

Consumers Union of Japan

Japan Resources

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From the Editors:

Stay Tuned for More to Come!

Welcome to issue No. 178 of Consumers Union of Japan’s English newsletter. The severe summer heat seems to be over with several typhoons on their way. We hope everyone will stay safe and get on with their lives in spite of the ongoing pandemic that is wreaking havoc around the world. Hopefully, there will be change for the better.

Here at CUJ we had to cancel many events but using the Internet, including web-based meetings and videos, in creative ways has been a way to step up our activities and campaigns. Stay tuned for more to come!

- Editors

Request to Stop Using Pre-harvest Glyphosate on Soybeans

To:

JA Toyama Prefecture

From:

No! GMO Campaign

Consumers Union of
Japan

25 August 2020

We are a consumer organization working for food safety. We are engaging in a number of initiatives to oppose genetically modified foods and genome-edited foods and demand prudent use of the herbicides and pesticides associated with them. In recent years, we have strengthened our monitoring of glyphosate herbicides, especially in light of the recent revelations of their harmfulness and the progress of global regulations.

In the midst of this situation, we were informed that the glyphosate was detected in soybeans and processed foods shipped from your prefecture's JA plant. Glyphosate is a suspected carcinogenic with other toxic effects. We are concerned to learn that it is being sprayed as a wilt agent before the wheat harvest in North America and that pre-harvest spraying is being carried out on soybeans here in Japan as well. We are concerned that the spraying of harmful pesticides has a high risk of harming the health of farmers, and that spraying just before harvest can lead to significant residues in the harvest. While the Pesticide Control Act allows for the

application of herbicides and pesticides in the field of soybeans prior to harvest, the purpose of using glyphosate is solely for weed control. We believe it is illegal to use glyphosate for soybean wilt or to use them in such a way that they affect the soybeans.

We, as consumers, used to think that domestic soybeans were safe because many imported soybeans are now genetically modified and new genome-edited soybeans have appeared in the United States. However, we are concerned that the detection of glyphosate in domestically produced soybeans may make it impossible to say that such soybeans are safe because they are domestically produced.

We would like to ask you to instruct your prefecture's JA to stop using glyphosate in soybeans prior to harvest, and ask the following questions. We would like to ask you to respond in writing by 8 September. We plan to publish your answers on our website.

Questions:

1. Have your prefecture's headquarters ever advised JAs in your prefecture to recommend or allow spraying with glyphosate before the harvest of soybeans?
2. Do you know whether or not your prefecture's JAs apply glyphosate before the harvest of soybeans?

3. Are you aware that in 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer evaluated glyphosate as a possible carcinogen for humans, and that in the United States, a large number of plaintiffs have won lawsuits against glyphosate manufacturers?
4. Could you instruct JA in the prefecture to stop using glyphosate before harvest? When, if at all, will you instruct them to stop? If not, please tell us why you will not do so.

CUJ Blog: What is the Future of Japanese Agriculture?

Every year at this time of the year, I feel depressed. It's the time of year when aerial pesticide spraying for rice stink bug control takes place. After a few years of living in rural areas, I've seen one aspect of the dwindling number of farmers. They have to rely on aerial spraying to save labor. There are many elderly people who don't want to use herbicides who can't cope with the vigorous growth of weeds, so they are dependent on them.

Not only in the town where I live, but also in neighboring towns and villages, young people are leaving for the big cities, and those who are engaged in farming are mostly in their 70s or 80s. The number of abandoned fields is increasing year by year due to the lack of manpower, so fields are in disrepair. Satoyama (mountainous farm areas) are no longer maintained, and damage from

monkeys, deer and wild boars is increasing.

Most urban residents think that they can get food at convenience stores and supermarkets anytime, but due to the effects of the new corona virus pandemic and climate change, the number of countries exporting food to Japan may decrease dramatically in the future. I really wonder what will happen to Japan then, as our food self-sufficiency rate is only 37%. Large cities with "dense" populations and rural areas that are exhausted by the outflow of population... I can only hope that the unbalanced distribution of human beings in this country will be restored through the pandemic.

By Matsuno Ryoko (August 6, 2020)

CUJ Supports "Defend Our Rice, Fight for Our Rights" Campaign Across Asia

To commemorate the historic event when more than 400 farmers, urban poor, youths, and consumers uprooted Golden Rice in Pili, Camarines Sur back in 2013, the Stop Golden Rice Network (SGRN) successfully held a week-long campaign with the theme "Defend Our Rice, Fight for Our Rights."

Joined by various organizations and alliances across Asia, the "Defend Our Rice, Fight for Our Rights" campaign included various sets of activities starting from its launching on August 2 and concluding on August 8, the International Day of Action Against Golden Rice.

“State-sanctioned lockdowns due to the pandemic truly posed a challenge in launching campaigns, but it did not deter our farmers from joining,” said Cris Panerio, MASIPAG National Coordinator. “We need to be even more united than before however difficult it is in the time of COVID-19 health pandemic. And it showed through Black Lives Matter that it is possible to get organized in new means by making use of technologies at our disposal,” said Julie Smit, Luxembourg-based executive member of People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS), in a webinar as part of the week-long campaign.

Farmers from MASIPAG Luzon took it to their farms to hang placards against Golden Rice

Different farmer organizations across Asia joined the International Day of Action Against Golden Rice on August 8 culminating in a protest action by hanging GM Free banners on their farms. It was then uploaded through social media platforms to encourage more farmers to do the same.

“It’s a show of force to display our solidarity with our genuine cause to stop golden rice and the further corporatization of our food systems.” said Panerio.

Women farmers from BAYAN Camarines Sur reveal their calls from their farm

Members and partners of the SGRN vow to continue the campaign through continued vigilance against the commercialization of Golden Rice

and the corporate agenda to food and agriculture. Active applications for the commercialization of Golden Rice are underway in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Indonesia. Several biosafety regulations are also being relaxed in several countries to accommodate GM crops, and even new plant breeding techniques through gene-editing.

“Consumers Union of Japan strongly supports the annual campaign event to stop Golden Rice. Here in Japan, we are very worried about attempts to use new gene-editing techniques on rice, with research already ongoing. Of course in the future, such genome-altering GM Rice would be unacceptable to farmers and consumers all over the world, if they were used to attempt to produce the same effects as the current GM Golden Rice. We will continue the struggle to educate everyone about these events” said Martin J. Frid of Consumers Union Japan.

Request for Opinion Exchange on Genome-Editing Foods

To:

The Ministry of Health, Labour & Welfare

From:

No! GMO Campaign

Consumers Union of Japan

3 August 2020

It has been almost 10 months since genome-edited foods became available for distribution in Japan. Although your ministry's website indicates that no notification has been made yet, the sale of "cricket crackers" made from genome-edited crickets was reported on 13 May 2020, causing concern among consumers. This turned out to be a false alarm, but later on, information was received that genome-edited crickets were being used at a ramen restaurant in Tokyo. The staff at the restaurant had actively admitted to using them, and when we reconfirmed their use, they denied it, but we cannot confirm whether this is true or not. Most importantly, this is due to the lack of notification requirements. It is possible that other genome-edited foods are being developed and distributed under the radar. A total of 447,725 signatures submitted at the House Study Session we held in September 2019 and January this year calling for the regulation and labeling of genome-edited foods were gathered in anticipation of this unsettling situation.

At the House Study Session in January, we heard from your ministry's officials that they have already received a number of consultations on how to report on the issue, but despite the fact that more than six months have passed since then, the government is still showing a lack of interest in the issue.

We would therefore like to request a meeting with your ministry to discuss this issue. As the new coronavirus continues to spread, we would be happy to meet with you in a small group. If you are unable to meet with us in person, we would be happy to have an online meeting. Here are the main points we'd like to ask you at this time. Please respond to the following questions by 14 August.

1. What is the status of consultations on the notification of genome-edited foods?
2. Are you aware of the status of research and development in Japan and abroad?
3. What is your understanding of genome-edited crickets?
4. Do you monitor undelivered distribution in Tokyo?

Over 9000 People Replied to CUJ's Questionnaire About Fragrances

Over the past three years Consumers Union of Japan has campaigned against harmful perfumes and irritating fragrances. Many people have lobbied schools, offices and public spaces to stop using any such artificial substances, that can cause headaches, allergic reactions and a range of other symptoms.



This year, we published a questionnaire and got over 9000 replies regarding this campaign. We found that 79% felt they have experiences problems due to perfumes and fragrances. And 18.6% of those who replied have had such strong reactions that they could not attend school or work. We strongly feel this shows the urgent reality of this matter and will continue to raise awareness.

Campaign Against Railway Glyphosate Use

As part of our ongoing work to get rid of the herbicide glyphosate (active ingredient in Roundup and several other herbicides) the No! GMO Campaign wrote to all major railway companies in Japan early in 2020. Many people are concerned about the spraying of this cancer-causing chemical to kill weeds along train tracks. And several railway companies have revealed in their environmental reports or sustainability reports that they are trying to reduce the use of herbicides. Unfortunately, none of the railway companies replied to our letter and did not answer our questions. As part of our campaign, we also asked the railway companies, including JR, Odakyu Line, Keio Line, Seibu Line and others to completely stop using glyphosate.

When we wrote to them a second time this spring, only a few companies replied:

JR East Japan: We do not reveal the names of individual herbicides that we use

JR West Japan: We are using glyphosate

JR Kyushu: We are using glyphosate

JR Shikoku: No reply regarding glyphosate

JR Tokai: No reply regarding glyphosate

Kintetsu Railway: We do not use glyphosate

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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