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Avon Awards to Women for

Kamiyama Michiko, Food Safety Citizens' Watch



Kamiyama Michiko (r) Receives Avon Award

Mrs. Kamiyama Michiko from **Food Safety Citizen's Watch** was one of the recipients of the Avon Awards to Women in 2008. The prestigious prize has been awarded since 1979 to opinion leaders, welfare activists, volunteers, scientists, politicians and writers.

Mrs. Kamiyama was awarded the Avon Prize for 30 years of activities connected with food safety. Food Safety Citizens' Watch was established in April 2003 as a network of experts to monitor developments and make proposals to the government regarding food safety issues from the citizen's point of view.

Congratulations!

How Genetically Modified Foods Are Accelerating The Food Crisis

Presentation by Keisuke AMAGASA, Chairperson of NO! GMO Campaign, as one of the programs at the World Foodless Day held in Tokyo on October 16, 2008.

Good afternoon. In my brief presentation, I would like to summarise the present state of genetically modified (GM) crop and food in 13 points, referring to their relationship to today's food crisis.

1. The farmland planted with GM crops is continuously expanding in the world.

Most of the GM-planted farmland is located in North and South America, with the United States accounting for about half of the global total GM-planted area. The number of countries cultivating GM crops remains limited. This is because GM crops are concentrated in regions that are dominated by Monsanto and/or closely involved in the U.S. food strategy. On the other hand, countries free of these influences also remain free of GM crops.

2. The varieties and characteristics of the planted GM crops are not increasing.

Only four GM crops are planted in the world; maize, soybean, canola and cotton, and there are only two genetically introduced characteristics; herbicide tolerance and pesticide effect. However, these GM characteristics are not very effective, basically because we cannot fully manipulate life forms; the living organisms do not always respond as human beings expect.

3. Japan is not cultivating GM crops, but is a great importer of GM crops.

Let me emphasise that Japan is not among the GM crop cultivating countries. But Japan is a great importer of GM crops; in average, people in Japan are eating GM food the most in East Asia, followed by South Korea, and Taiwan. This is due to the low self-sufficiency ratios and the increase of GM crop farming in certain exporting countries. In addition, the Japanese food labelling system is so partial and confusing that consumers are not able to make a choice.

4. Japan's GM labelling system is tricky.

We can compare Japan with the situation in Europe, where virtually no GM food is being sold. This is due to the strict and comprehensive labelling rules. First of all, every kind of food and food ingredient must be labelled in Europe if it has a GM origin. In Japan, however, only a few foods, such as natto, tofu and miso, are labelled. In addition, only the top three ingredients need to be labelled, and the rest of the ingredients are not covered by the GM labelling legislation. In Europe, GM labelling is required if there is a presence of GM as low as 0.9%, while the limit in Japan is 5%. For example, when we import soybeans from the United States, they may be contaminated by 1% of GM soybeans without any labelling requirements. The same product sold in Japan would be labelled as non-GM while in Europe, it would be labelled as a GM food.

5. The Japanese GM crop development has almost completely failed.

So far in Japan there have been hundreds or even thousands of different GM varieties developed by the agricultural research institutes of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and by different institutions, universities and private enterprises. Their focus has been on GM rice, but there is not a single case where a product has reached the market. Presently, the only remaining GM crop being developed is a rice variety supposedly carrying a trait to make it suitable for people with certain cedar pollen allergies (hay fever), but even this does not appear to be successful. Not only are GM foods rejected by consumers, but the bigger issue is that it seems impossible to develop GM crops that can in fact be marketed. This is basically because manipulating life forms is not that simple.

6. GM seeds are quasi-monopolised by Monsanto.

GM research and development is being dominated by Monsanto, the monopolistic U.S. corporation. Currently, this company has more than a 90% share of the world's GM seeds, controlling nearly 20% of the GM seed sales. They reached this by suppressing the entry of other companies through patents, and by aggressively purchasing seed companies, and by creating a monopoly on the way seeds are marketed.

7. Today's food crisis is caused by agri-bio-industry and financial speculation.

Food crisis: There have been many food crises in the past, but today, we are experiencing something which has been caused directly by the biofuel boom. For example, looking at the production volume and the consumption of corn, there is currently overproduction. Because the corn price soared, farmers expanded the planting of corn. In spite of the overproduction, the price has reached its highest level in history. Speculators continued to invest in biofuels, and as a result the price levels of corn used for food were also artificially rising, leading to riots in some developing countries. GM is promoted as a solution for the food crisis, but instead, it is this kind of worldwide market structure that needs to be changed.

Meanwhile, Monsanto reaps its largest profits ever, and continues to aggressively expand its market shares.

8. No advantages for farmers.

GM crops have no real merits for the farmer. Yields actually decrease and the amount of agricultural chemicals will increase. Monsanto has claimed that yields will increase, but they have not introduced DNA that specifically leads to increased yields. Furthermore, the insecticide-tolerant pests and herbicide-tolerant weeds are spreading, and as a result, increased amounts of agrochemicals continue to be used. This brings about an absurd destruction of the environment.

9. GM contamination is spreading.

Environmental pollution, seed pollution and food pollution all occur as the pollen of GM crops spread, and as the seeds spill and fall from farm vehicles and trucks. In addition, this has led to GM pollution of the food on our plates. At present, we strongly fear that the contamination is becoming a daily occurrence and a threat to biodiversity and food safety.

10. GMOs are threatening food safety and security.

Concerning the safety of GM food, there are various examples of animal experiments that have been made. A certain researcher pointed out the carcinogenic characteristics GM crops. Some experts have also pointed out that GM can easily cause new allergies. There are many research results that indicate that we should indeed be concerned about the influence on children. When we carefully examined and double-checked the experiments conducted by Monsanto, we even found evidence of harmful effects.

11. GMOs are threatening eco-system and biodiversity.

GM crops have been identified as a threat to the ecosystem and the biodiversity. Contamination trials in Hokkaido, northern Japan, proved that pollen from GM crops can spread further and wider than expected. Tests have been done by people all over Japan, collecting samples of wild-growing rape seed plants, and they have found a large number of cases of GM rape seed in locations where they should not be growing. This is an example of how serious the environmental pollution caused by GM has become.

12. Local governments are enforcing stricter regulations than the national ones.

Because of the weak Japanese regulation, GM crop cultivation regulations are expanding at the local, self-governing level. Hokkaido and Niigata prefecture were the first, by creating regulations at the local self-governing body level, as well as issuing by-laws and guidelines. Also, we see that municipalities are increasingly starting to deal with this issue. Especially, we are impressed by the superior regulations of Hokkaido and Imabari city.

13. GMO free zones are expanding all over the world.

In parallel with such actions by self-governing communities, the GMO free zone movement is gaining strength. A GMO free zone is an area where GM crops cannot be produced. Such designated areas are expanding around the world in an effort to prohibit the use of GM crops. This movement originally started in Europe. In countries such as Austria, Greece and Poland, all local governments have pledged to become GM free zones. Here in Japan, the first meeting was held in Takashima city, Shiga prefecture on January 29, 2005, as individuals, farmer groups and other NGOs joined hands to make a GMO Free Zone declaration. Currently, we are focusing on Hokkaido and the national capital region, with plans to expand to the entire country (the current GMO Free Zone areal exceeds 1% of the Japanese farmland).

These 13 points indicate the current situation and the problems related to GM crops and GM food.

Demands To The Japanese Government On The Codex Guideline On Antimicrobial Resistance

CUJ submitted the following demand letter (English version) to the Japanese government concerning a new guideline on antimicrobial resistance related to food being discussed in the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Antimicrobial Resistance. We think that the position the Japanese government took at the second meeting in Korea in October 2008 did not reflect the Japanese consumers' strong concerns about food safety.

Regarding the guideline on antimicrobial resistance related to food under discussion in the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Antimicrobial Resistance

(Translation)

To:

Members of the Japanese Codex Liaison Committee

Members of the Japanese Government Codex Delegation

From: Consumers Union of Japan

November 14, 2008

The second meeting of the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Antimicrobial Resistance was held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on October 20-24, 2008. The topics debated included agenda item 4, "Proposed Draft Risk Assessment Guidance Regarding Foodborne Antimicrobial Resistant Microorganisms" and guidance on creating risk profiles for antimicrobial resistant foodborne microorganisms for setting risk assessment and management profiles. Related to this debate, we have identified the following issues, listed below. We would like Japan's national liaison committee to thoroughly examine these points. We demand that the Japanese government base its position for the third task force meeting to be held in 2009 on the results of the discussion of this liaison committee.

1) As for agenda item 4 (which was added to the agenda items in CX/AMR 08/2/1), we agree that the three proposed documents on risk assessment, management and profiling be integrated into one guidance document, but we demand that this integration be done without any suppression of the contents of the original three documents.

2) During the discussion of agenda item 7 (agenda item 6 in the original CX/AMR 08/2/1), withdrawal from sale of food contaminated by antimicrobial resistant bacteria was debated as a risk management option. At that time, Canada, Norway and the EC supported the adoption of this option, but the representative from the Japanese government, Singapore, Thailand, the United States and Australia were opposed to the adoption of this option. We would like you to explain the reason. As food contaminated with bacteria that has acquired resistance to antibiotics is a serious health risk, we feel this food recall option should be stated clearly.

3) We urge the Japanese government to support the proposals for agenda item 7 (risk management) from the viewpoint of consumer protection, particularly regarding efforts to reducing antimicrobial drug use to reduce antimicrobial resistance.

4) Regarding the options for agenda item 7, we feel it is necessary to investigate the proper management and examination of animal feed, waste products including excrement and urine etc. We strongly demand that this should be actively discussed at the third meeting in 2009.

For more information, please contact Yamaura Yasuaki, Consumers Union of Japan

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Illegal Financial Activities Of The United Nations Information Centre, Tokyo

Resolution:

Call for a complete investigation of illegal financial activities of UNIC-Tokyo, for the introduction of a system to enable citizens to participate in overseeing the proper use of monetary contributions to the United Nations, and for the introduction of a UN Freedom of Information Policy.

The illegal financial activities of the United Nations Information Centre, Tokyo (UNIC-Tokyo) that were uncovered earlier in 2008 can be said to be of the exact same structure as the illegal financial activities of 12 prefectural governments of Japan exposed by the investigation of the Board of Audit of Japan. These are illegal financial activities in which unused money at the end of the budgetary fiscal year were bank transferred and pooled with the vendors by placing fictitious orders to the vendors, a fraudulent practice known as “azuke”.

This is collusive relationship between bureaucrats and vendors, that is none other than the breeding ground of various forms of corruption. How can one say that procurement without wasteful spending of tax payers' money is guaranteed in such a situation?

Consumers Union of Japan organized a meeting of citizens to pursue the allegation of illegal financial activities of the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), Tokyo, on 18 November, 2008, after having received information about the possibility of illegal financial activities.

Letter To Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon

Executive Office of the Secretary-General
United Nations Secretariat
New York, New York, 10017, U.S.A.

28 November, 2008

Re: Resolution Adopted by the Participants of the Meeting of Citizens Gathered to Pursue the Allegation of Illegal Financial Activities of the United Nations Information Center, Tokyo

Dear Mr. Ban Ki-moon,

We are the Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ), founded in April 1969 and officially certified as a non-profit organization on May 1, 2006 by the Japanese NPO legislation. We continue to be a non-political and financially independent organization (NGO). CUJ is funded by membership fees and donations. Since 1969 we have been working actively to secure sound and healthy life for our children.

We have organized a meeting of citizens to pursue the allegation of illegal financial activities of the United Nations Information center (UNIC), Tokyo, on 18 November, 2008.

In the spring of 2008, we received information about the possibility that illegal financial activities had been going on. Consequently, we sent open letters to the Foreign Minister and the UNIC Director in May, 2008. However, we could not be satisfied with their replies. We understand that the Japanese financial contributions to the United Nations come from citizen's taxes. Therefore, as we have right to know, we thought we should pursue the illegal financial activities occurring at the UNIC, Tokyo. At the same time, we have realized that the issue is also related to the problem of infringement of human rights within the UNIC.

Enclosed is the resolution which was adopted by all the participants at the citizens meeting.

We sincerely hope that you will accept the spirit of the resolution, shared by many other citizens, and that the principle of the resolution will be reflected in the United Nations Management reform.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed)

Yoko Tomiyama
Chairperson
Consumers Union of Japan

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CUJ pursues the following goals on behalf of consumers: (1) To secure for ourselves and our families safe and healthy lives, (2) to establish systems/laws to protect the rights of consumers, (3) to promote peace, social justice and economic fairness, (4) to support and empower consumers who care about the environment, and (5) to cooperate with foreign consumer groups/organizations.

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