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***From the Editors:***

**More Typhoons and Earthquakes?**

In this issue of Consumers Union of Japan's English newsletter we share articles about our recent activities.

2018 has so far seen both extreme weather and several strong earthquakes. While there is not much one can do about the latter, except to be prepared, the extreme heat and two of the strongest typhoons ever, are climate related. And we know without a doubt that human intervention is having a huge effect on global weather patterns. Our lifestyle choices and our collective (over-) consumption are the culprits.

The motto of Consumers Union of Japan is "Sound and Healthy Future for Our Children." Sometimes it feels like a gigantic battle against ignorance, greed and old habits.

No one is perfect, but there must be much more each individual can do for the planet. Waiting for governments and corporations to act does not seem like an option. Join our movement for sustainable consumption and production, and help us come up with solutions!

- Editors

## **International Symposium: Report from South Korea Meeting About Labelling of GM Food**

The demand for better labelling of genetically modified food is rising in South Korea. With citizens taking the lead, over 200,000 people signed a petition in March, 2018 and was officially submitted to the government, but no response has yet been coming forward.

On July 19, 2018 an international symposium will be held in Seoul with invited specialists from Japan and the United States, to discuss the current status of GM food labelling. The hosts are different South Korean civil society organizations. Consumers Union of Japan and Seikatsu Club will be representing Japan.

We will hold an event in Tokyo on July 24, 2018 to discuss the current efforts to improve the GM food labelling in South Korea, Japan and the US.

Date: July 24, 2018 (Tuesday) 13:30-15:30

Place: Tokyo Women's Plaza

The nearest station: The subway Omotesando station B2 exit or the JR Shibuya station Miyamasuzaka exit

Entrance fee: The general public: 800 yen (CUJ members 500 yen)

Reservation isn't necessary.

Speakers

- Ryoko Shimizu (Seikatsu Club)
- Michiyo Koketsu (CUJ Secretary-general)
- Hirouchi Kaori (CUJ)

## **In the News: "Gov't committee's GMO deregulation proposal too hasty: consumer groups, experts"**

*Consumers Union of Japan has been active in the debate about regulation of GMOs since the mid 1990 and firmly believe the new technologies, such as gene editing, must be strictly regulated. CUJ's stance is that any such experiments should be stopped to avoid serious adverse effects on human health and the environment.*

August 21, 2018 ([Mainichi Japan](#))

TOKYO — Consumer groups are taking aim at Aug. 20 recommendations by an Environment Ministry expert committee that some genetically modified organisms (GMO) be deregulated.

The expert committee proposed deregulation of organisms edited to remove or deactivate certain genes as opposed to adding new code, but critics are claiming this is "the same as genetic manipulation," and that it is "strange" to exempt it from government restrictions.

"They (the committee) came to this conclusion after just two meetings. How can they say it's safe?" said Consumers Union of Japan secretariat chief Michiyo Koketsu. "We need a debate that includes a wide range of experts, not just a small section of the research community."

Research is already well underway in Japan on creating meatier red sea bream by disabling a gene that suppresses muscle growth. In cases

like these — of disabling genes as opposed to replacing or recombining DNA — if the edited fish went to market without any report to the government, how could it be distinguished from organisms created through gene manipulation? Inspectors can identify organisms created through gene replacement by the DNA added to the plant's or animal's genome. However, in organisms with a disabled gene, it is impossible to tell if this was the result of deliberate editing or natural environmental factors.

Some critics have also pointed to the risk of harmful genetic edits, such as creating allergens by deleting a gene by mistake. (...)

### **Essay: The Bizarre World of Plastics**

When plastic materials were first discovered, they were brittle and fragile. Thus, a number of additives and “plasticizers” were introduced to counter the effects of ultraviolet light and make the materials more flexible and useful. Flame retardants were introduced as well. By the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, plastic pollution intensified. Plastic materials must be disposed of, making the garbage problem severe. In Tokyo, the toxic air pollution from the Yume-no-shima incinerators created health problems as increasing amounts of trash were thrown away by consumers.

No thought went into what would happen to plastic materials that were left in the environment. The

degradation takes time. Plastic materials basically just turn into smaller plastic fragments. It becomes an invisible danger as animals ingest the fragments, even entering the human food chain. In spite of this, the makers of plastic materials, including Showa Denko, Mitsubishi Chemical, BASF and Du Pont, claim that their novel products are biodegradable. This has led to the rather bizarre state of the world we are now facing, where the idea that plastics can simply be thrown away has been increasingly promoted.

By Amagasa Keisuke, CUJ

### **Fact Sheet: Status of Genome Editing in Japan**

In September 2018, CUJ participated in the [GMO Free Europe Conference](#) in Berlin, Germany. One of the big topics right now is genome editing, which has called the applicability of the current regulatory framework for Genetically Modified Organisms into question. We published a fact sheet to inform others around the world about the debate in Japan.

Click [here](#) to download the pdf file.

## Channel Nishoren Now on Youtube!

CUJ has started making videos and making them public on Youtube, on Channel Youtube. So far, we have made videos about the following topics available to the public (in Japanese only so far):

- Amagasa Keisuke Explains: Genome Editing
- Amagasa Keisuke Explains: Seeds and Genetically Modified Foods
- Symposium about CUJ's Telephone Hotline for People Who Suffer from Artificial Fragrances
- The Problem with Artificial Fragrances: A Kamishibai Presentation

# 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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