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***From the Editors:***

**Big Meetings: Not Effective Enough**

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

During the past couple of months there were large international meetings about climate change and biological diversity. Both are topics that are having a huge impact on ordinary citizens' lives. Consumers Union of Japan is active in the fight to protect biological diversity,

especially in the area of food crops. We are increasingly concerned that the international meetings are not effective. We need fast and sincere countermeasures from governments and corporations, but also education and awareness-raising campaigns for the general public.

Join our movement for sustainable consumption and production, and help us come up with solutions!

- Editors

## **Please Stop Selling Wheat Flour with Glyphosate Residue**

17 January 2019

To:

Nissin Foods

Nisshin Seifun Group

Showa Sangyo

Consumers Union of Japan and the No! GMO Campaign work together for safe and healthy food for all consumers.

We tested wheat flour from different companies for the residue of the herbicide glyphosate, and detected such residue in products sold by your company.

In 2015, WHO's International Cancer Research Institute has concluded that glyphosate is "probably carcinogenic to humans." In 2016, a joint report by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN said that there was some evidence of association between glyphosate exposure and risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in some studies.

Our investigation found levels of residue of glyphosate in your wheat flour that was lower than the standard limit set by the Japanese government. However, studies in other countries have shown negative health effects in test animals even at such low levels.

Consumers do not want to be exposed to glyphosate. We do not want to buy or eat food made with such products. We ask that you use the precautionary principle and please stop using wheat which has been treated with glyphosate.

Consumers Union of Japan

Keisuke Amagasa

Kazuoki Oono

No! GMO Campaign

Keisuke Amagasa

### **CUJ Environment Working Group**

Much of CUJ's work takes place in our working groups. They are the way for interested members to push for campaigns on a range of topics. The working groups are important for our office staff as a source of knowledge and inspiration for further action. Now we have started a new working group to focus on environmental issues. What kind of issues? Well, that is a good question.

At the first meeting, among the suggestions we are currently considering are microplastics, the construction of the "linear" maglev train between Nagoya and Tokyo, electromagnetic radiation, agricultural practices, and energy production (especially electricity/nuclear power) and "local production/local consumption" and its related challenges in an increasingly globalized world.

The blackout all over Hokkaido after the earthquake in September highlighted the multiple uncertainties regarding Japan's energy system. The concentration of electric power to a single large unit has been identified as the culprit. More people are beginning to understand the benefit of "local production/local consumption" which has been a guiding principle for our work at CUJ. On the other hand, the debate has also begun regarding importing electricity from Honshu, or even from foreign countries. We need to counter such proposals by demanding that pollution and waste of energy should be factored into the debate.

At our first meeting, a college student with an interest in agricultural systems participated. We are hoping that the discussion will lead to concrete proposals how we can create "local production/local consumption" in this vital area, and confront the globalization of food. There are many other issues as well, and we invite people to become members and participate in this new working group.

### **Consumer Affairs Agency holds explanatory meeting for GM food labelling changes**

The Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA), in step with proposed changes in GM food labelling, has held explanatory meetings starting in Tokyo and moving on to Sendai, Osaka, Fukuoka, Sapporo, Okayama and Nagoya. CAA has also solicited opinions from the general public at

the same time. The current proposed changes would lower the detection limit value (to almost zero) at which labels such as "Non-GM" or "GM soybeans not used" can be affixed to food packaging.

There is strong opposition to this proposal from not only consumers but also the soybean industry, general trading companies and others.

From [CBIC Bio Journal](#)

### **What is Behind the Cheap Bananas?**

"Bitter Truth of Sweet Bananas," a DVD on the reality of the banana production in the Philippines, was released by Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC). The 78-minute documentary film about the bananas produced for the Japanese market features the predicaments of the local banana farmers with agrichemicals aerial spraying and unfair contracts with enterprises, for example, and the futures of the initiatives to support the local farmers. PARC calls the public to see the film and "think about the relationships between Japan and the Philippines and also about the food."

The theme of documentary is the problems on the production site relating to, for example, agricultural chemicals and contracts with large companies, and also the efforts of the local farmers to become sustainable producers and of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support such initiatives. It touches

upon indigenous local peoples' thoughts, contains interviews with partner organizations that support the expansion of fair trades, and describes the new prospects for the future. The report carefully covers the reality of the banana production site which is out of the sight of Japanese consumers who eat cheap bananas and raises a question how they should think of the agriculture of the world and the future of the food.

From [Japan Agri News](#)

Read more on the [Pacific Asia Research Center](#) website (J)

## **Report from the COP-MOP 9 Meeting (CBD COP 14) in Egypt**

By Martin Frid, CUJ

### *Strong corporate pressure*

According to Friends of the Earth, corporate pressure was strong during the two weeks of negotiations at the Convention on Biological Diversity in November, 2018 in Egypt: "While the planet spirals deeper into a biodiversity crisis, corporations are doing everything in their considerable power to block the adoption of important measures that can save our ecosystems."

FoE said corporations are stacking scientific sub-bodies with their own people. During an online synthetic biology forum, it became clear the agenda was being steered by lobbyists with vested interests.

The Corporate Europe Observatory revealed how "the pro-biotech lobby platform Public Research Regulation Initiative (PRRI) unites industry, researchers and regulators in like-minded groups to manipulate crucial international biosafety talks."

In response the CBD Secretariat (the neutral organizing body) suggested new text to the Convention that asks those serving on scientific advisory bodies to declare conflicts of interest. But FoE noted that "Conflicting interests will not be made public. Nor will anyone with a conflict be disqualified from service. Instead, a commission will try to balance conflicted parties."

FoE also commented: "The corporate lobby was visible in all synthetic biology proceedings and discussions relating to gene drives and Digital Sequence Information, which are extremely advanced forms of genetically modified organisms and transgenics. Corporations experimenting in these fields want free reign and zero regulations."

According to Third World Network, a number of experts that had been appointed to the CBD's Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Synthetic Biology were working for institutions that received over US\$100 million combined in US military and philanthropic funds expressly to develop and test gene drive systems. TWN's Lim Li Ching added: "And yet, these experts were part of an expert group advising the COP's decision-making on the very same subject. These conflicts of interest had not been declared partly

because there was no requirement to do so in the CBD processes.”

### *Gene drives*

At a joint press conference in Egypt, The African Centre for Biodiversity and Friends of the Earth noted that in light of the significant ecological and societal threats posed by genetically engineered gene drives, many civil society organizations are calling on governments at the Convention to put in place a moratorium on any environmental release of this new technology and any further experimental application of gene drives. Specifically, they called for a global moratorium on the environmental release of gene drives, a new genetic extinction technology, and to caution for stronger regulation of synthetic biology.

Nele Marien, Friends of the Earth International Forests and Biodiversity coordinator said, “Delegates are being asked to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention, but there is little to celebrate. Biodiversity has hugely declined, and while the slogan of the Conference is “investing in biodiversity”, there is exponentially more financial investment that destroys biodiversity than that saves it.”

She also noted that FoE underlines that the new strategic objectives for biodiversity - which will be approved at the next Conference meeting in China in 2020 - needs to be a framework that ensures the world starts living within planetary boundaries. People and planet must

be prioritized over economic development, and especially so over corporate interests. The agreement must be based on a participatory, bottom-up approach from local communities and those living with Nature.

The conference made a significant global decision on how to govern gene drives, by using a precautionary approach. “This important decision puts controls on gene drives using simple common sense principles: Don’t mess with someone else’s environment, territories and rights without their consent,” explained Jim Thomas, Co-Executive Director of the ETC Group. “Gene drives are currently being pursued by powerful military and agribusiness interests and a few wealthy individuals. This UN decision puts the power back in the hands of local communities, in particular indigenous peoples, to step on the brakes on this exterminator technology.”

The CBD decision also requires that, before an environmental gene drive release, a thorough case-by-case risk assessment should be carried out. With most countries lacking a regulatory system for the technology, it requires that new safety measures are put in place to prevent potential adverse effects. Guy Kastler from La Via Campesina, the global movement that represents over 200 million peasants from 182 organizations in 81 countries, was not satisfied: “The prospect of this technology brings unprecedented risks that we can’t accept. The UN should have decided a clear moratorium on gene drives.”

### *Risk assessment*

Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety adopted a decision that puts its important risk assessment work firmly back on track, after previous setbacks. At COP-MOP 8 in 2016, risk assessment proved to be the most divisive issue, pitting developing countries requesting for further risk assessment guidance against many developed countries.

Due to opposition by some Parties, COP-MOP 8 did not endorse the Guidance on Risk Assessment on Living Modified Organisms and Monitoring in the Context of Risk Assessment, that had been developed by the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Risk Assessment and Risk Management since it was first set up in 2008. It also did not extend the mandate of the AHTEG, and the proposed work on specific risk assessment guidance on living modified fish and LMOs produced through synthetic biology was not taken further, as was initially anticipated.

However, at the meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) that took place in July 2018, Parties began to breathe some life back into the process. During the discussions in the Working Group in Egypt, some Parties including Brazil, New Zealand, Paraguay, Switzerland, as well as Malawi speaking for the Africa Group, requested the deletion of all the references to LMOs produced through genome editing. They held the view that some organisms produced through genome editing were not LMOs.

The European Union felt that "LMOs produced through genome editing" was too broad a category and said the work set out in the decision should focus on specific topics and well-defined examples of LMOs, such as LMOs containing engineered gene drives and LM fish. This view was supported by Norway.

On the other hand, some Parties including Belarus, Bolivia, Uruguay and Venezuela wanted to keep the specific references to LMOs produced through genome editing, given that genome editing techniques are new techniques of modern biotechnology, allowing for deeper interventions, but with potential off-target effects. They felt that all Parties, especially those from developing countries and economies in transition, could benefit from further guidance on risk assessment of these LMOs. Compromise text, which included LMOs developed through genome editing, was eventually agreed and adopted.

TWN's Lim Li Ching and Lim Li Lin commented: "Parties were relieved that an AHTEG has now been established, as opposition to this since the last COP-MOP has continued. There will now be further work on risk assessment, including a decision on new guidance at COP-MOP 10 in 2020."

**Note: In the context of the CBD, the term Living Modified Organism (LMO) is used. It has the same meaning as Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)**

## **New Videos on Channel Nishoren Now on Youtube!**

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

- Koketsu Michiyo Explains: The problem with Glyphosate Residue from Pre-harvest Use
- Japan's No! GMO Campaign
- Messages from Seoul, South Korea
- 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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