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Irradiated Food Ingredients

January 15, 2008

Are irradiated food ingredients imported into Japan? Food Safety Citizen's Watch has more details with a report from a meeting with government officials and food companies.

Food irradiation using gamma rays etc. damages the DNA of bacteria and has sterilization effects. Food irradiation has also been used to kill insects and stop germination. The efforts to promote food irradiation are supported by Japan's Atomic Energy Commission. The Ministry for Health, Labour and Welfare is making preparations for allowing the controversial technology to be used on spices by the end of March 2008.

Against this background, it was reported on June 1, 2007, that Kikkoman Corp. had recalled a product called SoyAct, due to the possibility of irradiation in the United States. Importing irradiated food is illegal in Japan. On November 15, a meeting was held at the Japanese Parliament with Assembly Members from several political parties, officials from the Health Ministry, and from the Food Safety Commission. The Food Irradiation Opposition Campaign Group representing consumers who oppose food irradiation was also present at the meeting.

On this occasion, it was pointed out that the biggest problem was to get factual verification whether SoyAct had been irradiated or not in the United States. After Kikkoman had announced its recall, the Ministry of Health sent a letter with questions to the US Food and Drug Administration via the US embassy on June 5, 2007. A formal reply was not received until August 24, but this lacked any details if irradiation had taken place or not. The Japanese government then made a second formal request to get factual verification, but has not yet received any reply from the United States.

Discrepancy between Japanese and English versions of the letter

The original letter sent to the US embassy was formulated in Japanese. The US embassy then translated it into English, and forwarded it to the FDA. However, that English version of the letter is very different compared to the original Japanese letter. Nothing was mentioned regarding the verification issue, and other sections were missing. For example, the Japanese government wanted to know the actual level of irradiation used on SoyAct. Since the approved dose limit for fruits and vegetables is 1 kGray in the United States, the Japanese version of the letter noted that there is a possibility of the breach of US law. These points had been removed on purpose from the English version.

Several participants reacted to this. It was pointed out that the Ministry of Health and the United States both appear to have a mindset to downplay the seriousness of this issue. Participants also strongly suggested that Japan's embassy in the US should ask the FDA directly, in order to avoid a situation where the US will simply be able to ignore the problem.

Voluntary recalls limited to 2%

During the meeting, it became clear that only 2% of the products had been voluntarily recalled by Kikkoman Corp. The names of companies that uses SoyAct ingredients were not made public. However, the Ministry of Health did not think it was necessary to take any further legal action, because it was not clear if irradiation had taken place or not. Participants at the meeting expressed the view that a legal measure, such as a mandatory recall, was in fact necessary, since food irradiation is prohibited under Japan's Food Sanitation Law. Using the US Freedom of Information Act to get more details was also suggested.

During the meeting, the Food Irradiation Opposition Campaign Group presented the result of a consumer survey regarding food irradiation. 11,700 people gave their opinions, with 88% replying that they were opposed to food irradiation. In addition, 72% replied that they did not know that food irradiation was being used. The survey showed beyond any doubt that this is a technology that we, the consumers, have absolutely no need for.

By Ichimura Tadafumi

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World Social Forum in Arakawa

January 25, 2008

Consumers Union of Japan will participate together with many other Japanese NGOs, including People's Plan, Attack and No to WTO/FTA, in the World Social Forum event on January 26, 2008 in Arakawa, Tokyo.

Our Call for Action - "Why Does It Have to Be in Arakawa?"

At multiple venues in the Arakawa district, we will be hosting a forum centered on a series of workshops pertinent to the topic of "neo-liberalism" and its alternatives. In every January since 2001, the "World Social Forum" in which social movements from literally around the world come together to demand globalization of hope and solidarity, and reject the globalization based on war and exploitation, have been held.

The WSF meetings have been held in regions of the "South" in the sense of position in the relationship of political and economic power, to counteract the worldview based on neo-liberal globalization spearheaded by the economically and militarily powerful countries. This also means that regions of the South can be a base of operation for powerful people's movements that demand a new kind of world order that is free of war and oppression.

The significance of holding the WSF Arakawa 1/26 Global Action that will be held in the Arakawa district is also along this line - to remember the memories of war, deepen international understanding, strive for a society that is free of discrimination and oppression, and to cooperate with activists firmly rooted in the community to face the various challenges stemming from globalization in spite of the fact that we are located in Tokyo, one of the centers of the global economy.

Our ambition is that whether they have been aware of the WSF until now, people from all walks of life would come to experience the significance of the WSF and of the Global Action Day on 1/26, and make them a springboard for activism as well as an organizing principle of their lives.

* * *

“Rokkasho: Nobody Talks, Nothing Changes”

Lots of activity here in Japan against the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Aomori Prefecture...

596 organisations and groups, and 2,500 people participated in the parade on Jan. 27, 2008 in central Tokyo. Over 810,000 signatures has been collected and were handed in to the government on Jan. 28, 2008. Representatives of the protesters, which include fishery associations, consumer cooperatives and surfer groups, handed the petition to the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

Seven consumer organisations have joined in this effort:

Consumers Union of Japan

Seikatsu Club Consumer's Co-operative Union

Daichi-o-Mamoru Kai

Green Consumer's Co-operative Union

Consumer's Co-operative Union “Kirari”

Consumer's Co-operative Miyagi

Pal-system Co-operative Union



Rokkasho Protest Post Card Campaign

To protect our bountiful nature, food, and life, let us send a message to oppose the full-scale operation of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant.

In November 2008, the Spent-Nuclear-Fuel Reprocessing Plant in Rokkasho Village, Aomori Prefecture, Japan, is supposed to start full-scale operations. This reprocessing plant collects spent-nuclear-fuel from nuclear power plants all across Japan. Plutonium and uranium will be extracted from the spent-fuel at this facility. From here, every day, a large quantity of radiation is released into the ocean and the atmosphere.

The radiation released into the ocean accumulates in the fish and seaweed. Radiation emitted into the air spreads to the mountains and fields and falls on agricultural crops. These marine and agricultural products polluted with radiation eventually reach our dining tables, and we take radiation into our bodies through our food. There are reports that near reprocessing plants in operation in England and France, there is an extremely high incidence of leukemia in children - considered to be caused by radiation.

In the midst of these serious circumstances, the reprocessing plant is well on its way to starting-up operations. If this continues, we face the threat that our bountiful nature will become polluted with radiation and many agricultural producers will no longer be able to farm or fish. This means that we will not be able to obtain food that is safe and gives us peace of mind.

To pass on to the future generations our bountiful nature, and to protect the health of our children and families, let us send a message saying, "We do not want to allow operation of the reprocessing plant!" Let us send a message that expresses our sincere feelings to the national and local governments that are promoting this reprocessing plant.

You can send a postcard from your country, or order message cards in sets of 4 cards from Consumers Union of Japan (Donation: 400Yen for one set). Design by Green Co-op.



**The Chinese Meat Dumplings Scandal:
The Responsibility of the Government must be Questioned**

January 30, 2008

It was reported today that five people including children in Ichikawa-shi, Chiba prefecture had been hospitalized due to food poisoning after eating frozen meat dumplings purchased in a supermarket in the same city. The organic phosphorus chemical, Methamidophos, which is prohibited in Japan, was found in the dumplings. Already on January 5, 2008 a similar food poisoning case occurred in Hyogo prefecture, caused by the same type of frozen food sold at Ito Yokado. However, information about that event had not been properly conveyed to the public. In the Chiba case, it took more than one week until the laboratory testing results obtained on January 22, 2008 were announced.

In this case, as a food poisoning incident, the distribution of food which has the potential to cause harm should have been stopped immediately. This kind of problem arises as a result of insufficient import controls and quarantine systems. At the same time, we must seriously question the responsibility of the government, which did not rapidly make all information known to the public. Now, consumers cannot feel assured about the safety of the food we eat. As this case is now under investigation, efforts should also be made to prevent that such incidents reoccur. Under these circumstances, Food Safety Citizens' Watch strongly and seriously questions the responsibility of the government.

Food Safety Citizens' Watch

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Thank you South Australia!

February 19, 2008

Consumers Union of Japan took the initiative to the No! GMO Campaign that started in 1996 as a Japanese group of citizens that were alarmed by the many problems associated with genetically manipulated (GM) food.

We were very encouraged and pleased recently as we received the news that South Australia decided to keep its GM moratorium. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to South Australia for taking this step. We would like to further ask that the strict GM-free policy is permanently maintained, for the sake of both consumers' health and the environment. GM crops should be eliminated, and not accepted.

We strongly request that South Australia makes sure not to let GM canola be cultivated in South Australia now or in the future.

Japan Resources

Consumers Union of Japan

Consumers Union of Japan joined over 120 NGOs, individuals and companies that signed an advertisement published on February 7, 2008 in The Australian:

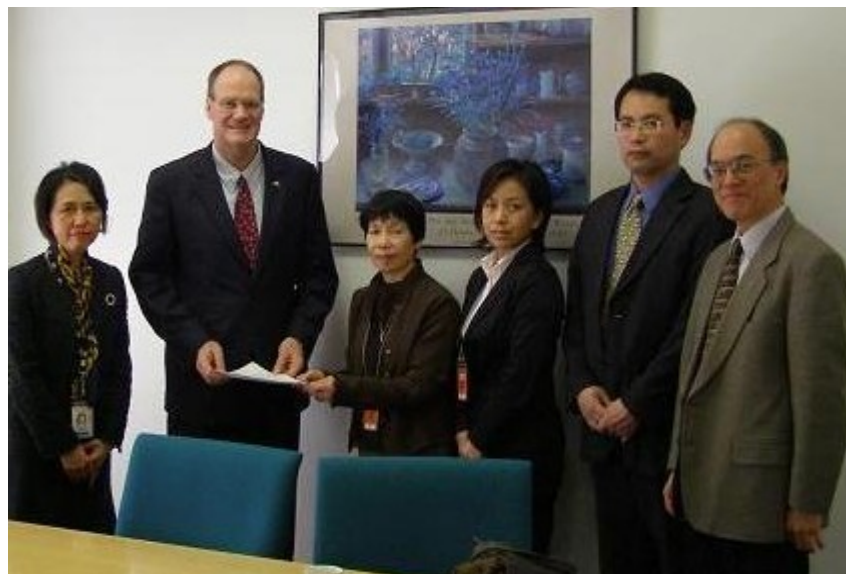
Stop Genetically Engineered food crops: Australia's next cane toad

In recent years, a handful of multinational chemical companies have engineered new kinds of crops that could never occur in nature. These GE crops pose unacceptable risks to human health, the environment and the economy.

Against the interests of other states, the Victorian and New South Wales Governments recently announced they will allow their bans on GE food crops to expire end February 2008. The decision from South Australia is also pending. As a result, Australia is now on the brink of losing its green GE free status and economic advantage forever.

This decision will allow the commercial release of GE canola. Like cane toads, the release of GE canola would be irreversible, as GE canola crops can cross state borders and contaminate non-GE canola crops. It will remove choice from farmers who want to remain GE free.

No systems of segregating GE canola crops or contamination control have yet been devised. Therefore no State government should lift its GE ban without the agreement of all that will be affected.



No! GMO Request at Australian Embassy

Keisuke Amagasa, Namiko Ono and other consumer activists visited the Australian Embassy in Tokyo on February 21, 2008 to deliver Japanese consumers' request regarding genetically modified (GM) foods. They asked the Australian government, on a national level, to firmly maintain a strict GM-free policy. Australia has such a valuable ecosystem, which is unparalleled in the world, so GM crops are a real threat to the country's unique biodiversity. They expressed the request that GM crops should be eliminated, and not accepted. They also strongly requested that Australia makes sure not to let GM canola to be cultivated now or in the future.

Letter to Hon. Tony Burke, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forest

February 21, 2008

Please Stop GM Canola Cultivation in Australia

The No! GMO Campaign started in 1996 as a Japanese group of citizens that were alarmed by the many problems associated with genetically modified (GM) food. Our active campaign has the aim to create a GM-free world.

In 2007, it came to our knowledge that five Australian states (New Southern Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and West Australia) - that had previously regulated the cultivation of GM crops under a "GM Moratorium" rule - would see their GM-free status expire in February 2008. If Australia were to allow GM canola cultivation, it would mean Japanese consumers would lose the opportunity to buy GM-free canola imported from Australia.

In August 2007, we sent an urgent letter, requesting that the GM moratorium should be maintained, to the state governors of the above-mentioned five states. Then, in October 2007 we had collected the signatures of 155 Japanese groups, requesting that Australia would maintain its GM moratorium. Their members consist of some 2,900,000 people all over Japan. We also visited Australia, and had the opportunity to hand over this appeal to state government officials, including the state ministers for agriculture in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and West Australia, strongly demanding that the GM moratorium would be maintained.

Regrettably, on November 27, Victoria and New South Wales announced that they would end their GM moratoria. To this we have only one thing to say: We do not need GM food! Our campaign together with Japanese consumer co-operatives, which import GM-free canola from Australia, and other groups sent protest letters to oppose and to reject GM canola.

On the other hand, we were very encouraged in February 2008 as we received the news that South Australia decided to keep its GM moratorium. Indeed, we appreciate this decision very much.

We would like to ask to the Federal Government, on a national level, to firmly maintain a strict GM-free policy. Your country has such a valuable ecosystem, which is unparalleled in the world, so GM crops are a real threat to your country's unique biodiversity. Therefore GM crops should be eliminated, and not accepted. We strongly request that you make sure not to let GM canola to be cultivated in Australia now or in the future.

Sincerely,

Keisuke Amagasa

Chairperson, No! GMO Campaign

Call to Action Against the G8

Resisting Free Trade, Militarism and Fighting for Real Solutions to Climate Change
The G8 Summit will be held July 7-9, 2008 in Toyako, Hokkaido, Japan. This will be a culmination of a series of ministerial preparation meeting beginning in March.

The G8 Action Network, a network of various Japanese organizations and movements, called on all social movements, peasant organizations, women, migrants, urban and rural poor, fisherfolks and civil society from all over the world who are resisting free trade in its many forms, war and militarism, the privatization of essential services and natural resources, illegitimate debt and the domination of global finance, and fighting for and building real people based solutions to global warming, to come and join us in the week of action against the G8 here in Japan.

The G8 Action Network invited activists and concerned citizens to Japan and join in our international preparatory meeting from March 7-11, 2008.

Schedule:

March 7, 16:00: Press conference at Parliamentarian building
March 8-9: International Coordination Meeting & G8 Seminar
March 9: evening, Move to Hokkaido by plane
March 10-11: Activities in Hokkaido

Contact: Yasuaki Yamaura, Consumers Union of Japan

Other groups that participated included Focus on the Global South, Jubilee South, Migrant Forum in Asia, Attac, and People's Forum.

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International Preparation Meeting about the Lake Toyako G8 Summit

March 8, 2008

Kurihara Yasushi from the Executive Office asked everyone to give their views and opinions regarding the G8.

The G8 Action Network is an open network composed of individuals and organizations who are questioning the G8 Summit itself. The Network is constructing a framework for exchange of information, designed to support many events and activities against the Summit.

Nations joining the G8 account for only 14% of the world's population. Also, the G8 Summit is an informal meeting that does not comply with the procedures as requested by international laws. However, what is agreed there defines the movement of the world. For these reasons, we consider the G8 Summit undemocratic.

It was also pointed out that the policies carried out by the G8 are based on neo-liberalism. This is a world view holding that free trade or market liberalization could maximize profits and benefits for people. Neo-liberal proposals by the G8 have brought about many problems around the world to date.

Ogura Toshimaru from People's Plan Study Group made a presentation about Japan's government and its G8 activities at Lake Toyako in Hokkaido. He noted that Japan has selected global climate change and environmental problems as principal subjects for the meeting. At the same time, the government has been pushing hard to maintain the road taxes, a revenue source that continues the usual destruction of the environment. In this way, it is clearly putting forward a deceptive proposition for the G8 Summit.

Shimozawa Takashi from JANIC made a presentation about the G8 Summit NGO Forum. Even though environmental issues are at the center, he pointed out that so far, 114 NGOs are participating in the NGO Forum, which was started in January 2007. They have divided their activities into three groups: environment, poverty and human rights. It is their goal to respond to each official communique and have regular meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They also intend to participate in the April, 2008 Sherpa meeting to explain the opinions of the NGOs. There will also be a Tanabata Campaign from April to July, as well as an alternative summit in Hokkaido immediately before the G8 Summit.

Yamaura Yasuaki from Consumers Union of Japan discussed the following points:

- 1) The G8 has deteriorated problems such as poverty and debt through international institutions including IMF, World Bank, or WTO, in addition to FTA and EPA agreements.
- 2) The G8 has consistently favoured big agribusiness firms. This is not only breaking the very foundation of small-scale farmers life around the world, but also expanding production of genetically modified crops or animals.
- 3) The G8 has pushed ahead with deregulations, such as the privatization of public services of rail, mail or medical care. In addition, liberalization of capital investment or finance has led to chaos such as the currency crisis in Asia or the subprime loan scandal.
- 4) The G8 has produced instability of labour, by relaxing the standards of labour laws.
- 5) The G8 has put priority on corporate activities and paid no attention to environmental destruction. The G8 policy on climate change will inevitably raise new problems including acceleration of more risky or speculative carbon trading or promotion of nuclear energy.
- 6) The G8 countries, who formerly built colonies in many regions, bear the responsibility for numerous wars or armed conflicts, and they are major weapons exporting states as well as nuclear-weapon states.
- 7) In the name of terrorism, the G8 has deprived life and freedom of people and violated human rights by mobilizing domestic or overseas police and military forces, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- 8) The G8 never discusses gender issues, ethnic minorities, indigenous people, or socially excluded people.

Please see the G8 Action Network website for news and updates:

<http://www.jca.apc.org/alt-g8/>

Japan Resources is published by Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ). CUJ was founded in April 1969 and was officially certified as a non-profit organization on May 1, 2006 by the new Japanese NPO legislation. We continue to be a non-political and financially independent organization (NGO). CUJ is funded by membership fees and donations. The main concern of CUJ and its members is to realize a world of liberty and equality, a world free of economic, social and legal discrimination, and to preserve a safe and healthy environment for our children's future.

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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