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From the Editors:

Japan's Anti-GMO Campaign

Welcome to issue No. 164 of Consumers Union of Japan's English newsletter.

This time, the theme is to highlight the 20th anniversary of the No! GMO Campaign here in Japan. Back in 1996, consumers and farmers joined hands to stop genetically modified crops from entering our food supply,

an issue that is still highly relevant today.

We hope you will continue to stay updated with CUJ's activities and news on our English website, and support our campaigns!

Event: Petition Campaign for Better Labelling of Genetically Modified Food

Consumers Union of Japan, the No! GMO Campaign and Food Safety Citizen's Watch will hold an event in the Japanese Parliament to present the results so far of our petition campaign to collect signatures for better labelling of genetically modified food.

The event will be an opportunity to discuss GM food in light of the new realities presented by the TPP that may soon be signed by 12 countries, including Japan. The TPP agreement also deals with cross-border trade barriers, and could mean that other countries or corporations may challenge Japan's food labelling laws.

Since August, 2015 a large number of consumers have signed our petition to improve the mandatory GM labelling laws from 2000 to include all GM foods, and to lower the limit at which foods with GM ingredients must be labelled, which is currently 5% (for example, the limit in the European Union is 0.9%).

We are strongly urging the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Food Safety to instruct the Consumer Agency to push for improved labelling of all GM foods in Japan, based on the fundamental principles of the consumers' right to know and right to choose.

Date: January 27, 2016
Location: House of Representatives (Shugiin) 2nd Bldg. Hall 1, Nagatacho, Tokyo

Event: Supporting Japanese Non-GM Soybeans

Consumers Union of Japan and the No! GMO Campaign are working together to support Japanese farmers who want to grow more soybeans for domestic consumption. On February 23, 2016, the 18th annual meeting of the Soybean Trust Movement was held in Jiyugaoka, Tokyo as a way for consumers and farmers to meet and discuss the many issues involved.

In 1996, the first genetically modified soybeans were imported to Japan from North America. This led to the formation of the Soybean Trust Movement as a way to counter the threat to Japanese traditional foods like tofu, miso and soy sauce that are made from soybeans. The aim is to increase Japan's food self-sufficiency rate for this important source of protein and nutrients.

Ms. Setsuko Yasuda from the 21st Century Food Policy Vision spoke about the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement and new risks to food, while Keisuke Amagasa from the No! GMO Campaign made a presentation about the current status of GM foods and agriculture.

Osamu Tsuchida from Tokyo Shinbun discussed the "land grab" problems associated with the plans that Japan's government has to promote soybean farming in Mozambique.

Currently, the United States has just approved GM salmon, and there are new issues involving Du Pont's controversial techniques to edit the genome. This could make it possible to bypass the legislation for older

ways to genetically modify living organisms and GM food.

On the other hand, there is an increasingly strong movement in the US to make labelling of GM foods mandatory. Here in Asia, we have recently learnt that Taiwan decided to ban GM foods in school lunches while also introducing stricter GM labelling rules.

A delightful lunch was served with organic soybeans from the Shumei Natural Farm Network. Clearly, growing soybeans is no easy task, and more efforts are needed to make more consumers aware of this important movement in Japan.

By Yoko Sugiura, CU

From Bio Journal:

GMO-Free Zone National Conference Held in Sendai

The 11th GMO-free zone conference was held in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, northern Japan on March 5-6, 2016 with around 300 people attending, including Tohoku region farmers and consumers from around the country.

In resistance to the centrally controlled Great East Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Plan, citizens in Miyagi Prefecture are currently proceeding with recovery and regeneration that are rooted in local areas. It was confirmed that the ideas of the GMO-free zone movement are in agreement with

those of the recovery movement by local citizens.

There is also great apprehension that the Trans-Pacific Economic Partnership Agreement (TPP) will result in large amounts of GM foods being imported into Japan. A conference declaration was adopted that stated that the resistance movement against such imports is precisely the same as the GMO-free zone movement.

From Bio Journal:

Ministry of the Environment releases a draft of its revised Cartagena Law

On March 10, 2016, the Ministry of the Environment called for public comment on the draft report finalised by the specialist committee on the situation regarding implementation of the Cartagena Law (formally known as the Law Concerning the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity through Regulations on the Use of Living Modified Organisms).

Firstly, concerning the situation regarding implementation of the Law, the report discussed the record of the law thus far, including the types of crops approved, implementation of public comments on the approvals and the reactions to them, and cases of inappropriate usage and the information supplied about them, and then presented the following points of issue.

In Type 1 Usage (Use of crop cultivation in open fields), there were fewer applications for academic research than for commercial uses. The report said that it was therefore necessary to give evaluations based on the differences between research use and commercial use. In Type 2 Usage (Use in closed systems such as factories), the report said that improvements were needed with regard to the manner of operation and provision of information.

In the response to new forms of usage of living modified organisms, the report stated that usages different from those that had been seen thus far might arise, such as commercial cultivation under certain management practices.

Regarding usage of new GM microorganisms, for which there have been no applications thus far, the report said that it would be possible to accommodate these with existing knowledge and experience. It seems that this statement was made with genome editing technology in mind, indicating that the committee considers that new measures are unnecessary for this.

The report contains no mention of GM rapeseed (Canola) volunteers in the wild or their expansion, which is currently becoming a nationwide issue, thus failing to reflect the reality that the Cartagena Law does not act to prevent genetic pollution.

In food-producing countries, such as the US, increases in the use of pesticides as a measure against superweeds not killed by herbicides or superbugs that do not die when

sprayed with insecticide are having adverse impacts on biodiversity, but there is no mention of the impacts on agriculture in these countries, and thus the content of the investigations for the report can only be considered as totally insufficient.

Following public comment, the ministry is due to devise measures based on the draft report, but as things stand, it is hard to imagine that there will be a strengthening of regulations and it looks as if the drift will be towards deregulation.

Citizens' Biotechnology Information Center (CBIC) publishes Bio Journal, a news source about GMO and its different applications and implications.

CBIC is an independent organisation concerned with the ethics and risks of biotechnology.

Follow Bio Journal on the Internet:

<http://www5d.biglobe.ne.jp/~cbic/index.html>

20 Years of Anti-GMO Work

The No! GMO Campaign held its 20th anniversary meeting on May 23, 2016. When it started, I was working in Sweden and had joined the Pure Food Campaign, an effort to stop Genetically Modified Organisms that had just been approved in the US. All over the world, people were protesting against the GM soy and GM corn that North American farmers were told would lead to many benefits, in spite of the risks.

One of the first things we did in Sweden was to join a Greenpeace protest at different supermarkets. We talked to the managers and demanded that they would not sell any GMO foods. Many of them agreed immediately, and were glad to get more information. We also visited the US Embassy in Stockholm to explain why biotechnology was such a bad idea for both farmers and consumers.

Soon, other organizations began to campaign as well. I got a job with the Swedish Consumer Coalition and we lobbied the government to introduce GMO labels. Increasingly, I had to go to Brussels to attend official EU meetings about the issue that quickly became a huge trade battle between Europe and the US. It was hard work but very rewarding.

My boss even sent me to the large FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius meetings that were being held in Japan. I was glad to be back – I had lived here for five years until 1993 – and I visited CUJ's old office in Meguro in the summer of 1998.

In Japan, we are concerned about the wild-growing genetically modified canola plants that we have found at many locations around Japan on numerous occasions. The first investigations by concerned citizens started in 2004.

The No! GMO Campaign and other groups and networks participated in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) conferences in Japan (2010), India (2012) and in South Korea (2014). In particular, the work done by Keisuke Amagasa helped raise awareness about the Cartagena Protocol as well as the new Nagoya Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol that was agreed upon in 2010. The aim of the protocol is to aid countries in the case of disputes when there is a need to assess the liability and redress, if genetically modified organisms cause harm to the natural environment or human health.

Over the years, there have been many visits abroad, including North America, Europe, and Australia. In Asia the focus has been to connect with anti-GMO activists and NGOs in countries including China, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, India and Bangladesh. The No! GMO Campaign has also invited many experts from other countries to speak at meetings in Japan.

Congratulations, No! GMO Campaign!

By Martin J. Frid, CUJ

Newsflash:

Five Years after the Nuclear Disaster in Fukushima

Epidemiological Studies Show a Rapid Increase in the Occurrence Rates of Thyroid Cancer

CUJ interviewed Okayama University professor Toshihide Tsuda, who published an epidemiological study on the occurrence rate of thyroid cancer in Fukushima prefecture in October, 2015. Dr. Tsuda is known for his expert opinions on a range of pollution related cases, including the Minamata disease. He held a press conference on October 8, 2015 to discuss the findings of his team, revealing a rapid increase of 20-50 times in the rate of thyroid cancer among infants in the disaster-stricken prefecture compared to national levels. While media in other countries published reports about his concerns, the Japanese press did not seem to take his warnings seriously.

Q: What can you say about the health risks associated with the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011?

A: It hasn't been reported much, but a risk assessment was done in 2013 by the World Health Organization (WHO). They noted that the health risks involve thyroid cancer, leukemia, breast cancer and other types of cancer. We have now reached the incubation stage when it would not be strange or surprising to begin to observe the frequent occurrence of thyroid cancer or leukemia.

When we calculated the rate of thyroid cancer that was found in medical examination of infants and children younger than 18 years old in Fukushima prefecture, there is a large area, excepting the north-eastern towns, where the occurrence rates are 20-50 times higher than the national average. We also note that this is happening at a faster pace than we had expected. Also, from the Chernobyl accident, we know that the rates continue to increase beyond when people reach 18 or 19 years old, so we can expect the same for Japan in the years to come. In my view, since the rates are already high in the southern parts of Fukushima prefecture, we also ought to examine children in neighboring Ibaraki prefecture.

Q: Meanwhile, the government is saying that it is difficult to conclude that the nuclear accident is the cause of the frequent occurrence.

A: It is clearly proven that radioactive Iodine easily gets concentrated in the thyroid gland and that it is a major cause of thyroid cancer. It is also clear that radioactivity can cause other health problems and diseases. But for each case, we won't have the actual proof until people start dying, which is obviously too late. I don't know what the people in charge should be doing or saying. I suppose it is best to follow the same protocol as when we have a large-scale food poisoning case. We should be defending the health of the people; that is the first rule. So, while we assume that damage has already been done, I think we need to do more.

Q: What can we do as citizens?

A: Even if you can't move away from the areas in question, there are ways to reduce the exposure as much as possible. It is important to be aware of the amounts of radioactivity in the place you live. It seems that right now, there is not so much sharing of ideas going on. But as time goes by, with a continued increase in occurrences, we may even run out of operation equipment. At present, about one student in every high school in Fukushima prefecture is diagnosed with thyroid cancer, but there are places where it is as high as three students already. Soon that number could be one child in each class.

When we are talking of probabilities, there is a huge difference after you have been told that you have cancer. Then your number is 100%. It is also true that while people rarely die from thyroid cancer, you will have a scar for life after the operation, and you will have to take medicines. The problem is not that it can be removed through surgery. What we should do is to prevent the frequent occurrence of this disease through proper measures.

Interview by Yoko Sugiura, CUJ

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Consumers Union of Japan

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