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From the Editors:

Staying Safe, and More

Welcome to issue No. 179 of Consumers Union of Japan's English newsletter. This year has been extraordinary in many ways. We hope you are all wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, and working/studying from home as much as possible.

Not only that, it is important to focus on the positive aspects of life. Have you noticed that the air seems

cleaner and actually, the number of people getting sick from the "usual" seasonal flu is much lower? Are you spending more time with your family? Perhaps you are exercising more than before? Let's hope something good will come out of this pandemic...

We wish you all the best in 2021.

- Editors

Open Letter of Inquiry Regarding the Handling of Genome-Edited Foods

From:

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To:

Major Food Companies in Japan

12 November 2020

Open Letter of Inquiry Regarding the Handling of Genome-Edited Foods

We are citizens' groups campaigning against the use of genetically modified technology in food.

Genetically modified crops are subject to a very simple safety review called "Substantial Equivalence," despite the fact that the GM technology relies heavily on random events and can produce toxic substances due to unexpected genetic changes. More than 20 years have passed since genetically modified foods were first distributed in Japan, but not only are these concerns still unresolved. The labeling of genetically modified foods lags behind the rest of the world, with most genetically modified foods on the market not being labeled.

In such a situation, a new type of so-called genome edited food has emerged. The Japanese government has decided on a policy of no prior notifications, no safety reviews, and no labeling requirements for genome edited foods, as long as no foreign genes remain in the food. However, it is known that genome-edited foods can also cause off-target and other unexpected genetic changes. Consequently, the explanation that they are the same as mutations in nature is wrong. Genome-edited crops are reportedly already being cultivated and distributed in the United States, and the development of genome-edited animals and plants is underway in Japan and abroad. It is uncertain when they will start to be distributed in Japan as well. If genome-edited food is distributed without labeling, it would not be possible for consumers to purchase food products without concern.

In light of this situation, we have decided to ask food manufacturers in Japan what their current awareness and intentions are. Please respond to the attached questionnaire.

Your answers should be in writing by the end of November 2020. You can send us your answers by mail or by email. In addition, we will publish your answers, including whether or not you answered, so please do not hesitate to contact us.

Questions

Question 1: What do you think about foods produced with genome-editing technology?

Please circle one reply and leave any comments in the space provided below.

- 1) We think we should take a cautious approach in consideration of safety.
- 2) We will consider the issue in the future.
- 3) We believe that there are no safety problems since the country has evaluated it.
- 4) We are not particularly aware of genome-editing.
- 5) Other

Question 2: Do you plan to handle foods produced with genome-editing technology?

- 1) No, we do not plan to handle them.
- 2) There are no plans to handle them at this time, but no policy has been decided.
- 3) We plan to handle them or are considering it.
- 4) We are neither undecided or unaware of the issue of genome-editing.
- 5) Other

Question 3: Have you had any problems with genome-edited foods?

- 1) We do not handle genome-edited food products, but we are concerned about checking raw materials and ingredients.
- 2) We are planning to handle or are

considering handling them, but we are concerned about whether consumers will be concerned.

- 3) We have no concerns.
- 4) Other

New Booklet: Glyphosate

CUJ and the No! GMO Campaign have published a new booklet about the dangerous herbicide glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup and other brands. Written by Amagasa Keisuke, it outlines the recent events including lawsuits in the US and new data about the toxic effects. Here in Japan, residue of glyphosate has been found in bread made with imported wheat.



The booklet also exposes how in 2017, the Japanese government increased the legal residue levels in many foods:

Wheat flour: From 5 => 30 parts per million (ppm)

Rye wheat flour: From 0.2 => 30 ppm

Soba flour: From 0.2 => 30 ppm

Corn: From 1 => 5 ppm

Canola: From 10 => 30 ppm

In Japan, many soybean farmers are using glyphosate-based herbicides including Roundup as a pre-harvest chemical, in order to dry the crops while they are still maturing. CUJ and the No! GMO Campaign have been successfully campaigning to get soybean farmers in Hokkaido to stop this practice. In other countries, especially in North and South America, farmers are growing crops that are genetically modified to tolerate glyphosate. In Japan, there is no commercial farming of such GM crops, but imported feed and food oils often contain GM ingredients such as GM soy, GM corn or GM canola (rapeseed). Look for the label on products including soy, such as tofu, soy sauce and natto if you want to avoid GM ingredients that can contain glyphosate residue.

Wild-growing GM Canola Still a Problem

Activists have for many years participated in actions around harbours all around Japan. They collect and test wild-growing canola along roads and near food oil factories. The import of Genetically Modified canola, which started in the late 1990s, led to GM plants growing wild, an unintentional effect that poses a risk to the biodiversity of similar plants. Canola is a member of the *Brassica* genus and many other edible plants are grown in Japan, thus increasing the risk that cross-contamination will occur of related foods like cabbage or broccoli.

In 2006, the government started taking an interest in this issue, after intense lobbying by CUJ and the No! GMO Campaign, who are helping to organise the testing. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) has again this year announced that they have found GM canola growing wild around seven harbours (Tomakomai, Kashima, Chiba, Nagoya, Yokkaichi, Kobe and Hakata). They also found wild-growing GM soy at one harbour (Hakata).

It is believed that the imported seeds easily fall off conveyor belts and lorries as they are transported from the ships that enter the harbours. According to Bio Journal, when 165 individual seeds of *Brassica napus* were tested, 20 were discovered to have resistance to both glyphosate and glufosinate.

Questionnaire Regarding Vaccination Against COVID-19

CUJ has submitted the following questionnaire to the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Mr. Katsunobu Kato.

On 31 July 2020, your ministry announced that it had reached a basic agreement with Pfizer Inc. of the United States to supply 60 million people with a new coronavirus vaccine by June of next year, if the vaccine is successful. Your ministry also announced on 7 August that it had reached an agreement in principle with AstraZeneca of the United Kingdom to receive 120 million doses of the vaccine, if successful, by early next year. Developed countries are working to secure the vaccine, and your ministry is actively working to secure it. This is a major agreement at a time when vaccines are not yet available and their effectiveness and safety are not even known.

Vaccines are causing health problems, especially among children, due to adverse reactions. Vaccines, unlike drugs, are administered to healthy people. We must be cautious as well as careful. In order to hasten the development of this new biotech vaccine, they are being developed in a different way than the traditional method of development, and the way the vaccine works is completely different. Moreover, large-scale vaccination is being considered. We can't help but be very concerned about

the damage caused by adverse reactions. For this reason, we would like to ask the following questions:

We would appreciate it if you could respond in writing to CUJ by 23 September. Please understand that we will share your answers with those inside and outside of our organization.

1. Your ministry is hurrying up the development of vaccines by shortening the screening process, which is normally required in vaccine development, and easing regulations. Therefore, your ministry is allowing basic research, animal experiments, and clinical research on humans to proceed in parallel. Concurrent research means inoculating humans and confirming the safety and efficacy of the vaccine before it is almost completely confirmed. Why did you condone this kind of disregard for safety?

2. This time the agreement with multinational pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer and AstraZeneca is not the traditional live, inactivated, or VLP vaccine, but a new mRNA vaccine or viral vector vaccine. Such vaccines have no experience with human inoculation and are more akin to human experimentation. Based on the experience of Nazi Germany, can we say that they violate the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki by the World Medical Association, which banned human experimentation in advanced medicine? What are your thoughts on this?

3. In addition to the mRNA vaccine and the viral vector vaccine, which were agreed upon in principle to be purchased, there is a DNA vaccine. The basic idea behind all three types of vaccines is to create a protein that has the function of a vaccine when introduced into the human body, as opposed to the traditional live, inactivated, and VLP vaccines, which all make the vaccine itself and inoculate the human body. If a substance that works as a vaccine is produced in the human body, this is the concept of gene therapy, which can be called human genetic modification. Gene therapy should be defined in the guidelines for gene therapy clinical trials. Please give us your views on this.

4. Along with the viral vector vaccines agreed upon in the contracts, the venture company AnGes Inc. of Osaka University is developing a DNA vaccine. If this gets into the human genome, it can lead to genetic modification of humans. This is ethically unacceptable. What is your opinion on this point?

5. As the new biotech vaccines involve genetic modification of humans, it should be subject to the Cartagena Protocol, which covers all organisms that have been genetically modified. What are your thoughts on this point? Are you discussing it with the Ministry of the Environment?

6. The human immune system is a complex system consisting of a variety of immune-related cells that communicate and work together. There is a risk that new types of biotech

vaccines, which work in an unprecedented way, may interfere with this complex system and cause allergies, hypersensitivity, autoimmune diseases, etc. What is being done about this? How are you trying to address that?

7. The government's policy of exonerating companies from liability in the event of a major adverse reaction is contrary to the concept of product liability, which is aimed at protecting consumers. What are your thoughts on this issue? Also, if the government promotes the vaccination, it will be subject to state compensation. Consequently, we think that both companies and the government should be held responsible.

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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