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Petition for the labelling of country of origin for food products containing beef

As Japan has re-started to import beef from the United States, a petition campaign has started to collect signatures, urging the minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries and the minister of health, welfare and labour to promptly make country-of-origin labelling mandatory for all beef and processed foods containing beef. In addition, the petition is asking for mandatory country-of-origin labelling at restaurants and other food producers.

The petition is demanding that consumers should be given the right to choose if they want to eat beef from cows that might be infected with BSE or not, since we know that U.S. BSE measures are insufficient. Also, the petition points out that many surveys show that a majority of consumers do not want to eat beef from the U.S.

For all raw beef, the JAS mark indicates clearly the country-of-origin, and since October 2006, some processed foods are also covered by mandatory labels. However, there are many cases where imported beef is being used in restaurants and for processed foods, without any mandatory labelling. Consequently we demand country-of-origin labelling for beef served in restaurants and the catering industry, including obento (processed food products for take-out).

The petition was launched by:
Food Safety Citizens' Watch
Consumers Union of Japan
Forum for Peace, Human Rights and the Environment
National Federation of Farmers Movement
Food Action 21

October 31, 2006

CONTENTS

Petition for the labelling of country of origin for food products containing beef	1
Food Irradiation Opposition	2
Keep our Land and Ocean GMO Free!	5
North Korea Nuclear Test: Statement of Protest	6
Proposal to Codex Liaison Committee	7
Our Views Regarding the 6th Session of the Codex Task Force for Foods Derived from Biotechnology	9
To Our Readers	12

Food Irradiation Opposition

Japan's Atomic Energy Commission expands the list of foods that may be exposed to food irradiation: Food irradiation opposition campaign group stepping up activities

In October, 2005 the Atomic Energy Commission of Japan's Cabinet Office decided to promote food irradiation as part of the "General Principles for Atomic Energy Policy". Also, during 2005, the spice industry was requesting that 94 types of spices should be allowed to be treated with food irradiation. In December, 2005 the Atomic Energy Commission established a food irradiation expert committee to examine this issue. Their conclusions were announced in July, 2006. Based on that report, the Atomic Energy Commission decided to consult with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labour (MHWL), as well as the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in order to obtain formal acceptance for food irradiation. The Commission also decided to keep asking the above ministries for the "evaluation of certain cases of foods where food irradiation may be useful."

We would like to report the following problems related to the safety of food irradiation and our opposition movement concerning this issue.

Animal experiments indicate health risks arising from changes in food components

Irradiated food has been exposed to gamma radiation from cobalt 60 isotopes and other sources, as a sterilization process. The radioactive energy can kill bacteria, insects and stop the ripening and sprouting that occurs naturally in many foods, but there are no cases where the food itself becomes radioactive.

As radiation hits the food cells, electrons start leaping from the molecules of the food components. They become chemically unstable and what is called "radiolysis products" will be formed. It is verified that substances with components that are carcinogenic and genotoxic (capable of causing damage to the DNA) are among the radiolysis products formed. Irradiated foods which look un-cooked, have already been damaged much more than foods cooked or heated in an ordinary way.

In 1998, a study at the Federal Research Centre for Nutrition in Karlsruhe, Germany, revealed that when the chemicals that are produced in foods exposed to food irradiation are fed to mice, there was damage to their DNA. Also, in further studies, when mice ingested such chemicals together with cancer-inducing substances, the carcinogenic effect was stronger.

Also, food irradiation gives rise to a bad smell, called "food irradiation smell" that impairs the important flavours and fragrances of food. When NASA, the US Space Administration, noticed that astronauts lost their appetite, irradiation of their meals was discontinued. This problem is related to the change in food components after exposure to food irradiation.

Safety has not been established, and there is also the danger of misuse

In experiments, feeding animals with irradiated food has been reported to give rise to deformities, DNA damage, abnormalities in genital organs, fetus abnormalities, and an increase in mortality rates. Nevertheless, there is no way to determine if the food has been irradiated or not, and also there are no established methods to estimate or determine the irradiation dosages or the number of times it has been irradiated.

In 1978, there was a big scandal involving the Japanese baby food maker Wakodo Co. It became a big issue as the vegetable ingredients used for their baby food products had been irradiated illegally over a period of four years for the purpose of disinfection. In February, 2004, Maruha Inc. was involved in a scandal with Canadian shellfish that had been contaminated with E Coli bacteria. An inspection by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government revealed that the Chinese-made processed product had been disinfected using irradiation, and Maruha was ordered to recall the product. These are just two examples here in Japan of abuse and violations involving food irradiation.

In addition, food irradiation facilities are using radioactive substances of several hundreds of thousands curies. There are many reports of accidents taking place at such facilities, as workers and visitors have been exposed to high doses of radiation. Also, accidents have happened while the radioactive substances are being transported to the facilities. It is necessary to manage the used radioactive substances as radioactive waste. Food irradiation facilities have similar problems as nuclear power plants.

Who is promoting food irradiation?

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is promoting food irradiation around the world. This goes on in spite of doubts about the safety and difficulties to estimate the irradiation dosages, as well as problems with management and regulation. In 1980, IAEA recommended a dose of 10 kGy ignoring a number of studies, such as chronic toxicity tests, that had indicated health problems. However, such data are not included in IAEA's reports.

This limit was used by the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization when they jointly established an international food safety standard for food irradiation in 1983. In 2003, without any scientific basis, they decided that doses above 10 kGy would also be acceptable. They have continued to advertise the benefits of food irradiation to the global food trade and as a means to avoid food poisoning.

As safety and management problems are ignored, it is meaningless to talk about merits such as reduced food poisoning risks and food trade. Japan has decided that foods produced in this country will not be irradiated, and has prohibited food irradiation in its food sanitation law, article 11. The only exception is the Shihoro Agricultural Cooperative in Hokkaido, which in 1972 got approval for the use of food irradiation for their potatoes (7000 tons/year).

Food irradiation opposition campaign group stepping up activities

Since the 1970s, there has been a widespread opposition to food irradiation among Japanese consumers and citizens. In June, 2006, anticipating that the Atomic Energy Commission would promote food irradiation, about 50 consumers and citizens organizations have formed a network to oppose food irradiation. Among the 50 groups are Consumers Union of Japan and women's groups in Tokyo (Secretariat: Food Irradiation Network).

Furthermore, a questionnaire was sent to food related producers, transport companies and trading companies. Replies from 46 companies showed that most of them were not sure how they will deal with the situation if irradiated foods would be approved. There were also replies from companies stating that due to reasons such as "there are safety problems" and "we do not need food irradiation" as well as "we are concerned about consumers' awareness", they will not deal with irradiated foods.

It is clear that that the food industry is not accepting the merits that the Atomic Energy Commission are promoting. Based on these results to the questionnaire, on September 30, 2006 the campaign group organized a meeting called "Are irradiated foods necessary? The results of a questionnaire". At the meeting, members once again confirmed their opposition to food irradiation. From now on, campaign activities will be stepped up. The aim is to make sure that Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labour and related ministries, as well as the Food Safety Commission, should not approve food irradiation.

The campaign group is inviting you to join and support the activities.

Food Irradiation Opposition Campaign Group

Representatives:

Wada Masae (Shufuren)

Tomiyama Yoko (Consumers Union of Japan)

Hida Rieko (Tokyo League of Regional Women's Organizations)

Satomi Hiroshi (Food Irradiation Network)

Keep our Land and Ocean GMO Free!

By Ryoko Shimizu, Policy Research Institute for the Civil Sector, Tokyo

More than 400 Japanese farmers, fishermen and consumers got together in Chiba, east of Tokyo, for the “GMO Opposition Week” which took place from 26 November to 2 December.

On 26 November, the Second National Conference on GMO Free Zones was held in Asahi City (Chiba Prefecture). That is where farmers put up a huge sign in February this year to declare that their farms are GMO free. More than 200 people participated in the conference. They were mostly farmers and consumers not only from all around Japan but also from other countries like Korea and the US.

At the panel discussion, a Korean farmer Cho Teme Hyong made a presentation about his experience of declaring his rural village GMO free. After the panel, 7 farmers from different places across the country exchanged their experiences in the GMO Free Zone Campaign. In addition, a fisherman in Chiba declared his fishing area GMO free. For the GMO Opposition Week, many friends in different countries sent letters of support and splendid videos to the Campaign. GMO free activists in Japan were greatly encouraged by these messages.

From 27 November to 1 December, the 6th Session of the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Food Derived from Biotechnology was held in Makuhari, Chiba. The main agenda was to set up a guideline for the conduct of food safety assessment of foods derived from recombinant-DNA animals. It is quite worrying that the US and Australian government are trying to make an animal guideline which is almost the same as the guideline for GM plants, in spite of the fact that GM animals have their own issues to be addressed, such as animal welfare and ethical issues. The animal guideline is planned to be fixed by 2008.

Another important point of this Session was that the Task Force decided to start a new work to discuss setting up a guideline for an abbreviated safety assessment of low-level contaminants. It is an extremely worrying situation because it could legitimate contamination. We have to keep a close watch on the future discussions. The working group for this guideline is co-hosted by the US, Germany, and Thailand. The first meeting will be held in Washington DC in late February or March in 2007, and the second meeting is supposed to be held in Brussels or at one of the cities in Germany.

On 26 November, the first day of the Task Force, more than 400 citizens marched against GM food, especially against GM animals. They walked in costumes of fish, cows, pigs or other animals, chanting “We don’t want to be genetically modified!”.

At the end of the week, on 2 December, more than 150 people participated in the 10th anniversary of the NO! GMO Campaign. There was a conference which had 3 parts. The first part was for reviewing the 10 years’ activities of the NO! GMO Campaign; the second part was about the problems around GM animals and included a report back of the Codex Task Force. And the last part was about the future activities of the Campaign: working against patenting on life forms, advocating to save our natural seeds, distributing the “True Food Guide” by Greenpeace Japan, promoting soy bean and rice trust movement, and so on.

After the conference, participants enjoyed a GMO free dinner prepared by A Seed Japan, which is an environmental protection group formed by young people.

Consumers Union of Japan is cooperating with many different groups, including CNIC, on issues related to nuclear power and peace. We would like to take this opportunity to publish CNIC's statement of protest after the North Korean Nuclear Test on October 9, 2006.

- Editors

North Korea Nuclear Test: Statement of Protest

10 October 2006

For over half a century, human beings have been yearning for the elimination of nuclear weapons. All over the world people from all walks of life have been striving for this cause.

The nuclear weapon test conducted by North Korea on 9 October 2006 was a crushing blow to humanity's fervent hope, held ever since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

We realize that there are already many countries which possess nuclear weapons. We also realize that there are people who recite the mantra of "peaceful use" to promote nuclear energy for the generation of electric power. Furthermore, we know very well that some people are in a great rush to extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel at the huge Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Aomori Prefecture. However, depending on the circumstances, plutonium may at any time be turned into nuclear weapons.

We believe that nuclear weapons are the flip side of the "peaceful use" of nuclear energy. Unless the path to nuclear weapons (including the precursors to nuclear weapons) is absolutely prohibited, the world will be unable to achieve permanent peace.

We strongly protest North Korea's nuclear weapon test. It is necessary to remind ourselves that human beings and nuclear energy, "peaceful" or otherwise, cannot coexist.

Yukio Yamaguchi
Co-Director
Citizens' Nuclear Information Center
(Source: <http://cnic.jp/english>)

November 28, 2006

To:
Codex Liaison Committee
Task Force for Foods Derived from Biotechnology
Japanese Government Delegates

From:
Tomiyama Yoko, Chairperson, Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ)
Amagasa Keisuke, Representative, No! GMO Campaign
Kurakata Masanori, Secretary General, Policy Research Institute for the Civil Sector (PRICS)

Proposal:

**“Our Views Regarding the Japanese Government's Opinions on the Guideline
for the Conduct of Food Safety Assessment of Foods Derived from Recombinant DNA Animals”**

From November 27, 2006, the 6th Codex TFBT is being held at Makuhari, Chiba to discuss the Guideline for the Conduct of Food Safety Assessment of Foods Derived from Recombinant DNA Animals (Agenda Item 4). Comments from governments are available in the document **CX/FBT06/6/4**, including the comments from the Japanese government, as submitted to Codex in October 2006.

Also, comments from governments regarding the document **CX/FBT06/6/5** about the Proposed Draft Annex (scoping document) to the Guideline for the Conduct of Food Safety Assessment of Foods Derived from Recombinant-DNA Plants: Food Safety Assessment of Food Derived from Recombinant-DNA Plants Modified for Nutritional or Health Benefits (Agenda Item 5), including the comments submitted by the Japanese government, are available in the document **CX/FBT06/6/5-Add.1**.

We would like to point out the following problems regarding those comments from the Japanese government. The government should listen to the voice of consumers who have concerns and doubts about the safety of GMO foods. We ask that careful and constructive discussion should be held during the Codex Liaison Committee meetings.

Please reply to our questions by December 11, 2006.

1) Problems regarding the process

The Japanese government participates and presents its views at FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission meetings and at other Codex meetings. Before that, they should exchange views and opinions at what is known as the National Codex Liaison Committee meetings. However, when preparing its comments for the 6th Codex TFBT, the Japanese government did not follow a transparent process. The opinions expressed in the comments submitted to Codex regarding the TFBT were compiled in an ambiguous way. This is unacceptable and we ask you to please clarify this point.

2) Other Legitimate Factors

According to the text called **CX/FBT06/6/4**, Section 1, Paragraph 2 (Scope and Definitions), Japan supports Option 4 regarding items that the Guideline is not expected to cover. However, during the Codex Liaison Committee meetings, consumers have repeatedly asked that Codex should discuss in depth factors such as animal welfare, ethics and environmental aspects. The Japanese government does not reflect this view. Other international organizations may work on these issues, but for example, OIE has not seriously dealt with issues such as animal welfare, and due to financial constraints, there are not many opportunities for WHO to work on such factors. Regarding the application of Recombinant-DNA technologies to animals, we believe that in order to ensure that food is safe, the health of the animals must be ensured. Also, factors such as ethics and environmental considerations must be taken into account. We strongly feel that they cannot be excluded from the discussion. Please explain why the Japanese government does not agree with this view.

3) Food Composition Analysis

At the Codex Liaison Committee meeting on November 16, the Japanese government made a comment about the text called Discussion Paper on Comparative Food Composition Analysis of Staple Foods (Agenda Item 6). Regarding this text, the Japanese government said discussion about this agenda item is on-going within OECD, so there is no need to discuss it at the TFBT. However, we have doubts whether OECD can sufficiently cover the food safety aspects. We would like to hear the Japanese government's explanation regarding this point.

4) Foods Derived from Animals Exposed to Protection against Disease through Recombinant-DNA Vaccines

On November 27, during the TFBT meeting, the Japanese government stated that the issue of Recombinant-DNA Vaccines should be dealt with by other international organizations such as OIE. We wonder if the Japanese government has any information about OIE's capacity to deal properly with this issue.

5) Trade with Unapproved GMO Crops

On November 27, the issue of trade with unapproved GMO crops was brought up to be discussed as part of the agenda. However, it was already decided by the TFBT in September, 2005 that this issue would not be discussed, and the reason mentioned was that importing countries and exporting countries have different standards. We are afraid that harmonization could lead to a lowering of safety standards, so this issue should not be discussed at the TFBT. Please explain how the Japanese government will handle this issue.

Contact:

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Our Views Regarding the 6th Session of the Codex Task Force for Foods Derived from Biotechnology (TFBT)

From November 27 to December 1, 2006, the 6th Codex Task Force for Foods Derived from Biotechnology was held at Makuhari, Chiba to discuss eleven agenda items. The Task Force agreed:

- (a) to move the draft GM Animal Guideline to Step 4 with some exceptions,
- (b) to consider criteria for GM plants modified for what they call “nutritional and health benefits”,
- (c) to consider an annex to the existing GM Plant Guideline to deal with the contamination of food by unauthorized GM material.

Among 176 delegates who attended this meeting, there were only a few who took a critical position towards GM food. Thus, unfortunately, the Guidelines for safety assessment of GM food were promoted without sufficiently considering the precautionary principle. Consumers International (CI) and 49th Parallel Biotechnology Consortium (49P) lead the discussion to try to include consumer concerns in the discussion. However, in spite of such efforts, the Task Force continues to create conditions to promote GM foods in the world.

GM Animal Guideline

Codex TFBT is now in the process of creating a guideline for the safety assessment for foods that come from genetically modified animals. This guideline can be used by governments in their regulations.

One of the controversial issues has been whether or not, or to which extent, the guideline should refer to so-called “other legitimate factors” (OLFs). These factors include ethics, animal welfare and environmental aspects of GM animals. The Task Force decided not to include them in the scope of this guideline. We are concerned that no work is being undertaken by any international organization to consider these factors, while the commercialization of GM animals is approaching in certain countries.

During the discussion, Japan, together with pro-GM countries such as the US, New Zealand, Australia and Argentina, supported an option that made no reference to such factors. This position by the Japanese government does not at all reflect the consumers’ standpoint, which we had repeatedly expressed in the Codex Liaison Committee meetings.

After a long debate, the Task Force finally agreed on a compromise that referred, to some extent, to the legitimacy and importance of OLFs.

From our point of view, the CODEX Task Force is irresponsible because the animal guideline does not include any explicit criteria for these factors. It has avoided to address these important factors in spite of the FAO/WHO Expert Consultation's proposal in its November 2003 report that clearly expressed the need for ethical aspects (religion, environment and animal welfare) in responsible decision-making and policy.

We believe that Clause 7 of the Principles for the Risk Analysis of Foods Derived from Modern Biotechnology (CAC/GL44-2003), which explicitly excludes these factors, should be revised in the case of the guideline for GM animals, since it was elaborated several years ago and mainly with GM plants in mind.

Controversial Proposal on Low-level Contamination

The US proposed new work on "Food Safety Assessment of the Low-Level Presence of rDNA Plant Material in Food Resulting from Asynchronous Authorizations." The purpose is to elaborate an abbreviated process for dealing with unauthorized GM material found in food. This problem, called "genetic contamination," has occurred on several occasions around the world including Japan (StarLink corn, LLRice 601, etc.).

It was decided that a working group for the new work will meet in March 2007. We are concerned that the US proposal intends to allow contamination by unauthorized GM material through a sloppy safety assessment process. More concretely, it can make it difficult for developing countries to reject the import of such contaminated food.

We consider the US proposal as a challenge to the principle that unauthorized GM material should never be allowed on the market. It is also specifically intended to force developing countries, which do not have sufficient resources to make their own safety assessment, to accept GM crops the US has authorized. We have fought for this "zero-tolerance principle" in the previous contamination cases for over ten years. Genetic contamination should remain illegal and import of such unauthorized material should never be tolerated.

--- Citizens' Codex Study Group

The Codex Study Group is a group of active citizens who are interested in the debate about the guidelines for safety assessment of genetically modified foods being discussed by the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology (TFBT).

Photos from the Codex demonstration in Makuhari, Chiba, Japan on November 27, 2006, with activists representing consumer organizations, anti-GMO campaign groups, and farmers' groups, as well as Co-ops from Japan and South Korea.



To our readers:

Japan Resources was started by Consumers Union of Japan in 1980 in the form of a hand-made newsletter composed mainly of consumer-related clippings from English newspapers published in Japan, as well as petitions and other campaign material produced by CUJ. Over the years, it has evolved in its form to convey Japanese consumers' voice to readers abroad. We, the editors, are proud of Japan Resources' persistent history and thankful to our readers' sustained support over the past 25 years.

Today, we feel the present form of hard-copied and quarterly newsletter sent by postal mail is impractical, and that it is high time to pass to an electronic version with a view to sharing its contents more widely, more timely and in a less costly way. That is why we are in the process of transforming Japan Resources to a web site in English.

During the fall of 2006 we formed a study group that meets regularly to translate and produce the new website. We plan to start a trial web-site in March 2007, sending in parallel the next issue of JR by post-mail as before. Hopefully, by April 2007 we will officially be able to move to the web version, ending hard-copied JR. For those readers who continue to want a printed version of JR, such as libraries, organizations exchanging periodicals, we plan to send periodically by e-mail a PDF version of newly added web pages that readers can print by themselves. For those readers who do not have access to Internet, we are prepared to make a print-out of the PDF version and personally mail it by post.

***Please contact us to request either the PDF version to be sent to you by e-mail, or its paper version to be sent to you by postal mail.**

We ask for your understanding and continued support.

— Editors

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