptop to do my work.

## 3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. Why are tons of stockpiled rice being released directly to supermarkets and retailers?
2. Why did minister Eto refuse to set the prices of rice?
3. What are Prime Minister Ishiba's plans for brand-name rice?
4. Do you feel it is acceptable for the government to control the cost of rice instead of the market?
5. Does the Japanese government have the money or the resources to "provide detailed support to retailers"?

## 4. 「おじさんトレカ」福岡で大流行 子供たちのヒーローは実在男性 特技を武器に熱い闘い

米価が1年前の2倍まで急騰する深刻な事態が続いている。消費者への危機対応が求められていることを踏まえれば、異例の措置を講じることに妥当性があるといえる。

小泉進次郎農林水産相が政府備蓄米の放出で、従来の競争入札をやめ、大手スーパーなどを任意に選ぶ随意契約で直接売り渡す新たな入札方式を発表した。

これにより、6月初旬にも5キロで2千円程度の備蓄米が店頭に並ぶことを目指す。市場介入しないとの原則で国の価格関与を否定した江藤拓前農水相時の方針を転換するものである。

価格高騰で「国産米離れが加速しかねない」とする小泉氏の認識はもっともだ。生産費高騰に苦慮する農業者への影響は考慮すべきだとしても適切な価格水準に戻すことは理に適（かな）う。

従前の手法では、備蓄米を放出しても価格を下げられなかった。その点を深く反省した上で新方式を混乱なく実施し、事態を打開できるかが問われる。

コメ問題への対応は石破茂政権がなすべき物価高対策の核心だ。石破首相や小泉氏は、その成否に大きな責任を負っていることを忘れてはならない。

これまでの競争入札では、高値を提示した業者に備蓄米を売り渡すことになるため、店頭価格が下がりにくい指摘されていた。随意契約ならば、国が価格などの条件を決めた上で任意に受注業者を選べるため、価格低下を見込みやすくなる。

随意契約の導入と併せて、売り渡し先についても、全国農業協同組合連合会（JA全農）のような集荷業者ではなく、消費者に近い大手小売業者とした。適切に業者を選定し、全国にあまねく備蓄米が行き渡るようにしてもらいたい。

消費者の手元へと迅速に備蓄米を供給するためには、配送や精米なども円滑に進めなくてはならない。国は、地方に輸送する際の費用に限らず小売業者をきめ細かく支援すべきだ。

次頁に続く

出典: 備蓄米の随意契約 価格全体の低下が重要だ  
JAPAN Forward



## 4. 「おじさんトレカ」福岡で大流行 子供たちのヒーローは実在男性 特技を武器に熱い闘い

肝心なのは、備蓄米だけでなくブランド米も含めたコメ全体の店頭価格を抑制できるかどうかだ。石破首相は足元で4200円を超える平均価格を3千円台に下げる意向だが、卸売業者などには高値で入荷した在庫がある。それらの販売価格も十分に下がるのか。備蓄米とそれ以外で価格が二極化するようでは消費者の納得は得られまい。



出典: 備蓄米の随意契約 価格全体の低下が重要だ  
[JAPAN Forward](#)