

# Consumers Union of Japan

## Japan Resources

No. 174

April 2019

---

### Contents:

<i>From the Editors: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CUJ</i>
<b>Request Regarding Smart Meters</b>
<b>CUJ Public Comment about Genome Editing Techniques for Food</b>
<b>Essay: GM in Europe vs. Japan</b>
<b>Open Letter to Australia: Please Regulate New GM Technologies Strictly</b>

#### *From the Editors:*

### 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CUJ

This year, we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary since CUJ was founded. Back then, there were almost no Non-governmental organisations and no environmental movement to speak of. There wasn't even a government agency for consumer protection, and little chance to get redress in case of faulty products or services. Pollution was rampant.

CUJ quickly joined the global federation, now known as

Consumers International, as many of our campaigns by nature have an international dimension. This is particularly true when it comes to food safety issues, such as the problems associated with genetically modified food and new GM technologies.

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

- Editors

## Request Regarding Smart Meters

February 19, 2019

To: TEPCO Power Grid Corporation

Thank you for endeavoring to maintain the power transmission and distribution network.

We are concerned about the reports of fires in defective smart meters made by Toshiba Toko Meter Systems Co., Ltd. Some 90,000 smart meters produced by Toshiba Toko have been installed in your region, and so far, 16 cases of fires have been reported by December 2018.

We request that you stop installing smart meters, and that you respond to the consumers who want you to replace their smart meters with analogue ones.

Sincerely,

Denjiha.org

Nomura Osami

Consumers Union of Japan

Amagasa Keisuke

## CUJ Public Comment about Genome Editing Techniques for Food

*On February 21, 2019, Consumers Union of Japan submitted the following public comment in response to the Japanese government's GM Food, etc. Investigative Panel of the Pharmaceutical Affairs and Food Sanitation Council, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) regarding the handling of food modified by genome editing.*

Consumers Union of Japan is working for a sound and healthy future for all. This is why we are active in protecting our surrounding environment and the safety of our daily food. We believe this is what the Japanese government also wants. However, there are reports that the government has concluded that the Food Sanitation Law will not apply to food obtained through genome editing, thus giving up the important focus to protect the environment while also protecting food safety. CUJ finds this unacceptable. Therefore, we request that you withdraw the report and redo the deliberation from the beginning.

These are our reasons:

1. It is not possible to avoid off target influence and mosaic effects through genome editing. There are numerous studies that confirm this. The current conclusion contradicts data about such influences and effects by treating them in an overly optimistic way. After

- a serious change has occurred it will be too late to take action.
2. Through genome editing, epigenetic changes (heritable changes in gene expressions) have been reported to take place, something you hardly mention in your report. We can't help wondering if you are simply imagining that such a problem cannot happen.
  3. When inserting genes, and then removing them during the crossing stages, we assume that regulation is required. But even if the introduced genes are removed, there is no guarantee that they have been removed 100%, and that there does not remain any influence. Moreover, we have not heard that any safety studies have been done to make sure that such practices actually work as intended or that safety can be secured. We have big misgivings about the advancement of such technologies while the scientific basis appear to be so weak.
  4. The process of dealing with this by the Food Sanitation Law was compared to the safety examination of genetically modified food. Genome editing is also a genetic technology, but it differs fundamentally from DNA recombination technologies. Many more and various new vegetable or plant breeding experiments will now take place. New legal restrictions are needed for

this. We cannot accept that no effort will be made to maintain the safety of our food supply by the government's current policy approach.

5. The Food Sanitation Law has a huge influence also on how food is labelled. If the labelling requirements are affected by the current conclusion, and no labelling is required, it will remove the consumer's right to know and choose. This is a large and important responsibility for the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

### **Essay: GM in Europe vs. Japan**

*By Ryoko Matsuno, a member of the GMO No! Campaign & CUJ board member*

I took part in the 9<sup>th</sup> GMO-Free Europe Conference which was held on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2018 as one of three delegates from GMO No! Campaign, which has been campaigning against GMOs with the Consumers Union of Japan. More than 200 participants not only from Europe, but also from Africa, Asia, North America gathered in Berlin to discuss GM issues.

Until I visited Berlin, I did not know much about the situation surrounding GM issues in Europe. What I was told before my departure was that in the EU, food made of GM ingredients were hardly available because of mandatory labelling requirement for GM foods; also, European people are averse to such foods, therefore

food companies do not sell products made of GM ingredients. I, being a skeptic, could not believe it, because Japanese situation is completely opposite, and it is so difficult to buy food without GM ingredients unless you do your shopping online or go to natural food shops. When I realized that what I was told was true, I was shocked! In order to avoid GM food in Japan, you need to know labelling rules and their loopholes, but most Japanese are kept ignorant of these. Therefore, most of us end up eating large amount of GM food without being aware of that, or even worse believing that they don't eat such food, as the rules are far from clear.

In one part of the world, GM-free foods are readily available, so people there eat those foods effortlessly, whereas in other part, conscious efforts are required in order to buy such foods, otherwise people eat food of which health impact is not fully understood. Isn't this terrible? If there is no change of policy, Japanese kids might be more prone to be ill due to GM foods and other nasty stuff. Will the place of birth determine the health and fate of children? I suspect that Japanese kids cannot enjoy the same level of health that children in the EU are entitled to.

A few weeks before the Berlin conference, the decision by the European Court of Justice came out, in which the ECJ ruled that gene editing techniques would be subject to the same regulations as GMOs, hence plants and animals obtained by genome editing would need to go through the requirements of risk

assessment and authorization. The decision was, according to many GMO activists who attended the conference, needless to say, very welcome, but also unexpected.

In contrast, Japan seems to be heading to a completely opposite direction. An experts' panel for the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan proposed that most of the foods developed using gene-editing can be marketed without safety assessment. Furthermore, those foods could be placed on the market without appropriate labels. The outcome could be devastating for the health of people living in Japan and the environment.

Taking part in the conference gave me good opportunities to compare Japan and outside world. I would like Japan to prioritise protection of human health and environment, based on the precautionary principle like the EU does. Regretfully, the priorities of Japan, or more notably the Abe administration, are the economic growth and the protection of interest of multinational companies, sacrificing the health of Japanese people and the quality of the environment in this county.

Empowering Japanese NGOs might provide a key to facilitate changes in Japanese society. There must be so many lessons we can learn from European experiences.

## **Open Letter to Australia: Please Regulate New GM Technologies Strictly**

To:

Minister Bridget McKenzie

Parliament House, Canberra ACT  
2600

Australia

February 20, 2019

We are Consumers Union of Japan, founded in 1969, as a member-based consumer organization. One of our main concerns is the many problems with genetically modified organisms (GMO) and GM food. Consumers in Japan are strongly opposed to GM technology and do not want to eat such products.

In light of this, we are alarmed to hear that Australia is considering to deregulate new GM technologies, including CRISPR, in animals, plants and microbes. Japanese consumers would not at all be willing to eat such products, either. We do not believe the claims that these new technologies are “precise” or “predictable” but regard them with the same mistrust as older GM technologies that can harm biological diversity, as well as pose unknown risks to human health.

Please regulate new GM technologies as strictly if not even stricter than older GM technologies, or you risk harming Australia’s image as a food producer here in Japan, and we will boycott all such products.

**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.**

**Address: Nishi Waseda 1-9-19-207 Shinjuku-Ku, Tokyo, Japan**  
**English website:**  
**[www.nishoren.org/en/](http://www.nishoren.org/en/)**

