

Fried chicken in space: Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency certifies freeze-dried product as space food

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The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) has approved Lawson's fried chicken (karaage kun) as a space food for astronauts after three years of testing.

Karaage kun is a popular hot bite-sized chicken snack found in most convenience stores in Japan. Lawson first sold karaage kun in April 1986, made from chicken breast meat.

Lawson started working with JAXA in February 2017 after feedback from astronauts based at the International Space Station (ISS) who wanted more meat products during their missions.

This initiative was conceived to develop karaage kun into a comfort food for Japanese astronauts at the ISS, to help relieve the mental stress of long-haul missions and hopefully maintain and improve work efficiency.

This is the first such convenience store product said to achieve such certification from JAXA.

Winner winner, chicken dinner

According to JAXA, foods used on the ISS should meet the requirements including long preservation, resistance to flight and microgravity stresses stipulated in the ISS Food Plan, a standard document for space food supply to the ISS.

In an email statement to *FoodNavigator-Asia*, Satoshi Sano, associate senior researcher, Human Spaceflight Technology Directorate at JAXA said: *"The Japanese space foods are proposed by food manufacturers and certified as Japanese space food if they meet the criteria according to the Japanese space food certification standard established by JAXA."*

Among the Japanese space food standard include requiring food manufacturing equipment to be located in Japan.

According to Sano, in order to be certified as a space food, products must remain safe to eat after 1.5 years or more of storage.

After three years of testing, he said Lawson's freeze-dried karaage kun has an 18-month shelf-life, qualifying it as a space food. Each pack contains 66.6 kcal.

Sano explained the product comes in bite-sized freeze-dried form and can be consumed without any prior preparation.

Comments from the public on this space fried chicken news were buzzing online, with some individuals pointing its potential as an emergency food for disasters as it can be consumed without water or fire.

Karaage kun is the latest product to join the ranks of 39 Japanese certified foods from 24 manufacturers. Among these space foods include Morinaga Milk Industry's nutritional milk powder, Takara Foods' sardines, LOTTE's chewing gum, Nissin Foods Holdings' ramen, and Hotei Foods' canned chicken.

These snacks aim to provide emotional support to Japanese astronauts on long space missions.

Sano said there were no plans to develop more Lawson's convenience foods for space, but the sky (space) is the limit.