

JAPAN RESOURCES

CONSUMERS UNION OF JAPAN NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 139 JANUARY – MARCH 2007

Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs)

- The more you know the healthier you are!

Consumers Korea organized the international conference about environmental hormones or EDCs in Seoul, South Korea on 22 November, 2006. The conference was supported by KFDA National Institute of Toxicological Research and some 100 people participated.

Martin J. Frid was invited to represent Consumers Union of Japan, together with Dr. Michael Hansen from Consumers Union (US) and Sarojeni Rengam from Pesticide Action Network.

In his presentation, Mr Frid noted that collection of good data is important if a country wants a strict policy on chemicals. Scientists have monitored certain EDCs over a long period of time, since the early 1970s. He also discussed how consumer activists in Japan were able to raise awareness about EDCs after the book *Our Stolen Future* was published in Japanese.

The People's Association on Countermeasures of Dioxin & Endocrine Disrupters has continued to be active in raising these issues with Japanese government officials and ministers, while also working with medical doctors and experts.

Michael Hansen noted that Consumers Union had raised the issue of hormone mimics or EDCs repeatedly in its popular magazine, *Consumers Report*, since June 1998. The organization also tested plastic wrap, microwavable plastic bowls and baby food for different chemicals including phthalates, PCBs, and dioxins.

Sarojeni Rengam described how pesticides in agricultural production harm farmers and consumers, and the environment. She also described alternatives: Ecological agriculture based on biodiversity. Some 200,000 people are killed by pesticides according to WHO figures and an estimated 25 million agricultural workers suffer at least one incidence of pesticide poisoning every year.

Contents

EDC Conference in Seoul, South Korea.....	1
Demand: To exclude farm products from Japan-Australia FTA negotiations.....	3
Statement of opposition to the violations against the Japan-U.S. Beef Agreement	4
We request that imports of American beef should be prohibited and demand strict country-of-origin labeling rules.....	5
Breaking News: CUJ finds benzene in popular soft drinks.....	6
Appeal Against Patents on Life.....	7
Report: Attempt to Legitimate GM Contamination Blocked.....	8
To the participants of the WG Meeting on Low-level Presence of rDNA Plant Material.....	11

The purpose of the Korean conference was to discuss how to build a global network for consumer safety. While the topic of EDCs had been reported widely in South Korea during 2005 and 2006, consumer activists in that country also deal with a number of other issues, including the mad cow disease problem and GMOs. On the same day that the conference was held, there were massive demonstrations in the streets of many Korean cities against the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with the United States.

In 2005, Consumers Korea tested children's products, including toys and clothes, and found high levels of the cancer-causing chemical DEHP, which has been banned in goods for children in Europe.

"Children in Korea face dangers of harmful materials such as endocrine disruptors from the morning when they get dressed until the evening when they go to sleep with their toys," a Consumer Korea member said. "To protect children from harmful substances, the government should establish a law on child safety regulating the amount of harmful materials in child goods. Child products also need to have separate safety standards from adult goods," according to Consumer Korea.



Dr. Michael Hansen speaking at a press conference in Seoul, South Korea

30 January, 2007

**To: Hon. Peter McGauran
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Australia**

Demand: To exclude farm products from Japan-Australia FTA negotiations

We would like to express our deep appreciation for Australia's efforts to produce safe and healthy food.

We represent Japanese farmers, consumers and workers. We are concerned about Japan-Australia FTA negotiations which started this month. Australia is a big export country of cattle meat, dairy products, wheat and sugar which are also important farm products for Japanese agriculture. If tariff rates of these import products will be cut down to zero, Japanese agriculture will be damaged severely. If Japanese agriculture collapses, the land and the environment will also be damaged. As imported farm products increase, Japanese consumers are seriously concerned about the situation which we depend more on foreign products.

We demand Australia and Japan to exclude agricultural products such as wheat, cattle meat, dairy products and sugar from the FTA's agriculture negotiation.

We strongly request your country to negotiate with Japan with your understanding on our situation.

Sincerely,

**National Federation of Farmers Movement
Forum for Peace, Human Rights and the Environment
Food Safety Citizens' Watch
Consumers Union of Japan
Food Action 21**

20 February, 2007

To Mr. Matsuoka Toshikatsu, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
To Mr. Yanagisawa Hakuo, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare

Statement of opposition to the violations against the Japan-U.S. agreement on the import of American beef (age limit rules) and a demand to stop all imports

On February 16, 2007 Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare announced that two boxes of beef had been found at the Yokohama port, without the required hygiene certificates issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The beef in question had been shipped from the Lexington meat processing plant of Tyson Fresh Meat Inc., in clear violation of the conditions of the Japan-U.S. beef import program. According to this agreement only beef from cows age 20 months or younger may be shipped to Japan.

When Japan re-opened its markets in December 2005, the governments of Japan and the U.S. had agreed that beef should be from cows age 20 months or less, and stipulated that specified risk materials (SRMs) should be removed from the beef shipments. These are the conditions that the governments have agreed on. Consequently, as soon as imports had resumed, SRMs were found in a shipment, and U.S. beef was banned again. Consumers took that action for granted.

We opposed the decision to once more re-open Japan's market to imports of beef from the U.S. but in spite of this, Japan's market was re-opened again in July, 2006. Then in November, 2006 there was the case of beef shipments lacking the proper certificates issued by the USDA, and consumers increasingly felt a deep insecurity regarding the safety of beef. Now we learn of yet another case where meat is imported without the required hygiene certificates.

This time, we strongly protest against the clear violation of the import agreement, and demand that Japan should stop the import of all U.S. beef for a second time, in the same way as after the re-opening in 2005, when the same import violation was discovered.

Tyson explained that it was just a careless mistake, and it was announced that their other meat factories will continue exporting to Japan. Japan's government is currently maintaining an ambiguous attitude of only stopping imports from that one particular meat factory, thus giving preference to the will of the U.S. export industry, leaving consumers increasingly suspicious that they are being betrayed. Meat imports should be stopped until Japan's government has verified that the Japan-U.S. agreement is strictly adhered to.

Lastly, we note that it took 10 days or more until the Japan's government announced this most recent incident. We can only conclude that Japan is caring more about the views of the U.S. government, while turning its back to Japanese consumers. Japan's government must understand that Japanese consumers are becoming deeply suspicious of beef. We demand that strict measures are taken as a response to this situation.

Contact: Consumers Union of Japan

Kamiyama Michiko, Representative
Food Safety Citizens' Watch

Tomiyama Yoko, Chairperson
Consumers Union of Japan

8 March, 2007

To Mr. Matsuoka Toshikatsu, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
To Mr. Yanagisawa Hakuo, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare

We request that imports of American beef should be prohibited and demand strict country-of-origin labeling rules

In July, 2006 Japan re-started imports of U.S. beef. However, this was a result of Japan's government yielding to American pressure, while ignoring the voices of the citizens. Furthermore, the agreement between the governments of Japan and the U.S. was broken three times by the U.S. (January 2006, November 2006, and February 2007). The American side is not complying with the production and exporting rules for U.S. beef.

Actually, since U.S. beef has been used as processed food as well as by restaurants without being covered by the present rules of the country-of-origin labelling system, consumers' rights to choose are not guaranteed. Since 2006 we have been active to collect signatures to require thorough rules for country-of-origin labels for all beef products, and by 8 March 2007 we had collected 422,019 signatures.

We note that the International Animal Health Organization (OIE) has been moving in the direction of weakening the Animal Health Code regarding international trade of domestic farm animals. We are opposed to this weaker international standard. In spite of countries having experience of diseases such as bird flu, foot and mouth disease, BSE and so on, the rules have been changed to introduce the concept of making it possible to have zones or facilities (called "compartments") for export. Efforts to eradicate such diseases should be made across national borders through cooperation. Instead, safety has been sacrificed as exceptional measures are being made to promote trade and exports of meat and animals.

Trade conditions are being modified for living cattle and meat-and-bone meal, and for skulls and spinal materials used for gelatin and collagen, through release assessments with regards to BSE. We are opposed to all use of meat-and-bone meal, and opposed to such production and export, in order to stop the global spread of BSE. Currently, there is a need for thorough feed regulations and traceability rules in every country. There is a risk that consumers will unknowingly be exposed to gelatin and collagen in food and cosmetics etc. Utilization of specified risk material should be prohibited.

Demands

1. We request that the Japanese government must immediately take measures to stop the import of all U.S. beef and U.S. beef products.
2. The government must certainly listen to the voice of over 420,000 Japanese consumers who signed the petition requesting country-of-origin labels for all beef products.
3. At the March, 2007 meeting of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission, the Japanese government should insist on the withdrawal of the proposed "compartment" concept, and we request that you also insist on the withdrawal of any proposals that weakens BSE countermeasure standards.

This letter was adopted and presented to the government at a meeting on 8 March, 2007

by participants from consumer organizations and other NGOs

Contact: Forum for Peace, Human Rights and the Environment

Breaking News

CUJ finds benzene in popular soft drinks

On 13 March, 2007 Consumers Union of Japan announced the results of its investigation into 21 popular soft drinks, vitamin drinks, and supplement drinks. 16 of the tested products were contaminated with the cancer-causing chemical benzene.

The source is thought to be common food additives such as benzoic acids (E201, E211, E212 and E213) used as preservatives. It has been known for a long time that benzoic acid can react with ascorbic acid (vitamin C) when it is added as an anti oxidant in soft drinks, forming benzene.

Consumers Union of Japan wants companies to stop selling such products and immediately stop the simultaneous use of the additives. CUJ also wants the Food Safety Commission and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to take measures to totally ban the simultaneous use of these additives in soft drinks, supplement drinks, cosmetics, etc.

While no safe levels of benzene have been established for soft drinks, different countries have different standards for water. WHO notes that benzene should be avoided whenever technically feasible, and there is no justification for soft drinks or supplement drinks sold to consumers to contain high levels of benzene. In 2006, Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare investigated this problem, and said they found levels of benzene above the level of 10 µg/kg in two cases, but refused to make the other findings public. Consumers Union of Japan demanded in September 2006 that all the findings of benzene should be made public, but MHLW has refused.

After the CUJ investigation, CUJ sent a questionnaire to 11 companies. 8 companies have responded to CUJ, saying they will not use the two additives in combination anymore, or they have discontinued making the products found to contain benzene. This shows that most of the producers are taking this problem into consideration, and it is clear that production is possible without these additives.

CUJ is concerned that MHLW and the Food Safety Commission are not taking any action, and CUJ will continue to keep an eye on this issue.

Limits on benzene content in drinking water (µg/kg):		The five products with highest levels of benzene in CUJ's study (µg/l):	
WHO:	10	1) Zetsurin Gold	7.4
Japan:	10	2) Sapuriku Alpha	2.7
South Korea:	10	3) Oishii Kurozu Hachimitsu	1.8
United States:	5	4) Fanta Grape	1.7
Canada:	5	5) Collagen C	1.7
European Union:	1		

(Source: CUJ Shohisha Report No. 1360/1361 Published 7 March, 2007)

Appeal Against Patents on Life

21 March, 2007

Recently, countries, universities and industries are infatuated with obtaining patents on life forms. Around the world, this trend is leading to a race to be the first to file patents. Genetically altered living organisms and the deciphered genetic code are being patented by companies for the purpose of creating technologies and new industries, in order to gain monopolies and amass great fortunes.

Life forms and genetic material differ from other industrial products, and have an inherent value, and are not compatible with the patent system. This has been the understanding for a long time. However, this concept was overturned by the U.S. government and multinational companies, with additional momentum from the World Trade Organization. The new global patent regime has been created by only a few rich countries while the developing world and ordinary citizens had no way of knowing what was being decided.

The protection of patent rights is a shield for companies making it impossible for citizens to get access to beneficial information. Thus, we are increasingly unable to get important information about food safety and the protection of the environment. Life patents are also leading to increased genetic modification and the selection of life, towards eugenics. Farmers' rights to farm and the consumers right to live safely are done away with. In hospitals, patients' treatments are removed and in various fields, citizens are becoming slaves of multinational companies.

In such an age, when the priority is promoting trade and industrialization, even life itself has only an economic value. Can the current situation really be left as it is? Life is not an industrial product and neither something that should be owned by certain countries, industries or researchers.

Today, we have gathered here to oppose patents on life. Together with citizens around the world, we will spread the call for opposition against patents on life.

Adopted by participants at the Life Patent Symposium in Japan

Attempt to Legitimate GM Contamination Blocked

NGOs Play Key Roles in Working Group Meeting of Codex Task Force on GM Foods

Report by Toshiki Mashimo, CUJ

The threat of the US government's attempt of legitimating contamination by unauthorized GM material by putting forward an Annex to the Codex GM plant guideline was largely reduced by the pressure from a world-wide NGO opposition.

Abbreviated Safety Assessment

In the 2005 meeting of the Codex Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology (CTFBT), the United States proposed a first project for an Annex that would allow an abbreviated safety assessment on foods containing “low-level” of GM materials. But as it wanted to cover contamination by *any* GM plant material, including GM plants that have never been authorized as food by any country like StarLink maize and LL-601 rice, the project was rejected, opposed by NGO delegations and getting no support from any countries.

In 2006, the US came up with a revised version of the project that conceded in that the Annex would focus only on GM plants **authorized in one or more countries**, and that, **based on a safety assessment following the Codex GM plant guidelines**. In the discussion of CTFBT, the US had to accept EC's strong demand that establishment of a **“data and information sharing system”** on authorized GM plants be included as a second major Terms of Reference of the Annex.

Even with these restrictions successively imposed, the Annex could represent an end run around the existing Codex GM plant guideline as well as the Bio Safety Protocol.



Pollen of genetically modified plants is carried on the wind and/or by insects, and crossbreeds with natural species.

If the Annex's **safety assessment requirements were significantly abbreviated** (at a level as lax as it is in GMO exporting countries) and could be applied routinely to shipments of GM contaminated with **an arbitrary definition of “low-level”** (the Annex project paper left the evaluation of “low-level” to the importing country's discretion), GM contamination could be infinitely legitimated all over the world, exempting the biotechnology industry and GMO exporting countries of any effort of segregation, and crumbling the principle of “zero-tolerance” for unauthorized GMOs.

Another threat was that the Annex could be used to **put pressure on importing countries** (especially developing countries that do not have adequate capacity and resources to conduct full assessments) **to promptly allow contaminated shipments** to their lands based on the data of the (very lax) safety assessment done by the exporting countries. Japan has amply experienced the muscled pressure from the United States in many cases.

Petition Campaign

Reducing these threats was the main concern of the NGO delegations (Consumers International and 49th Parallel Biotechnology Consortium) at the Codex “Working Group Meeting on Low-level Presence of rDNA Plant Material” which was held in Washington D.C. on 13-15 March, 2007 to elaborate a draft of the Annex.

Before the meeting, the **Codex Study Group**, a Tokyo-based watch group of Codex GM standards, and NGOs in the US sent a message about the problems of the Annex project to NGOs interested in the GM issue all over the world, inviting them to sign a petition against any legitimization of GM contamination (see the box on page 11). Fifty-eight organizations and fifty-nine individuals, including several prominent persons, signed the petition, and it was distributed among the participants of the Working Group meeting in Washington D.C..



Contamination of our daily food by genetically modified material is taking place all over the world.

guideline, but many delegations took a very prudent attitude, insisting that the Annex should not be “Codex-light” but it should keep everything needed. We felt encouraged that perhaps they were pushed or backed-up by the NGO petition.

Finally, it was only the parts concerning nutrition that was eliminated in the draft Annex text, with the parts for toxicity and allergenicity, as well as unintended effects, all kept intact.

The effect of the NGO petition was more evident when European delegations (Norway, EC and Germany) said, “**Many critics assume that the Annex will allow industry and regulators to routinely avoid their responsibilities,**” and stressed that **this Annex should be applied only in exceptional cases**. The US and Canada resisted, but finally had to allow in the preamble of the Annex a paragraph indicating the low-level presence is an occasional situation.

Thus, the threat of this Annex being routinely used as an end run around the existing international regulations was removed.

The first battle was on the **definition of “low-level.”** CI suggested that “low level” be defined as being no greater than 0.1% and that countries can decide to set maximum levels that are lower than 1% (or 0.1%) and may be zero. Thailand proposed “unintentional” presence, and Mexico, “non-intentional and technically unavoidable”, as criteria. But the chair (the US) rejected any definition, saying it belonged to the “risk management” which was out of the scope, and which was to be defined by the importing country.

How much the safety assessment of “low-level” presence will be abbreviated from the plant guideline, was the second battle field. The US and Canada wanted to pick-up only the “essential” parts from the plant

Public, Open Database on GM Plants to Be Set-up

As for the information and data sharing system, the other pillar of this Annex, the US, Canada and Biotech industry wanted to supply information only to, and at the demand of, the importing countries. The industry was unwilling to supply information on detection technology on the plea of intellectual properties. On the contrary, the NGOs and many of the European and developing countries wanted an **international public** database including **all the safety assessment data** as well as the information on **detection methods, open to the public as soon as an authorization is made** in one country.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said it was ready to set up a database for this purpose and the WG ultimately agreed to make the data required by the Codex plant guideline available to the general public on the database. As for the detection methods, the draft Annex included a paragraph allowing access; “The product applicant shall make all reasonable efforts to provide further information and clarification as necessary to allow the assessment according to the annex to proceed, as well as a validated protocol for an event-specific or trait-specific detection method, as specified by the country, and non-viable reference materials.”

Positive Balance

The Annex is to be discussed during the next CTFBT session at Chiba in September 2007. But at its draft stage, we can say that most of the threats the original project could incur were eliminated. Food exporters *could* still take advantage of the Annex to put pressure on developing countries to accelerate their authorization processes, but in order to do it, the exporters would be obliged to conduct beforehand a safety assessment conforming to the Codex plant guidelines, and make the data available to the public.

Codex meetings provide unique occasions, in which international NGOs with observer status can participate in debates like a country. As mentioned above, presence of NGOs and the voice expressed by the world citizens can have a big influence on the Codex international food standards, which in turn will be translated into national legislation of each member country.

We invite many NGOs concerned with GM issue to take interest in the CTFBT and to join us.

To the participants of the WG Meeting on Low-level Presence of rDNA Plant Material

We, the undersigned organizations, oppose the proposed Codex document on "Low-level Presence of rDNA Plant Material" because it would legitimize GM contamination.

We believe that there should be zero tolerance for GM contaminants that are not approved in the country where they will be sold mixed with foods.

Genetic modification can lead to toxins and allergens unexpectedly appearing in previously safe foods. Even low levels can be dangerous.

We therefore urge countries to reject any Codex agreement that creates new, relaxed safety rules for low-level GM contamination.

Signed by 58 organizations (see below) and 59 individuals (as of March 12, 2007)

Organization Signatories

International

49th Parallel Biotechnology Consortium
A SEED Europe
Earthlife Africa
Eco-TIRAS International Environmental Association of River Keepers
Greenpeace International
International Code Documentation Centre
Third World Network

Africa

African Centre for Biosafety (South Africa)
African Conservation Foundation (Tanzania)
ASPAB (Senegal)
Cape Craft & Design Institute (South Africa)
Cape Town Medi-Spa (South Africa)
CIRPED (Senegal)
Earthlife Namibia (Namibia)
Ekogaia Foundation (South Africa)
Future Sense (South Africa)
HUMAN PRODUCTIONS (South Africa)
Institute for Sustainable Development (Ethiopia)
Kinesiology Centre for International Studies (South Africa)
SABC (South Africa)
Safe Food Coalition (South

Africa)
SAFeAGE (South Africa)

Asia/Oceania

BioTani (Indonesia)
Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (India)
Consumers Korea (Republic of Korea)
Consumers Union of Japan (Japan)
Ecological Society of the Philippines (Philippines)
No! GMO Campaign (Japan)
Pesticide Action Network Aotearoa (New Zealand)
Policy Research Institute for the
Civil Sector (Japan)

Europe

Biological Farming Association Elkana (Georgia)
CIS Alliance for Biosafety (Russia)
The Coalition to Protect the Polish Countryside Ecological (Poland)
Woman Assembly (Russia)
Ecospectrum (Moldova)
For the Earth! (Tajikistan)
Foundation of Integration of Ecological Culture (Kazakhstan)
Friends of Confédération Paysanne (France)

Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland (UK)
Genetic Food Alert (UK)
Genetic Rights Foundation (Italy)
GeneWatch (UK)
GM Freeze (Russia)
Institute of Science in Society (Russia)
MUNLOCHY VIGIL (UK)
National Association for genetic safety (Scotland)
No Patents on Life! (Germany)
pro-Natural Food Scotland (Scotland)
Rudolf Steiner Publications (Germany)
The Greens Movement of Georgia (Georgia)
Wholesome Food Association Ltd (UK)

North America

Edmonds Institute (USA)
Genetic Engineering Policy Project (USA)
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (USA)
Institute for Social Ecology (USA)
Northwest Resistance Against Genetic Engineering (USA)
Planetary Health, Inc., and the Amberwaves Network (USA)
Washington Biotechnology Action Council (USA)

To our readers:

As we announced in the last issue, Japan Resources will pass to a web site in English. Consequently, this will be the last issue of Japan Resources in hard-copy format.

You can join our new English web site from a link “**English**” on the front page of CUJ's official web site in Japanese at <http://www1.jca.apc.org/nishoren/>.

The English web site that we have opened in March, 2007 is a provisional one, because we are planning to move the CUJ's official web site to a new independent site.

You can read any new announcement on CUJ's present English site: <http://cujtokyo.wordpress.com/>

For those readers who continue to want a printed version of Japan Resources, such as libraries or organizations exchanging periodicals, we plan to send by e-mail a PDF version that subscribers may 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, upon request.

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

Consumers Union of Japan
Nikken Building, 75 Waseda-machi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-0042, Japan
Tel: (81) 3-5155-4765 Fax: (81) 3-5155-4767 Email: nishoren@jca.apc.org

Consumers Union of Japan
Nikken Building,
75 Waseda-machi, Shinjuku-ku
Tokyo 162-0042, *JAPAN*

BY AIR/PAR AVION
PRINTED MATTER