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Do Not Approve Genetically Modified Salmon!

February 8, 2013

Consumers Union of Japan opposes GM salmon, and sent the following appeal to US FDA as part of their Public Comment (deadline Feb. 25, 2013):

Re: Docket No. FDA-2011-N-0899 Genetically Engineered Salmon

We the consumers in Japan are strongly opposed to the approval of genetically modified (GM) salmon. This GM fish has been said to pose no risks to the environment or as food, according to the December 12, 2012 evaluation by FDA. However, we regard it to be very unsafe. We ask that you do not approve it, for the following reasons.

If this GM salmon escape to the environment in large quantities, it will cause genetic contamination. Although the company that developed this GM salmon claims that it can be bred safely, it cannot be said that the technology to produce infertile eggs is 100% certain, and the possibility that the reproductive ability recovers is high. Consequently, there is a high probability that diffusion of the GM trait will occur.

It is our understanding that this GM fish will not be sold as such, but rather the eggs. It will then almost certainly spread to other countries around the world. Should this happen, the risk of contamination will be further amplified, as recovery is difficult once the fish have been released into the environment.

This GM salmon will eat more fish at a faster rate than ordinary salmon because its growth is faster. It means that this GM salmon will increase the risk of damaging fishing resources and cause damage to biological diversity. In addition, growing fast means that this GM salmon will accumulate the toxic concentration of growth hormones in the environment faster and it has higher growth hormones. How will you assess the risks that consumers will be exposed to when eating fish with higher levels of growth hormones? We are concerned about the negative health effects this may have on the people eating GM salmon.

Japan imports large amount of fish. If this GM salmon is approved and starts to appear in markets around the world, it will create confusion among Japanese consumers. We do not want to eat transgenic fish, and we sincerely ask that you do not approve this GM salmon.

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BSE In Brazil

Open letter: Our demands regarding mad cow disease in Brazil

To: Agriculture Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi

From: Food Safety Citizens' Watch

January 9, 2013

Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) announced on December 8, 2012 on its homepage that beef from Brazil was infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and that import of beef products from Brazil were banned from that same day. The following are problems regarding the slow response which we would like MAFF's Risk Management Agency to reply to before January 21, 2013.

1) Why was the news about the Brazilian cow that died from BSE in December 2010 (at age 13 years) not announced until December 8, 2012?

2) Between 2010 and 2012, Brazilian beef products were imported for two years. 935 tons of heat-processed products were imported in 2010, and 1435 tons in 2011, an increase from 17% to 21% of the total imports. Please clarify how the beef products were distributed and consumed around Japan.

3) Please respond to the public regarding your ideas about taking responsibility for the risks associated with BSE and vCJD.

4) The import ban for beef products from Brazil will be kept in place until March, 2013 but until the results are presented and the consultation of the Food Safety Commission has reduced the risk, the import ban should be maintained. We also note that OIE still puts Brazil in the category of "negligible risk countries" and wonder why OIE is reluctant to change Brazil's status. In addition, we strongly urge Japan to require all imported beef products to be fully investigated as soon as possible.

Signed: Kamiyama Michiko, FSCW

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After the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster: The Roles of Consumers and Farmers

Symposium: What Can We Eat? Farmers and Consumers Reaching Out to Each Other

The Three Mile Island nuclear accident that took place in the United States on March 28, 1979 had some impact on Japan and influenced the anti-nuclear movement here, especially in areas with nuclear power plant construction sites. Media, however, continued to treat nuclear issues only as regional issues, and did not give much attention to the overall, nationwide concerns.

The April 26, 1986 disaster at Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union was an even bigger shock for Japan. The radioactive clouds reached the country and

caused pollution of Japanese agricultural products.

Contaminated food is a particularly serious matter for young children and pregnant women, with possible consequences for coming generations as well. The consumer movement and anti-nuclear power plant activists have pointed out similar problems resulting from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant disaster after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan.

However, there is another aspect to the meltdowns here in Japan. After Chernobyl, farmers and consumers in Japan did not take steps to cooperate and deal with radioactive contamination, in spite of the fact that agricultural lands and the ocean were polluted. After the Fukushima disaster, farmers and consumers have ended up divided on the issues, as the perpetrators – the government and TEPCO – have strongly continued to promote nuclear power over the years.

For over 40 years, the consumer movement demanded Japan to abolish nuclear power plants in order to avoid accidents. What is our role now? Even I could never imagine such a situation after an accident has actually occurred.

Our biggest challenge is how to protect the children. We need to think clearly about how to deal with the issues that divide the producers and the consumers regarding the crops and foods that have been contaminated with radioactivity. This means we need to pursue the responsibility of the government and TEPCO, and at the same time realize a nuclear-free future for everyone.

The consumer movement is not simply a movement for buying, but also a movement to actively support producers, support Japan's agriculture and fisheries, who can provide farm-fresh food, through partnerships that provide locally grown ingredients. We are on the verge of a crisis. The question that many are asking is how we can rise to the challenge and continue to ensure that we have safe and reliable food, while also continuing to support the farmers?

Will it be possible to create solid relationships between farmers and consumers? The purpose of this symposium is to involve many people who want to discuss the future of food and agriculture in Japan.

Amagasa Keisuke (CUJ Co-chair)

Symposium: What Can We Eat? Farmers and Consumers Reaching Out to Each Other

Time: January 19, 2013, 13:30-17:00 (Sat.)

Place: Bunkyo-ku Shimin Center 2 Floor (Room A)

Entrance: 800 Yen

Panelists:

Ono Kazuoki (Agriculture Journalist)

Tenmyo Nobuhiro (Farmer from Niigata)

Ishige Emi (Farmer from Yamanashi)

Ito Fumika (Consumer)

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Proposal for a Basic Law to Abandon Nuclear Power!

December 7, 2012

Action for an election to get rid of nuclear power reactors: How you can participate

It is time for another general election in Japan. Let's turn this into an "Abandon Nuclear Power Election" and spread the message about the election candidates and their views about nuclear power. You can participate by asking the candidate on your town to approve a Proposal for a Basic Law to Abandon Nuclear Power and help us release their reply.

In August, 2012, Nobel literature laureate Oe Kenzaburo and others launched a nationwide network seeking the abolition of nuclear plants in Japan. Consumers Union of Japan also joined this network together with many civil society organizations (NGOs). As a result, some 103 members of Japan's parliament have so far supported and approved the Proposal for a Basic Law to Abandon Nuclear Power. This bill is now waiting for deliberation during the next session of the House of Representatives.

It is regrettable that even though 80% of the population in Japan supports reducing nuclear power to "zero," the views of legislators have not reflected this percentage number. Thus, we need to act now to get many more candidates to support the Proposal for a Basic Law to Abandon Nuclear Power. We can achieve this by monitoring which of the candidates have clear views about this important issue, and who will work for this goal. It is worth noting that all political parties have expressed some opinion or other regarding the "reduction" of nuclear power plants. The nuances in their views vary among the different political parties, and we need to carry out the campaign to get the individual candidates' views. Asking the candidates to sign a "policy contract" before the election on December 16, 2012 will ensure that the Proposal will be enacted as we elect candidates who agree with the Proposal.

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Highlights From The Negotiations In Hyderabad About Biological Diversity

October 24, 2012

Updates about GMOs from the Convention of Biological Diversity

It is not always easy to follow the details of the discussions and negotiations of international agreements... Media pays scant attention or ignores important concerns. Governments provide a massive amount of information but it is not easy to find or digest. Fortunately, NGOs are usually present both in the conference hall and in the corridors. For the current round of negotiations in Hyderabad, India, groups like CBD Alliance publish a newsletter called ECO with easy-to-understand updates.

Here are some highlights:

For the initial meeting, MOP6, many worried that the so-called Roadmap about genetically modified organisms would not be endorsed. This Roadmap deals with risk assessment, to make sure that countries know what they are getting into if they import certain GMOs that may disturb or pose a threat to their local biological diversity. Without proper risk assessment, countries will not have the tools necessary to take into account recent developments in risk research.

There was anger that the United States (not a Party to the Convention of Biological Diversity) has voiced its opposition to work regarding the consideration of socio-economic consequences of genetically modified organisms. Philip L Bereano, Washington Biotechnology Action Council, notes that the US has sponsored literally thousands of socio-economic assessments as part of government policy to aid decision-making. Why not for GMOs?

During the main meeting of the COP11, there was also great concern that the negotiators would suddenly “rewrite history” by editing out an earlier text that many NGOs and governments feel strongly about, regarding so-called “Terminator” crops. These are genetically modified to not be able to produce new fertile seeds, thus undermining the ancient right of farmers to save their own seed from their harvest. Such GMOs, dubbed “Terminator” back in the late 1990s, would give biotech companies like Monsanto (that holds the patents to the Terminator technology) immense power over global food production. Activists in Hyderabad were indignant that instead of deleting old decisions, countries should implement what they agree on at the CBD meetings! Finally, it was agreed to retain the text, after swift action from six countries.

* * *

Stop TPP Action/Occupy Monsanto

On the first Tuesday of every month, demonstrations will be held in front of the Prime Minister’s Official Residence in Tokyo. Together we can stop the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP)!

Consumers Union of Japan has joined together with other organizations to strongly voice our opposition to TPP. Starting in August, 2012, a new campaign strategy was initiated as we met in front of the Prime Minister’s Official Residence in central Tokyo under the theme of stopping the TPP. Ordinary citizens who are opposed to TPP joined elected Parliament members, representatives from local municipalities, self-governing bodies, labour unions and farmers’ organizations. Still, Prime Minister Noda and some parts of the government are urging Japan to join the controversial TPP negotiations. Since the decision to join appears to be imminent, we need to step up our protest activities in front of the Official Residence.

We invite everyone to join our next action meetings. The future dates are scheduled to be November 6, December 4, January 8 (first Tuesday of every month) at 18:00-20:00.

TPP is a way for American and Japanese multinational corporations to take control over the livelihoods of ordinary citizens. Consumers Union of Japan has been holding regular lectures since January, 2012 together with other NGOs about the related problems as seen from the perspective of consumers. During the course of these lectures, it became clear to everyone that TPP proposes unacceptable challenges and participation would be a huge mistake for Japan.

Lecture 1: "TPP problems viewed from the perspective of consumers"

Lecture 2: "Food labeling to be taken away from us"

Lecture 3: "Labour issues"

Lecture 4: "Medical treatment issues"

A total of six action meetings were held to "stop the rash act of TPP" from August 21 to September 25, 2012 in front of the Prime Minister's Official Residence in Tokyo, on each Tuesday between 18:00 and 20:00. Some 100-400 participants have joined the events. Each time, representatives from different regions and rural areas around the country have joined. Speeches were held to reveal problems related to agriculture, medical treatment, health insurance system, food safety etc.

On September 18, 2012 the action event was tied together with the Occupy Monsanto campaign, with a protest rally outside the offices of the US biotech giant Monsanto's head office in Tokyo, followed by a parade that went to Ginza and the Prime Minister's Official Residence. Occupy Monsanto is an international effort to protest against genetically modified organisms and GM food.

Different protest actions are planned for the coming months. In November, the event is held on Tuesday, November 6 from 18:00 to 20:00. This coincides with the US presidential election. The theme of the event will be to discuss what we can do about the situation as it is said that the brief time period directly after the US presidential election is the most dangerous time in terms of joining in the TPP negotiations. Let us raise our voices even more loudly and together stop TPP!

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Protect Biodiversity From GMOs: Hyderabad MOP6 Meeting

CUJ has joined other NGOs from around the world for the 6th Meeting of Parties (MOP6) of the Convention of Biological Diversity.

The United Nations conference is held in Hyderabad, India October 1-5, 2012. Just over 2 years ago, everyone met in Nagoya for the MOP5, as negotiators finalized the Nagoya - Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress, the important legal instrument to deal with damage due to genetically modified organisms (GMO).

September 30, 2012

Proposals for Japan to Introduce a National Legislation Regarding the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol:

A Call for Action on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity Through Strict Regulations on the Use of Living Modified Organisms

Amend Japan's Current Domestic Cartagena Protocol Legislation

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By Japan Citizens' Network for Sustainable Food and Agriculture
Amagasa Keisuke
Kawata Masaharu

It is an undeniable fact that Japan imports a large amount of genetically modified organisms/living modified organisms (GMO/LMO). In recent years, we have seen a number of cases of problems where domestic agricultural products are genetically contaminated due to such imported GMOs.

During the course of the nation-wide investigations that we and other civic organizations have undertaken since 2004, wild-growing GM rapeseed (canola) plants have been found all around Japan, ranging from Hokkaido in the north to Chiba Prefecture, Hyogo Prefecture, and Fukuoka Prefecture in the south. There have been many cases of hybridization and suspected cases of stacked traits (several GM traits in one type of organism), as well as crossing with other species that are related to rapeseed within the brassica family.

In Mie Prefecture, which for decades have carefully protected local specialty brand crops, it was decided to use seeds from outside the prefecture due to fear of GM contamination within the region.

In 2011, papaya-growers in Okinawa Prefecture were found to be using illegal GM papaya imported from Taiwan. The farmers, who did not even know that their trees were genetically modified to resist virus infections, had to cut down all their trees, incurring losses up to 70 million Yen.

In order to deal with these problems, Japan Citizens' Network for Sustainable Food and Agriculture strongly urges the Japanese government to sign and ratify the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol, and amend its current national Cartagena Protocol law:

Proposals:

1) Amend Japan's national legislation so that it reflects all the important issues raised in the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol, and take the international lead in ratifying the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol. Take special note of the following key issues:

1.a) Ensure that the legislation includes a reference to Article 15 in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development regarding the precautionary principle.

1.b) The term "damage" should include any negative influence to the biological diversity related to ecosystem services as a whole, such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and to the health of human beings.

1.c) The term "operator" should include the developer, producer and exporter (i.e. all who are involved in the marketing process) that contribute to

commercializing the genetically modified organism.

1.d) In the case of damage, the redress system should give priority not only to financial compensation but to actual restoration to the original state.

1.e) Enact a special civil liability system to cover damages caused by the import of GMOs. Incorporate the following items in the system:

- The system should be based on strict liability.
- Ensure that the operator has retroactive obligations.
- Specify the centralized responsibility.
- Secure the victim's right to take legal action.
- Ensure that an insurance fund is set up to cover the liability of operators in the case of GMO export and imports, in order to avoid any situation of insufficient compensation due to bankruptcy, etc.

2) Revise Japan's current domestic Cartagena Protocol legislation and make sure that the related laws fully reflect the Cartagena Protocol. Take special note of the following key issues:

2.a) Ensure that the legislation includes a reference to the precautionary principle.

2.b) The target should include any activity related to ecosystem services as a whole, such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and the health of human beings.

Japan Resources is published by Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ). CUJ was founded in April 1969 and was officially certified as a non-profit organization on May 1, 2006 by the new Japanese NPO legislation. We continue to be a non-political and financially independent organization (NGO). CUJ is funded by membership fees and donations. The main concern of CUJ and its members is to realize a world of liberty and equality, a world free of economic, social and legal discrimination, and to preserve a safe and healthy environment for our children's future.

CUJ pursues the following goals on behalf of consumers: (1) To secure for ourselves and our families safe and healthy lives, (2) to establish systems/laws to protect the rights of consumers, (3) to promote peace, social justice and economic fairness, (4) to support and empower consumers who care about the environment, and (5) to cooperate with foreign consumer groups/organizations.

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