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About Food Mileage

By Miyake Seiko, FSCW

(Report published by Food Safety Citizens' Watch, which 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.)

April 30, 2008

What can we learn from the recent food safety related incidents? Recently we had several fraudulent labeling scandals and this year, the Chinese gyoza problem etc. There are a number of answers. The food companies appear to lack awareness of compliance with regulations, while Japan has a weak inspection system for the increasing amount of imports. The fundamental problems are how we eat, as well as the promotion of bad eating patterns in society.

We consider it to be an abnormal situation that 60 percent of the food on our tables are imported. As people have come to view convenience and low prices as a good thing, they are in fact supporting the downfall of domestic agriculture here in Japan. Global warming is also closely linked to this problem. Longer transportation will contribute more to climate change, if food is produced far from consumers. Thus, the "food mileage" index has been introduced as a way to emphasize and express these issues.

"Food mileage" is a quantitative index that can give hints about the food supply structure, based on transportation. Transportation distance data is not included when expressing a country's food self-sufficiency ratio. The self-sufficiency ratio shows the dependency on imports, which is only a part of the actual situation. According to Tetsuya Nakata, Kyushu Regional Agricultural Administration Office:

In 2001, Japan's total volume of food imports was 58 million tons and its food mileage was 900 billion ton-km, the latter being almost 1.6 times the total domestic freightage. International comparisons show that this figure is high. The food mileage of South Korea and the United States are around 30 to 40% of Japan's, the United Kingdom and Germany about 20% and France around 10%. The per capita figure of Japan is also high.

Japan's remarkably high food mileage is largely due to particular commodities such as grains and distant export countries such as the United States, and incurs environmental concerns. Japan's huge volume of food imports accompanied by long-distance transportation may be damaging the global environment through the increase of carbon dioxide emissions.¹⁾

It is clear that Japan's food mileage is by far the largest, with an average transportation of 15,000 km, which is equivalent to the distance between Tokyo and Cape Town in South Africa. This is a figure that really forces us to think about our current situation.

In the last few years, China has become Japan's largest food trading partner, overtaking the United States. The distance of importing food has thus been getting shorter. Japan still imports a large amount of feed grains and food oil crops from the United States, Canada and Australia for its animal feed and food oil. Looking at these crops imported from United States only, these crops account for 60% of Japan's total food mileage. Such crops are also increasingly used as biofuels, and the prices have been pushed higher due to rivalry on the global commodity markets. Furthermore, these crops are increasingly genetically modified.

From this it becomes clear that the Japanese government's agricultural policy ignores the environmental effects, while in effect renouncing food security in its efforts to ensure a certain amount of domestic production. Also, the large food companies have been increasing the amount of imported food at low prices, with consumers accepting eating habits based on low-priced imported foods. Food education campaigns are ongoing, but we would like to propose an approach to the current food problem based on the "food mileage" perspective.

1) A Study on the Volume and Transportation Distance as to Food Imports ("Food Mileage") and its Influence on the Environment, by Tetsuya NAKATA, Journal of Agricultural Policy Research, No.5, pp.45-59.

<http://www.primaff.affrc.go.jp/english/publications/seisaku/5/5-2.pdf>

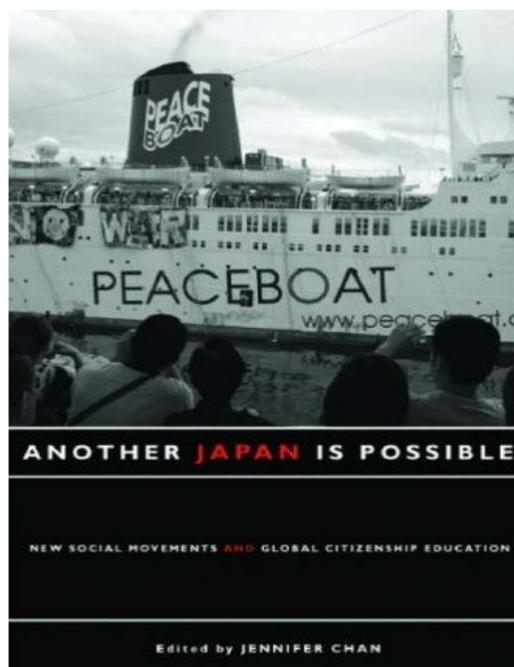
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Book Review:

Another Japan is Possible

Consumers Union of Japan is very impressed by Jennifer Chan's new book, *Another Japan is Possible*, published by Stanford University Press (432 pp.)

"I think that this book can explain the situations of Japanese modern social movements," says Yamaura Yasuaki, CUJ's vice chairperson. "Jennifer Chan's research is wide-ranging and complete. We recommend it to all who are interested in new social movements and global citizenship education."



Please order from the Stanford University Press website: <http://www.sup.org/>

Global Article 9 Declaration to Abolish War



Ms. Yoko Tomiyama, CUJ's veteran activist and chairperson, participated in the huge Global Article 9 conference at Makuhari, Chiba on May 4-6, 2008.

A Declaration was adopted by participants of the Global Article 9 Conference to Abolish War, endorsed by Nobel Peace Laureates Mairead Maguire, Jody Williams, and by the Nobel Women's Peace Initiative. To read all the outcome documents of the Conference, [click here](#).

Global Article 9 Conference Statement towards the Non-Proliferation Treaty PrepCom meeting in Geneva, Switzerland (April 28 - May 9, 2008).

Global Article 9 Conference Statement to the G8 Summit taking place in July 2008 in Hokkaido, Japan under Japanese presidency.

This three-day event attracted over 33,000 participants nationwide: over 22,000 in Tokyo, 8,000 in Osaka, 2,000 in Hiroshima and 1,000 in Sendai. Close to 200 international guest speakers and participants came from 40 different countries and regions to represent all continents at the conference.

The conference was a success. Many expressed the feeling that it was a "historical moment", when people from all over Japan and abroad came together to share ideas and energies towards building a world without war. The high numbers of participants reveal that the debate in Japan was in dire need of a new impetus. The Japanese audience was positively surprised to discover the global interest in the issue, while international participants were enthused to learn more about the Article 9 debate in Japan and reflect on the potential of Article 9 principles as an international mechanism to promote global peace and stability.

- From Global Article 9 Campaign www.article-9.org

Special Resolution:

Evaluate the Food Safety Commission before Establishing a Consumer Agency

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.

To: Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda

To: LDP Consumer Issue Research Group Chairman Noda Seiko

To: Democratic Party of Japan

April 28, 2008

At a meeting with the government panel on consumer issues on April 23, 2008, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda announced that the Government would establish a consumer agency the next fiscal year. This new body will reportedly have authority over all consumer-related issues including food safety, and will operate as a “control tower” over consumer protection with competence for planning, legal execution and advising. However, the Government decided that the relevant members from existing consumer-related government bodies would be unified within the consumer agency's structure, wanting to deflect criticism for making the government bigger.

In this context, we want to point out that there has been no proper evaluation of the roles played by the Food Safety Commission and the Fundamental law for food safety in protecting the citizens' health and guaranteeing the safety of our food. Before creating a new consumer administrative body, we believe it is necessary to impartially evaluate the current achievements, pointing out both the positive and negative aspects.

We therefore request that the present Food Safety Commission should be thoroughly evaluated before a new Consumer Agency is established.

– *Adopted by the participants at the sixth annual general meeting of Food Safety Citizens' Watch on April 26, 2008*

No! GMO Campaign

To: Warrnambool Cheese and Butter Factory

April, 2008

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please continue raising your dairy cattle with non-GMO feed!

We are the No! GMO Campaign, that started in 1996 as a Japanese group of citizens that were alarmed by the many problems associated with genetically modified (GM) food. Our goal is to keep not only Japan but also the world GM-free and make sure GM foods are completely eliminated.

As you probably know, Japan has a low food self-sufficiency rate, importing some 60% of the food from other countries. Japan currently imports farm products, beef and other meat products, dairy products, natural cheese, and wheat from the following top four countries: The United States, China, EU and Australia. Due to the outbreak of BSE in North America, Japan has increased its imports of beef from Australia and New Zealand, as we are aware of the fact that safe and delicious beef as well as dairy products are produced by grass feeding. In particular, we understand that since Australia has sufficient pasture land, you are raising cows with grass instead of feeding large amounts of grain.

However, we are very concerned that several states in your country lifted their moratoria against farming GM crops. We agree with the Australian NGO "Mothers against Genetic Engineering", who say: "We want our children to drink milk from cows that are not fed with GM feed!"

Since Japan imports most of its feed from North America, GM feed is generally used for domestic dairy cows. Under such circumstances, we strongly support all dairy farmers here and abroad who are raising cows with non-GM feed. Japanese consumers actively choose dairy products from such dairy farmers. Japan imports dairy products including natural cheese from Australia, and we also import natural cheese from EU countries. If you allow GM feed for raising cows in Australia, Japanese consumers may choose European dairy products that are produced with milk from cows and goats raised locally with non-GM feed.

Australian food producers and Japan's consumers should cooperate to secure GM-free dairy products.

Keisuke Amagasa
Chairperson
No! GMO Campaign

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No! GMO Campaign

May 21, 2008

Please stop farming genetically modified sugar beet crops

Rejecting genetically modified sugar beet crops, we strongly oppose its cultivation and commercialization in the United States. In addition, we will start to actively boycott American candy products if it is verified that GM sugar beet crops have been used for making the sugar used in the candy.

Our organization, No! GMO Campaign, was started in 1996 by a large number of Japanese consumer organizations and citizens' groups that were alarmed by various problems associated with genetically modified (GM) food. Our campaign has actively pursued the aim to create a GM-free world.

GM soybeans and GM corn were first imported to Japan from your country in 1996 and have been used as food ingredients and raw materials for animal feed. With the No! GMO Campaign taking the lead, many consumer groups, consumer co-operatives and a large number of ordinary people have demanded that GM foods should be eliminated from our dining tables. Thus organic food and food without GM ingredients have increasingly been made available by co-operatives and other food selling groups and companies.

During the spring of 2008 we have received information from citizens' groups in your country that GM sugar beet crops may soon be cultivated commercially. Japan also imports candy products containing beet sugar made from US sugar beet crops. Such sweets are eaten by our children. It is likely that many consumers will stop buying US-made candy products if there is any concern that the sweets they give their children may contain GM sugar beet products.

It is widely known that the Starlink corn contamination became a huge problem here in Japan in 2000. The No! GMO Campaign detected food on the Japanese market that contained this illegal GM corn variety, and requested that our government prohibited the import of such foods, and that they should be recalled. As a result, the import of US corn dropped sharply at that time.

If GM sugar beet crops are grown commercially in the United States, we will have to assume that it is being used in food from your country. Thus we will have the same situation with regards to foods that contains sugar, including candy. It will be a repetition of the Starlink corn problem, and we will have to refuse import of products containing sugar from the United States.

We sincerely urge you to stop farming genetically modified sugar beet crops.

Keisuke Amagasa
Chairperson
No! GMO Campaign

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Report from the Planet Diversity Conference in Bonn, Germany

Consumers Union of Japan participated together with other Japanese NGOs at the large Planet Diversity conference in Bonn, Germany on May 12-16, 2008. It was a global congress on the future of food and agriculture, with a demonstration to celebrate biodiversity.

At the rally, anti-GMO activists including Percy Schmeiser and Vandana Shiva spoke to the 6,000 people who gathered from all over Germany and other countries for the event. At the workshops, participants discussed plant and livestock diversity, building knowledge around biodiversity, and key issues of the official biosafety negotiations held later in May.

Koketsu Michiyo from CUJ participated in the workshop on health impacts of GMOs organised by the Federation of Ecological Physicists, including Dr. Arpad Pushtai, who has a vast experience with GMO and has visited Japan. Organic farmer Raymond Epp from Hokkaido read a speech prepared by Shinji Asada, ex vice-governor of Hokkaido, Japan about how Hokkaido protects its farmers from GMOs. Also Shimizu Ryoko from Policy Research Institute for the Civil Sector gave a speech on Japanese activities concerning GMO contamination.

Shimizu-san also described how the No! GMO Campaign has been at the forefront of efforts to keep Japan GMO-free with a strong demand from consumers to have a mandatory, legally binding labelling system. Citizens in many regions around Japanese ports have also been volunteering to test if canola growing wild near the ports and roads has been contaminated by imported GM crops or not, and she presented data on the extent of the contamination so far.

The No! GMO Campaign presented a translated document about how buffer zones cannot prevent GMO cross-contamination, and how GMO cross-fertilization by airborne pollen has been found at surprisingly large distances in Hokkaido, Japan.

Many Asian activists participated and there were deep discussions about how to save rice from being genetically engineered. The core of this campaign is the Week of Rice Action (WORA) Network based in Malaysia. CUJ also participated in the workshop about GMO free world perspectives, with updates from Western Australia's battle to keep its moratorium against GMO crops.

“We don't only need networks between people, but between people and plants, and people and planet earth,” notes Koketsu-san from CUJ, who says she became aware of this during the six days in Bonn, Germany.

Read more on the Planet Diversity website
www.planet-diversity.org

For information about the UN Biodiversity Protocol negotiations, please see the CBD Alliance website
www.cbdalliance.org

No! GMO Campaign



Anti-GMO activists from Japan gathering at the Planet Diversity conference in Bonn, Germany on May 12-16, 2008

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Tokyo Actions Against the G8 Meeting

The G8 summit will be held in Hokkaido, Japan. On July 7-9, head of states from just eight of the world's countries will gather together at Lake Toya. There they will make decisions on the future in the world, protected by the police and military. While the Japanese government welcomes the summit, many people who are dissatisfied with the decisions plan various actions against the summit.

Opposing the summit, NGOs are organizing actions against the summit. This event will take place in Tokyo on June 28-29, 2008.

[G8 Action Network](#) (English)

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate in actions with people who tackle with issues of poverty, labor, discrimination, war, violence, gender inequality, social exclusion, environmental destruction, abuse of human rights, food safety, agriculture, minority, and public order. Our aim is to spread our dissent to as many as possible people immediately before the G8 summit.

Among the speakers is Yasuaki Yamaura from CUJ, who will discuss the opposition against WTO and Free Trade Agreements, food safety and food security, in light of the current global food crisis.

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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