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From the Editors:

Resistance and Resilience

In this issue of Consumers Union of Japan's English newsletter we share articles about our recent activities. This autumn, we started a campaign against food products with manipulated genomes, and new ways to genetically engineer living organisms that raise many novel problematic issues. Gene editing is already happening in Japan, with field trials in Ibaraki Prefecture of a "sinkability altered rice" produced by splicing the DNA to insert a CRISPR/Cas9 gene to prevent the function of a particular gene.

Also, researchers from Hokkaido University, Yokohama City University and the National Agriculture and Food Research Organization have used advanced genome-editing technologies to alter soybeans.

Our campaign since the mid-1990s against genetically modified food has been a success due to our resilience, and there is no commercial farming of GM foods in Japan. Now we must find ways to stop the manipulation of the genomes of plants and animals before it is too late.

Campaign Against Genome-manipulated Food

Consumers Union of Japan and the No! GMO Campaign started a new campaign on December 9 with the publication of a booklet with information about genome editing technologies. Journalist Amagasa Keisuke, co-chair of CUJ and a long-time critic of genetically modified food, outlined the many problems and outstanding issues at a seminar in Ochanomizu, Tokyo. Also participating at the event were campaigners including the newly formed Mom's Project to Change our Food in Japan. Many questions were raised by the audience.

One large concern is that although field trials have already begun during 2017, the government has still not put sufficient legislation in place. For example, it has not been decided if genome-manipulated food should be classified as genetically engineered or not. It also remains uncertain whether crops produced through genome editing will be subject to the domestic law restricting the release of genetically modified crops into the environment, known as the Cartagena Act.



Press Release: Appeal for World Food Day

Our goal is a world with no genetically modified foods and an end to the multinational corporate control of the global food supply

October 16 is the World Food Day, as designated by the United Nations. The aim is to combat hunger and promote agriculture, while the forces that makes this difficult to achieve are having the opposite results. Regional conflicts and nationalism are increasing poverty. We are especially concerned about the concentration of economic resources into the hands of just a few corporations that control the global economy. At the same time, governments have embarked on EPAs and FTAs that ignores public opinion and lead to more division in society.

In just the past 12 months, the worst case scenario has become reality, with multinational agribusiness takeovers and mergers, much as we predicted over 20 years ago. This is a de facto monopoly over the global seed supply and cannot be accepted. How are we as consumers and farmers supposed to react to Bayer taking over Monsanto, while DuPont merged with Dow, and Syngenta was purchased by a ChemChina, the Chinese chemical company, except to oppose it? Our health and freedom to farm and purchase food that we can trust will now be completely at mercy of these few multinational corporations that control genetically modified crops through DNA patent rules and global agreements on intellectual property rights and other strong-arm tactics.

At the same time, this year we learned that genetically modified salmon has been approved in North America in spite of protests. This is the first GM animal to be sold as food. If this is acceptable, where does it lead us next? New GM technologies such as genome editing and RNA interference are also increasingly being promoted. Examples include canola and potatoes developed with these new GM techniques.

As if this is not enough, in April 2017 the Japanese government suddenly abolished the 1952 Seed Law, after multinational corporations engaged in the seed business complained that the publicly funded seed program hindered their attempts to expand their business. After only a few hours of deliberation at the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Committees of the Parliament, the new Seed Law bill was passed without any concern for the possible impacts on our agriculture and food systems. Instead, we maintain that the trend to undermine Japan's public seed program for major crops should be stopped. We should ensure that the national and local governments will remain involved in the seed program as an essential part of our food security policy.

We have clear evidence that agriculture as promoted by multinational corporations are destroying the health of citizens, in particular children. It has been admitted that agricultural chemicals are the main cause of allergies, which are becoming increasingly common, and evidence from the United States show that children's development is impaired by such residue in food. The

most serious problem is GM foods as their introduction 20 years ago has led to a drastic increase in the amount of toxic glyphosate used and consumed. However, the Japanese government keeps changing the allowed residue levels leading to higher levels of pesticides and herbicides, even relaxing the standard for glyphosate as recently as July, 2017. We need to radically change the current thinking about agriculture and get rid of dangerous chemicals from our food supply.

We believe in expansion of agriculture that is small-scale and organic, with local production for local consumption, within an international framework that connects citizens around the world. Co-operation is the basis for world peace. Furthermore, we believe that World Food Day should stand for agriculture without harmful chemicals, allowing no genetically modified or genome edited foods. We will continue to fight against multinational corporations and their systems that lead to hunger and malnutrition.

October 16, 2017

Consumers Union of Japan

No! GMO Campaign

Food Security: Japan's Self-sufficiency Rate for Sesame Seed Only 0.1%

One of the main pillars of Consumers Union of Japan is that we care deeply about food safety, which is connected to food security issues. We constantly try to monitor food production and are concerned about how things are developing or rather, deteriorating. Sometimes, we are taken by surprise. So, when I read in the newsletter from the Kansai-based Yotsuba Group that Japan's self-sufficiency rate for sesame seed has dropped to 0.1%, well, it turned out to be one of many such cases.

The main place for growing sesame seed is a small island called Kikaijima in Kagoshima prefecture, in southern Japan, part of the Amami Islands. Their white sesame is a local variety that accounts for around 70% of Japan's total domestic sesame seed production. But, for several years, abnormal weather and especially rain from typhoons have wreaked havoc on the small island's farms, due to global climate change. Volcanic activity nearby has also brought unusual levels of ash to the fields. Taken together, domestic sesame seed farming in Japan is currently in great danger.

Another example is the small citrus fruit called sudachi in Japanese (which is also grown in Peru). Just like sesame, this is an important ingredient in Japanese traditional cooking. But when I checked, the farmers tell me many of them are getting too old to continue growing this special product. Also, there are places where tea will no longer be

grown unless efforts are made to seriously support local and regional farms as well as the companies that bring such wonderful gifts to the market. This is a serious issue we call "food security" which is fundamental when we start discussing "food safety" and other concerns. Consumers Union of Japan continues to be at the forefront of the debate to resolve these important issues.

By Ono Kazuoki, CUJ

Is the Consumer Agency in Fact the Industry Agency?

Criticism is rising regarding the government's way of handling the meetings to examine the mandatory labelling of genetically modified organisms and GMO food, held by the Consumer Agency since April, 2017. The opinion of the Agency seems to be stuck with the idea that no changes need to be made to the current labelling regime, in spite of continued arguments that the system must be improved.

In particular, food oils do not need to be labelled because GMO cannot be detected in such products. Also, if the ingredients that require GMO labelling are under 5% of the total weight, they do not need to be labelled. This has in effect meant that most processed foods are not giving the consumers the information they want. Consumers Union of Japan has repeatedly demanded that all GMO foods that we do not regard as safe should be properly labelled so that consumers have full information and are guaranteed the right to choose.

It is noteworthy that all GMO foods and ingredients must be labelled in the European Union, including food oils. CUJ has also repeatedly pointed out that the limit for unintended contamination in the European Union is as low as 0.9%, compared to 5% in Japan, and 3% in Taiwan as well as South Korea.

At the Consumer Agency's meetings, the commissioner has taken to echo the industry standpoint, saying: "We can't change the labelling rule to a lower percentage level". Indeed we are wondering why the ideas from over 15 years ago still are so entrenched and why the current meetings appear to be useless. The reason is the Consumer Agency itself. There is just no enthusiasm to improve the system. We are beginning to hear the opinion that an agency that ignores consumers while completely accepting the requests by producers should be renamed, and instead be known as the "Industry Agency"

By Koketsu Michiyo, CUJ

Pluto and Monju

In the old Greek mythology, Pluto was name of the god that ruled the underworld, where souls go after death. Someone who has recently been thinking about this is Nakajima Tetsuen, the head priest of the Buddhist temple Myoutsuu in Obama City, Fukui Prefecture. He currently serves as the chairperson of a local group of citizens that oppose nuclear power in the prefecture.

In December, 2016 the decision was finally taken to decommission and scrap the infamous nuclear reactor called Monju in Tsuruga City, Fukui Prefecture. To celebrate this, the citizens met on November 5, 2017 where Mr. Nakajima explained: "We should not walk the path to hell of Pluto, but instead follow the path of the Buddha, which is the path of the living."

In Obama City, there are no nuclear power plants, but nearby, as many as 15 reactors are located around Wakasa Bay. The reason is the strong opposition by people in Obama City, led by Mr. Nakajima. In other locations that accepted nuclear plants, a splendid gymnasium or huge hot spring facilities were built using special government grants, while Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples and old roads greet visitors to Obama City.

The priest of a Shingon temple with traditions dating back from the 9th century uses Buddhist teaching to communicate his message: "Maybe we can believe that Monju (also known as Manjushri) is a compassionate bodhisattva who will wake us all from the nightmare of multiplying hellish rulers..."

By Sugiura Yoko, CUJ

News Flash: Monju Reactor Set for Decommissioning Lacks Sodium Removal Method

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) has revealed that the Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, which is set to be decommissioned, was designed without any consideration of ever having to remove liquid sodium from inside the reactor vessel.

Water is normally used as a nuclear fuel coolant in power plants but in the case of the Monju reactor, liquid sodium is used instead to increase production of plutonium. However, liquid sodium ignites when it comes into contact with air, and it causes an explosive chemical reaction when it is mixed with water. In 1995, some liquid sodium leaked from the Monju reactor, causing the reactor to be shut down for a long period of time.

Keiji Kobayashi, a former instructor at Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute who is an expert on the Monju reactor, states, "It has to be said that there are defects in the design. It is also thought that the number of staff members who understand the structure of the reactor is declining. If the sodium is removed erratically, it could lead to a major accident."

The Mainichi, November 29, 2017

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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