

Japanese astronaut plans to grow space cucumbers

June 6 2011, By PETER LEONARD , Associated Press



Japanese astronaut Satoshi Furukawa, crew member of the mission to the International Space Station, ISS, waves before a news conference at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, Monday, June 6, 2011. The start of the new Soyuz mission to the International Space Station is scheduled on Wednesday, June 8. (AP Photo/Dmitry Lovetsky)

(AP) -- Cucumbers may be out of favor on earth, but a Japanese astronaut said Monday that he plans to harvest the vegetable on board the International Space Station.

Satoshi Furukawa is set to blast off early Wednesday for a half-year stint in orbit along with [Russian cosmonaut](#) Sergei Volkov and NASA astronaut Michael Fossum.

Speaking about experiments scheduled for the next few months,

Furukawa said he would be growing [cucumbers](#) as part of ongoing studies on how future space explorers will be able to harvest their own food.

"We wish we were able to eat the cucumbers, but we have not been allowed," Furukawa, a doctor, said at a news conference.

Millions of concerned consumers across Europe have been spurning cucumbers in the wake of an E. coli outbreak blamed on contaminated vegetables that has killed 22 and sickened more than 2,200.

Mindful of their own health ahead of their mission, astronauts at the Russia-leased Baikonur launch pad in Kazakhstan remain in strict isolation in the days ahead of any [launch](#) to avoid exposure to infection. Furukawa, Fossum and Volkov sat behind a plate of protective glass as they talked about the highlights of their upcoming mission.

Fossum said he was ready for the heavy workload that will come with being in orbit as the U.S. [shuttle Atlantis](#) makes its final voyage to the space laboratory in July.

"There is always an adaptation time when we get there, but we are going to hit the ground running. We have to," he said.

South Dakota native Fossum, 53, is the oldest member of the outbound crew and has been closely involved with the design and assembly of the [International Space Station](#) over its brief history.

"(I) helped design the space station, I helped build it on two assembly flights, and now to have the opportunity to live there is just amazing," he said.

Fossum said that while the shuttles had completed their purpose of

helping to assemble the space station, "we are going to miss the shuttle's capabilities, because ... they are awesome and unmatched."

The grounding of the shuttles will leave Russia's Soyuz spacecraft as the only means of ferrying crew to the station and back to Earth.

Reprising the food-related theme, Volkov said the Russian segment will be planting tomatoes and joked that he hoped astronauts might be granted permission to prepare a salad. He added that "to be honest, what I would really like is fried potatoes."

Japan has led the way in trying to raise culinary standards in space. Japanese astronaut Soichi Noguchi, who is in Baikonur escorting Furukawa's family, even made his own sushi while on the space station last year.

Fossum, Furukawa and Volkov are due to return to earth in the middle of November.

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Citation: Japanese astronaut plans to grow space cucumbers (2011, June 6) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-japanese-astronaut-space-cucumbers.html>

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