

Consumers Union of Japan

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From the Editors:

Many Thanks!

As we noted in the last issue of Japan Resources, Consumers Union of Japan is engaged in campaigns that have international implications.

This time, we are appreciating our friends and colleagues abroad, from Canada to New Zealand, from Bangladesh and Malaysia to South Korea (as well as everyone who met in Brussels and joined our Tabe Kime Action Campaign) and more.

This time we are also dealing with several global UN meetings, including issues ranging from Biological Diversity to Plastic Pollution...

We hope you will stay tuned to our campaigns and join us as we keep up the good work.

- Editors

Over 67,000 Signatures for UN Plastic Convention Petition

In Japan, the Network for Protecting Children from Toxic Chemical Substances, of which Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ) is a member, is calling on the Japanese Government to make the United Nations Plastics Convention effective.

The Network is also collecting signatures for a petition to the Japanese Government to make this Plastics Convention effective.

The Network is led by the Japan Endocrine-disrupter Preventive Action, the National Council for Dioxin and Environmental Hormone Control, and 20 citizens' groups, including NPOs such as the Toxic Watch Network, the Toxic Chemical Substances Reduction Network and 32 consumer cooperatives across Japan.

In the run-up to INC5 in Busan in November 2024, the Network has collected more than 67180 signatures in about two months in a petition drive asking the Japanese government to incorporate the following into the Convention:

- (1) Reduction of new plastic production
- (2) Regulation of toxic chemicals contained in plastics
- (3) A phased ban on the use of disposable plastics

Alert: Kewpie, Keep GMO Eggs Out of Our Mayo

Canada Biotechnology Action Network has kindly posted this in solidarity with our efforts here in Japan:

In solidarity with the Consumers' Union of Japan, CBAN asks Canadian consumers of Kewpie mayonnaise to write to the company. Ask Kewpie not to use genetically modified eggs:

Consumers' Union of Japan is calling for Kewpie Corp, a Japanese food processing company famous for its mayonnaise, to cease the development of genome-edited "low-allergen" eggs that are intended to eventually become commercialized through the company's food product line. In collaboration with Kewpie, Hiroshima University is developing a chicken to lay eggs that cannot produce the allergen ovomucoid. A clinical trial is currently underway at Sagamihara National Hospital and may be completed by spring 2026.

Consumers Union of Japan has asked Kewpie not to support or use genome-edited eggs in their mayo and other products because of food safety and animal welfare concerns.

For more info on the risks of genome-editing in food and farming see cban.ca/gene-editing

Genome-edited Organisms Already Marketed in Japan

30 October 2024

By Martin J. Frid, Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ) and Yoshimasa Harano, Japan Citizens' Network for Sustainable Food and Agriculture (FA-Net)

When discussing synthetic biology in the United Nations Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD), we note that this is not just a potential risk that may seem far-fetched and out-of-reach. Already genome-edited tomatoes and fish are being marketed and sold in supermarkets and online in Japan. Using CRISPR-Cas9, and released without risk assessment or environmental assessment, and not even subject to mandatory labelling, the products are marketed directly to consumers. Plants (seedlings) for growing the genome-edited tomatoes in home gardens are also available online to hobby farmers. The company has gotten approval to sell this genome-edited tomato in the Philippines.

After the 2024 earthquake in Noto Peninsula, northeast of Kyoto, where there were aquaculture fish farms, there was concern that genome-edited fish could have escaped into the wild. We were also worried about the transfer by truck or car of such living modified organisms. And it is not just a concern for Japan, as the company has announced plans to expand its aquaculture technology

first to Indonesia (cancelled) and then to Thailand. Genome-edited eggs are also being developed in Japan, with implications both for food safety and animal welfare, in addition to biodiversity.

Further liability and redress mechanisms are necessary, which requires continued work under the Cartagena protocol, which Japan has ratified, and a regular horizon scanning mechanism. We note that the corporations that have released these products (High-GABA tomato, fast-growing fish) are not transparent and hide data behind the practice of “trade secrets” which is not in the interest of consumers or farmers, with potential implications for biodiversity and health.

We conclude that genome-editing should be discussed as a topic in synthetic biology under the CBD. The Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) has been mandated established to deliberate on synthetic biology and disappointingly, we have yet to see results in terms of genome-editing. Unintended effects of CRISPR-Cas technologies and changes are essentially different from those of the old GMO/LMO techniques. Several questions of risk, e.g., future effects of horizontal gene transfer, may not be possible to answer in present terms, making it even more urgent to discuss these issues in the framework of CBD.

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Many Thanks for Joining our Tabé Kime Action Campaign 2024

For World Food Day on 16 October, we again started the campaign “I decide what I eat. I decide what I plant and grow. Not for the benefit of multinational corporations.” We call this campaign the Tabé Kime Action (Tabé=Eat Kime=Decide).

Participants can post photos of our message board on Facebook. Our campaign was launched in response to the criticism voiced by family farmers, small-scale farmers' groups and citizens' groups around the world against the multinational corporations led UN Food System Summit in September 2021, and to show Japan's support for them.

Last year, over 200 photos were submitted. In addition to the message board with the text there is also a blank board on which you can write your own message. Please take photos of yourself and the view of the food or food production sites you want to protect. For example, you can take photos of fields or rice paddies, a scene of a meal at an organic restaurant or at home can also be included. Do add a personal message if you wish!

Watch Youtube videos, including “Tabé Kime” on Channel Nishoren!

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Joint Statement for Peace in Asia

30 August 2024

We are citizens' organisations engaged in the consumer movement and consumer cooperative activities in South Korea and Japan. As we promote efforts to protect the rights of consumers and citizens, we are heartbroken that many people are embroiled in wars and conflicts around the world, such as the war in Russia and Ukraine and the fighting between Israel and Palestine.

War takes and maims all life, including children, and destroys everything that sustains life. We saw this first-hand in the two World Wars. In World War II, Japan inflicted indescribable damage on Korea and other Asian countries. Upon reflection, the citizens of Japan resolved in the Constitution of Japan to ensure that the horrors of war would never again be caused by the actions of the government, and pledged to Asia and the world that the mistakes would never be repeated.

However, in 2022, the Japanese Government revised three documents on security and announced a plan to double defense spending to a total of 43 trillion yen (about 374.5 trillion won) over the next five years in the name of deterrence. This is a 180-degree turnaround in Japan's approach to security, from the previous policy of exclusive defence to pre-emptive attack, and an attempt to once again push the country into

war. In response to this situation, a joint statement by consumers in Japan calling for the withdrawal of the three security documents has been issued, with the support of over 90 organisations.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Japan and South Korea both rank around the top ten in the world's military expenditure rankings. Conflicts and tensions continue in many parts of the world, but we know from past war experience that the expansion of armaments is never a deterrent, but paves the way for war. Wars do not start suddenly one day, but creep into our lives little by little. At a time when the global arms build-up is underway, Asian consumer and civil society organisations need to unite in solidarity and appeal for anti-war and peace.

All people on earth have the right to live in peace and security. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.' Peace is not merely the absence of war and conflict, but a state of peace and prosperity, free from violence, poverty, oppression of human rights, discrimination and environmental destruction. Above all, we believe that human dignity must be taken seriously. We see each situation that threatens this as our own and urge that all international confrontational challenges be resolved not by force but by dialogue.

We hereby resolve to continue dialogue and exchange in order to further broaden and deepen the links between people in search of peace and never to provoke war.

Dure Consumer's Cooperative Union
(South Korea)

Shufuren Association of Consumer
Organisations (Japan)

Consumers Union of Japan (Japan)

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Update: Many thanks to everyone who has supported the Joint Statement for Peace in Asia that we released on 30 August 2024.

16 organisations, including five from abroad, have so far signed the statement that we released with Dure Consumer's Cooperative Union (South Korea) and Shufuren Association of Consumer Organisations (Japan):

SHISUK (Bangladesh)
GE Free NZ in Food and Environment (New Zealand)
Consumers' Association of Penang (Malaysia)
Friends of the Earth Malaysia (Malaysia)
Indonesian Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas – InDHRRA (Bina Desa)

You can still sign the statement [here](#) (in English) until 31 December 2024.

In the News: OECD Meeting for Consumer Protection that is “Fit for the Future”

On 8-9 October 2024, 37 ministers and heads of consumer agencies and international organisations attended the first ever OECD Consumer Policy Ministerial meeting in Paris. They approved a Declaration on Protecting and Empowering Consumers in the Digital and Green Transitions. Among other things, they urge the OECD to examine how consumer policy can help consumers who want to reduce their environmental footprint. Also, consumers’ understanding of environmental information and of the future, long-term environmental impact of their choices need to be better understood through research.

This progress at the OECD level can be used by us in our campaigns, to demand that the Japanese government does more to protect consumers. OECD noted that consumers are facing large volumes of unsafe products available online. There are new risks associated with digital technologies in products. Evidence shows that while many consumers want to make more sustainable choices, obstacles such as unclear, inaccurate, and misleading green claims can prevent them from making green choices.

How we can be more proactive and raise awareness among our members?

Consumers International, participating at the OECD meeting, noted that consumers need better information and incentives to help them drive sustainable practices. Last year CI’s report on sustainable lifestyles showed that affordability is a barrier for 94% of consumers who want to shift towards sustainable living. CI also pointed out that only 59% of countries have any laws at all covering online consumer protection. Other topics included promoting safe reuse and repair and the adoption of environmentally friendly product design. For example, children’s toys, pharmaceuticals and household chemicals must be rigorously tested to prevent harm.

Consumers International was founded in 1960 and worked for “sustainable consumption” to be included as a goal in the global work by the United Nations since the late 1990s. CI notes that by 2050, the equivalent of almost three planets could be required to match the natural resources needed to sustain current lifestyles. In line with UN SDGs, ensuring sustainable production and consumption patterns is a key focus of CI’s work and one of the most pressing issues for consumer organisations around the world.

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Consumers Union of Japan

CUJ is a politically and financially independent non-governmental organization (NGO). We are funded by membership fees, sales of publications and donations.

CUJ was founded in April 1969 as Japan's first nationwide grassroots consumer organization.

Address: Nishi Waseda 1-9-19-207

Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan (169-0051)

E-mail: office.w@nishoren.org

**English website:
www.nishoren.org/en/**

