Consumers Union of Japan
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Welcome to issue No. 181 of Consumers Union of Japan's English newsletter. In Japan, there is a growing movement to make school lunches organic. All over Japan, parents are collecting signatures, collaborating with producers, and lobbying local governments. However, organic school lunches are not a new theme. In the late 1970s, there was a movement for "pesticide-free vegetables in school lunches," which led to the formation of a network for school lunches, in which Consumers Union of Japan also participated. The topics we tackled were not only organic food, but also harmful tableware, synthetic detergents used for washing dishes, and food additives. CUJ has been raising various issues, always asking what is the best school lunch for children. The organic school lunch movement, which is gaining momentum again, has in common the strong desire to bring safe school lunches to children. In this issue of Japan Resources we would like to introduce you to some of the movements in various parts of the country that are working hard to achieve this goal.

- Editors

Organically Grown Food for School Lunch Programs
By Koa Tasaka

The Case of Isumi City:

In 2014, Isumi City invited Mr. Inaba, who had recently established a method of controlling weeds in paddy fields without the use of herbicides, to train farmers in the area to start organic rice cultivation. In the first year, the farmers had to remove the weeds in the paddy fields by hand, but, from the second year, the ecosystem in the paddy field recovered, and there was almost no need for manual weeding.

The city mayor decided to introduce the organic rice produced in Isumi City to the school lunch program, and in 2015, 5 tons out of 40 tons of rice used for school lunches were organic, locally grown rice. Mr. Sameda of the Agriculture Department of Isumi City encouraged local farmers to produce more organic rice, and the numbers of farmers who received training in organic rice cultivation increased. The number of organic farmers increased from five in 2010 to 25 in 2019, and it became possible to provide 40 tons of organic rice for the school lunch program in all the elementary and secondary schools in the city in 2019. According to Mr. Sameda, eight different kinds of vegetables are now grown organically which will be utilized for the school lunch program.

The Case of Kisarazu City:

In 2018 when Mr. Inaba and I were working on a three year project for the introduction of organic rice cultivation in Bhutan, we met the Mayor of Kisarazu City. I asked him why he was visiting Bhutan. He replied that he was thinking of introducing organic rice into the school lunch program in Kisarazu City, and decided to visit Bhutan where Mr. Inaba was making efforts to cultivate rice without the use of pesticides or herbicides. He also told us that the success of Isumi City to introduce organic school lunch with the help of Mr. Inaba encouraged him to try the same.

After he returned to Japan, Kisarazu City started a project to change the school lunch program to organic rice rather than imported wheat (which had been found to be contaminated with pesticides and herbicides), plus a budget to give training to farmers. Mr. Inaba was invited to Kisarazu City and started providing training to farmers on organic methods. Although Mr. Inaba passed away on 11 December 2020, two members of the Civil Institute of (Organic) Rice Cultivation are presently continuing the training.

As the population of Kisarazu City is much larger than Isumi City, it may take more time to achieve a 100% organic school lunch program there, but, I believe that after some years, it will be possible to provide all the students in Kisarazu with organic rice.

Itadakimasu!

By Yuri Kitagawa

While the share of organic farming in Japan remains low and farmers in general are ageing (average age is 68 years old), individual farmers who have been pursuing organic farming are slowly gathering attention and attempts to introduce organic school lunches are gathering pace albeit slowly. Two movies introducing organic farmers and organic school lunches have been made recently, both directed by Vin Oota.

The first movie called “Itadakimasu 1” features a child care facility in Fukuoka Prefecture where children make 100 kg of miso (fermented bean paste) every year for soup to be consumed as part of their lunches. Many Japanese kids these days tend to dislike traditional Japanese meals but here the children love it and the child care facility is successful in overcoming allergies, which keeps surging in Japan. “Itadakimasu 2” introduces several organic farms and schools, kindergarten and child care facilities across Japan which adopt organic lunches.

“Itadakimasu” is a Japanese word whose direct translation is “I humbly receive” and is cited before a meal like “bon appétit”. The expression also encompasses a meaning of gratitude towards receiving life, products, farmers and earth.

“Itadakimasu 1” with English subtitles exists and was screened at the California Independent Film Festival in 2018. The production company of Director Vin Oota has screened this English version online but they have no plan for another screening for the time being.

Itadakimasu 1 (in English):
http://itadakimasu-miso.jp/english/
Itadakimasu 2 (in Japanese):
https://itadakimasu2.jp

Oota Vin Theatre - Mahoroba Studio:
https://www.mahoroba-mirai.com
Contact: i@mahoroba-mirai.jp

School Lunches at a Public School in Chiba Prefecture

Text & photos by Kaori Hirouchi

Menu 1: Rice with barley, Crispy fried capelins, Sprout salad, Miso soup with potatoes, Orange, Milk

Menu 2: Rice with red beans, Grilled red fish, Vegetables with sesame sauce, Vegetable soup, Strawberries, Milk

Menu 3: Ramen noodles with vegetables, Beef salad, Orange rice flour cake, Milk

Note: An alternative menu is provided for pupils with allergies. It is customized individually depending on the allergens to be removed.

News: New Wave of Protests Against Unregulated Genome-Edited Tomato

Activists from Japanese consumer organizations and farmers' groups protested again against the unregulated GABA tomato on Earth Day 22 April 2021. Sanatech Seed is introducing its genome-edited tomato this spring without any safety checks and no mandatory labelling. "It is a genetically modified food and consumers have no idea if it is safe or not, and no way of avoiding it, once it reaches the market," said one of the speakers at the protest action outside Sanatech's offices in central Tokyo. This is the second effort to stop the release of the GMO tomato, which is said to be genetically engineered to have "high levels of GABA" without much research to support the claims regarding any potential health benefits.

Specifically, the company is giving out genome-edited seedlings for free and claims some 5000 growers are already interested. This could lead to contamination and problems not

only for consumers but for nearby farmers and other growers as well. Consumers Union of Japan, the No! GMO Campaign and many other organizations and groups in Japan are urging the company to stop this introduction, and asking how the CBD Cartagena Protocol may apply.

Trend: Intense Activity Toward Commercialization of Genome-Edited Food

There is growing intensity among companies and research institutes, and, based on that, in the government, regarding genome-edited food. A typical example is the start of field trials of a new genome-edited potato. The potato was developed by RIKEN and will be cultivated in the fields of the National Agriculture and Food Research Organization (NARO), which is conducting joint experiments with RIKEN. The potato has reduced amounts of solanine and chaconine, toxic alkaloids found in potatoes. Solanine is a toxic substance that forms in the sprouts, and chaconine is a toxic substance that forms when a part of a potato exposed to the sun turns green. The new variety was developed by destroying a gene to prevent the enzyme SSR2 from being produced, thereby preventing the production of these

substances. The first round of field trials is scheduled to be conducted from late April to early August, and the second round from late August to January 2022.

Meanwhile, Sanatech Seeds will soon start distributing free seedlings of high GABA tomatoes. In anticipation of this, the Japan Citizens' Network for Sustainable Food and Agriculture (FA-Net), a citizen's group, repeatedly asked the developer, Prof. Ezura of Tsukuba University, and Sanatech Seeds for a meeting and to attend an opinion exchange meeting with MHLW. However, as both parties refused, another request was made through the office of Mizuho Fukushima, a member of the Upper House of the Japanese Parliament, but again the professor and the company refused to attend, and only responses to written questions were received. According to the responses, "As a result of prior consultations with the relevant ministries and agencies and a review by experts, the safety (of the genome-edited tomatoes) is judged to have been scientifically determined to be as safe as conventionally bred tomatoes." No further details were given. On 23 April 2021 the company held a press conference to announce that it would start distributing the seedlings in mid-May and that they would be grown by contract farmers for processing into tomato puree for mail-order sales.

Activity surrounding fish, such as the fleshy red sea bream, is also gaining momentum. Consumers Union of Japan and other consumer groups received responses to letters of inquiry sent to the developer, Assistant Professor Kinoshita of Kyoto University, Regional Fish, and the MHLW. Briefly, the responses from Assistant Professor Kinoshita and Regional Fish were as follows:

(1) The fish are cultured on land with double protection against environmental impacts
(2) The entire genome is analyzed and there are no off-targets
(3) There is no genetic mosaicism from the offspring generation onward
(4) The epigenome has not yet been analyzed
(5) Analysis of food ingredients shows no difference from conventional varieties
(6) The company will take the consumer's right to know into account though labelling.

Citing intellectual property rights as a reason to refrain from stating views, the MHLW effectively did not respond. (Source: Bio Journal May 2021)

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