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From the Editors:

Stop the Abe Train!

In this issue of Consumers Union of Japan’s English newsletter we share articles about our recent activities, with a focus on healthy, organic food and farming, and a new campaign led by mothers who want to change our food - and Japan - for the better.

This spring, however we have suffered attack after attack on our civil rights. The ruling coalition under PM Abe Shinzo is like a runaway train with no brakes. They have rammed

through bill after bill in the Parliament, including the “anti-conspiracy bill” with only suspicion needed to instigate wire-tapping, internet surveillance and other invasive methods that the law enforcement authorities can use.

We hope you will continue to stay updated with CUJ’s activities and news on our English website, support our campaigns, and participate in our events.

Organic Rice for School Lunch: Healthy Kids, Healthy Community

By Kaori Hirouchi

Isumi City in Chiba prefecture, east of Tokyo, has announced that it would be the first in Japan to serve locally grown organic rice at the city's elementary and junior high schools throughout 2017. The project started in 2015 when they partly managed to serve locally grown organic rice. Two years have passed, and now they are ready to substitute all the rice for organic rice produced in Isumi City.

It is only school lunch, but it still matters. In a year, a student (elementary or junior high school) will eat more than 180 meals at school. Supposing that rice is served 4 times a week, the student is at least served 150 bowls of rice yearly. As children are more susceptible to toxic substances, locally grown organic rice for public school lunch is a big step to protect children from being exposed to chemicals. Besides, the city says, the program is highly regarded by the parents.

Isumi farmers are encouraged to grow organic rice, which is supporting biological diversity, while affecting all age groups in the community positively. The school year starts in April. At the end of March 2018, we hope that they will carry out the pledge and celebrate their new policy of serving locally grown rice for school lunch.

Update: Bhutan Organic Rice Project

The project to explore ways to help farmers in Bhutan switch to organic farming methods is progressing. This is an update by Mitsukuni Inaba (Director of Civil Institute of Organic Rice Cultivation) and Koa Tasaka (Co-chair of CUJ and board member of Asian Rural Institute) from their visit on May 28 – June 4, 2017.

Rice farming in paddy fields means weeds may be growing in the water before the rice is transplanted into the soil. Removing the weeds by hand tools, such as a rake, or machines rather than by using chemical herbicides is a requirement for organic rice farming. In Bhutan the prevalent weed is called Shouchum (Pondweed, Lat. *Potamogeton*). Flooding the paddy fields repeatedly will assist in removing the weeds, as they float to the surface after careful raking. On May 29 and May 30, Mr Inaba led the effort to flood two experimental fields for a third time together with Bhutan farmers and Japanese volunteers, and remove the weeds. Transplanting the seedlings was possible at the first farm, and organic fertilizer was applied to promote the growth of the rice plants as well as to suppress the weeds.

On June 1, the group visited the Bajo Seed Center. At their paddy fields, a lot of Shouchum grows and is usually removed with Butachlor, a synthetic herbicide that is known to be toxic. "At first, I was overwhelmed by the strong power of the native weed, Shouchum, which had grown so rapidly, and thought it would be very

difficult to remove it,” notes Mr Inaba. “However, after watching them for a while I came up with a new idea: To plow them into the soil! Then, under the anaerobic condition, the weeds will be fermented and produce large amounts of butyric acid which will damage the bulb of Shouchum and the roots of other weeds as well. In this way, all the weeds would be suppressed effectively.”

Transplantation was done the following day. Three types of rice were transplanted: A Japanese variety called Sasanishiki, and a local rice variety grown either in a regular nursery bed or in a pot-type nursery bed. Concludes Mr Inaba: “Many people participated in this activity of transplantation, and we feel enormous gratitude to those who joined us! At the next visit, we will check on the success or failure of the three types of young rice plants, the growth at an early stage, and the tilling situation, and look for the condition and possibility of a stable good yield.”

The next visit will be in the beginning of July, 2017, with a focus on weed control and preparation for soy bean planting. The project is supported by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).



Street Event with the “Moms’ Project to Change our Food in Japan!”

Sticker questionnaire in Futakotamagawa, Tokyo on Mothers’ Day, May 15, 2017

A new citizens group has recently been formed in Japan by people who oppose genetically modified food plus moms who participated in the March, 2017 events with Zen Honeycutt of Moms Across America. The group is called “Moms’ Project to Change our Food in Japan!” We are Japanese mothers who want to give safe food to their children, wishing to reduce the amount of pesticides and artificial additives in their food, as well as avoid GMOs. During the first event in the Tokyo suburb of Futakotamagawa we used a visual questionnaire to let people place stickers based on their opinions and knowledge about GMO food.

We held the event outside the busy Futakotamagawa train station where many families with baby strollers are passing by. All of us had decided to wear something pink and we also brought pink balloons. For about one hour, 27 people participated by placing stickers on our board with questions.

Here are some of the results:

21 people indicated that they worry about genetically modified food and 6 people indicated that they are not worrying or do not understand the

Newsflash:

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NPO Consumers Union of Japan

May 24, 2017

Consumers Union of Japan was founded in 1969 as an independent organization working for a sound and healthy future. Our activities are guided by the principle that ordinary people have the right to live in peace and safety. This is the reason we are taking a stand against the proposed “anti-conspiracy bill” which was approved in a rushed manner on May 23, 2017 by the House of Representatives plenary session, and sent to the House of Councilors.

We oppose this proposed bill that has become increasingly contentious the more it has been deliberated. It is ambiguous and far-reaching, deeply influencing people’s lives and activities, with only suspicion needed to instigate wire-tapping, internet surveillance and other invasive methods that the law enforcement authorities can use.

For example, CUJ is working on a number of campaigns for the benefit of consumers to protect the environment and human health. This includes lobbying for strict regulations and putting pressure on government and corporations that make harmful detergents or promote genetically modified crops and GM food, which we strongly oppose. Other campaigns target agricultural chemicals and pesticide use, especially neo-

nicotinoids which hurt both humans and animals. Many such activities and campaigns can now become regarded as illegal if they are interpreted to interfere with laws covered by the proposed conspiracy bill, including patent laws and other laws that protect corporations and their intellectual property rights.

Another law that is covered is the Plant Variety Protection and Seed Act. The purpose of this law is to protect the commercial interests of anyone who produces, registers and sells seed. Now, if you were to buy registered seed at a gardening store, grow plants from the seed, and then share the plant’s seed with others, this could be regarded as a conspiracy crime – a nightmare! By introducing the conspiracy bill, our normal world may be changed in an instant. Will this nightmare really come true? We do not want to make such a world become reality and we will have no part in living in such a world.

Consequently, Consumers Union of Japan strongly urges the government to scrap this proposed bill.

CUJ is a politically and financially independent non-governmental organization (NGO). We are funded by membership fees, sales of publications and donations.

CUJ was founded in April 1969 as Japan's first nationwide grassroots consumer organization. CUJ is officially certified as a non-profit organization by the Japanese NPO legislation.

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