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***From the Editors:***

**Ignoring Consumers**

In this issue of Consumers Union of Japan's English newsletter we share articles about our recent activities. During the summer, we started a campaign against artificial fragrances, an irritant for many as corporate profit comes before consumers' concerns.

While Japan is trying to revive the controversial TPP agreement, it has also announced progress regarding the economic partnership with the European Union. This will undoubtedly have far-reaching consequences on our daily lives.

However, the documents have only been published in English, and not yet in Japanese, making debate and discussion very difficult about the wide range of issues involved.

For the first time CUJ published a joint declaration together with BEUC, the large European Consumer Organisation, regarding consumers and trade. Can we trust that our concerns will be taken seriously? It is hard not to reach the conclusion that Japan's government is making a calculated choice to keep ignoring citizens and consumers.

## **Consumers in Japan and Europe want Guarantees for a Positive Trade Agreement**

*Consumers Union of Japan and The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) would like to provide input on the EU-Japan trade agreement. The technical negotiations between Japan and the EU are about to start and the final agreement will cover a broad range of economic sectors and inevitably affect consumers. This phase provides the opportunity for both sides to demonstrate that trade can deliver to consumers.*

To:

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September 6, 2017

Consumers Union of Japan and The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) would like to provide input on the EU-Japan trade agreement. The technical negotiations between Japan and the EU are about to start and the final agreement will cover a broad range of economic sectors and inevitably affect consumers. This phase provides the opportunity for both sides to demonstrate that trade can deliver to consumers.

## **Place consumers at the heart of the agreement**

A trade agreement is not only about getting better market access for companies. It is also about delivering real benefits to consumers while ensuring they are protected. Unfortunately, the benefits for consumers are not yet clear. This is because consumer benefits have not been placed at the heart of the agreement at the early stages of the process. For this to happen, we recommend applying the checklist in attachment to the entire agreement.

## **Better involve consumer organisations**

Modern trade agreements like the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement are supposed to be designed for all, including consumers. For this to happen, consumer organisations must be involved in the negotiations phase and beyond. If properly involved in the negotiating and implementing processes, consumer organisations can provide constructive input and contribute to a deal which benefits consumers. We call on you to explicitly mention consumer organisations as stakeholders in the article on the domestic advisory group of the Chapter for Trade and Sustainable Development.

### **Refrain from including an investor to State dispute settlement**

Investor to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) systems have proven harmful to consumers and the public interest in the past, as foreign investors have used them to challenge and undermine consumer protections. Despite some improvements proposed by the EU with the Investment Court System and the idea of creating a multilateral court, there are high risks for consumers. Foreign investors will still be able to threaten governments with lawsuits for compensation when governments, for example, adopt ambitious laws that protect consumers. This could deter governments from introducing new protections and lead to a regulatory chill. Moreover, we need to see empirical evidence of the need for such a system between the EU and Japan which would only protect investors and keep foreign direct investment flowing. Therefore, our organisations call on you to refrain from introducing such systems in the final agreement.

### **Ensure better food labelling rules**

This trade agreement should improve food labelling rules so that Japanese consumers have at least the same level of information as consumers in Europe. This is especially the case for food additives, the right to know what foods are genetically modified or not, and which foods contain, consist of or are obtained from GMOs. Country of origin labels should be encouraged as they provide consumers with the right to know where food is coming from.

### **Make sure regulatory dialogue benefits and protects consumers**

Dialogue between EU and Japanese regulators should have the firm objective to enhance consumer welfare. These regulatory exchanges must remain voluntary. However, a trade agreement is not the place to define guidelines on good regulatory practices, notably as Governments want to protect their right to regulate.

### **Transparency must continue**

Transparency is a precondition for people to trust trade agreements. We welcomed the publication of the agreed texts on the EU side by the time of the political conclusion. To restore consumer trust in trade deals, we urgently call on both sides to publish their negotiating positions, texts, including consolidated versions, and communicate better on the content of the future agreement during this technical phase. In particular, the agreed texts must be translated into Japanese and published as soon as possible.

We trust that you will take our views into account and we remain at your disposal for further discussion.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens  
Director General  
European Consumer Organisation

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Co-chairpersons  
Consumers Union of Japan

## Campaign against Artificial Fragrances

In recent years, there are an increasing number of people who are feeling sick because of artificial fragrances such as fabric softeners, deodorant sprays and antiperspirants. People feel that it is difficult to get on the train, as people wash their clothes but do not dry them outdoors properly. But some people also react to the strong smell of laundry hanging on verandas in their neighborhoods.

There are reports of various symptoms, including nausea, feeling irritated, coughing, eye trouble, sneezing, heart pounding, and headaches. Consumers Union of Japan strongly believes we need to make sure that people are not put in harm's way by unnecessary artificial fragrance products.

## GM Food Awareness Survey Conducted by Japan's Consumer Affairs Agency

The Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA), in initiating a GM Food Labelling Investigative Committee, has conducted a consumer awareness survey. The web survey was implemented between 12 December 2016 and 4 January 2017. The total number of respondents was 10,648 (5296 males and 5352 females).

According to the results of the survey, regarding awareness of recombinant DNA, 69.6% responded that they "knew of or had heard of" it. 61.3% responded that they "knew of or had heard of" safety screening.

In response to the question "Are you anxious about GM food?" 40.7% replied "Yes", 11.4% replied "No". Excepting those who responded "I don't care" or "I don't know", around 80% of respondents say they harbor anxieties about GM food. In addition, 83.0% of the people who responded either "Yes" or "No" to the question "Are you anxious about GM food?" are avoiding the consumption of GM food.

Source: CBIC Bio Journal (July, 2017)

## ***Newsflash:***

### **Nagoya Protocol Ratified**

Japan ratified the Nagoya Protocol on 20 August 2017, thus enforcing the domestic measure on fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of or opportunities to access genetic resources (the ABS – access and benefit-sharing agreement). This makes it compulsory to report to the Minister for the Environment when genetic resources are obtained from overseas.

The Nagoya Protocol came into existence at the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP10) held in Nagoya in 2010. The conclusion has taken seven years due to strong resistance from industrial circles.

Source: CBIC Bio Journal (July & September, 2017)

## ***Event:***

### **International Film Festival on Organic Farming**

The 11<sup>th</sup> film festival with food & farming as a theme will be held on December 3, 2017 at the Zendentsu Worker's Assembly Building in Ochanomizu, Tokyo. Documentary films in Japanese, French, English and Romanian languages will be screened. Themes include the future of farming around the world, the

dangers of genetically modified foods, seed and property right issues, as well as the inspiring campaign to increase the amount of local food grown and eaten in the town of Todmorden, UK, called Incredible Edible Todmorden.

Read more here (in Japanese)  
<http://www.yuki-eiga.com/>

## **Consumers Union of Japan**

**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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