

Consumers Union of Japan

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From the Editors:

New Year, New Challenges

Consumers Union of Japan is currently looking for new staff and would like to hire qualified people with an interest in consumer issues. It turns out that it may be easier said than done. We have a long history as an independent NGO and depend on our members and volunteers, as well as the sale of our publications.

We also realise that many young people cannot survive on a small salary, even if the work is attractive.

It is a challenge, but we intend to pass on the baton to the future generation. We hope you will stay tuned to our campaigns and join us as we keep up the good work...

- Editors

Surprise, Shock and More Worries: Japanese Consumers React to New Zealand Regarding Genetically Modified Foods

15 February 2025

Japan imports a lot of food including but not only your sweet kiwi fruit from New Zealand. We depend on all kinds of nutritious crops as we balance the benefits of international trade agreements with the problems they cause to farmers here, and our domestic food production, which often have consumers doubt safety rules and standards. Consumers Union of Japan has protested against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans Atlantic Partnership (CPTPP) that New Zealand is also a part of.

As for genetically modified (GM) foods, we have rejected them and fought hard to keep them off the shelves of Japan's supermarkets and convenience stores. For almost 30 years, Japanese farmers have not grown GM crops because of consumer opposition to GM foods. Nevertheless, contamination from imported GM canola has been repeatedly confirmed throughout Japan.

We have been told that farmers in New Zealand share our concerns about GM foods: the severe safety issues, and the lack of concern for farmers' rights (such as patenting rules). There is also the general feeling that biological diversity is a

major concern, that seed and seedlings are not adequately protected, even by the Convention of Biological Diversity or the Cartagena Protocol, which needs to move faster on so-called "Synthetic Biology".

We, Consumers Union of Japan, along with many co-ops and community organizations around Japan, have been fighting hard to avoid genetically modified foods from entering Japan. We demand mandatory labelling and of course, better legal rules to deal with genome-edited or "New Genetic Technologies" (NGTs) or "Precision Breeding".

We like natural food from New Zealand, without the hubris and unreasonable claims that we do not believe will be realised. We are surprised and frankly quite shocked that anyone in New Zealand would imagine that its food (or drink, like NZ wine that is quite popular here) would get a boost from GM technologies.

"We hope you will remain a stable, wonderful and natural food exporter. Do not underestimate the old saying, the customer is king, and please keep New Zealand GM-free," says Mrs. Michiyo Koketsu, Secretary General of CUJ.

Background from GE Free New Zealand

12 February 2025

Re: Proposed Gene Technology Bill

<https://www.gefree.org.nz/>

Tēnā koutou katoa,

We would like to be heard.

We oppose the Gene Technology Bill, and it must be withdrawn in its present form.

We also request extra time to allow for expert witnesses.

We also ask, given the GE Technology area is ever evolving, that we can add this evidence to our submission.

The Gene Technology Bill is usurping the democratic process by making public policy with a selected private faction of interested parties who will both monetarily and privately benefit.

The Gene Technology Bill is not fit for purpose and will not achieve the objectives of safe use of gene technology to protect people and the environment.

We ask that the Select committee –

- Restore the interpretation of genetically modified/engineered organisms (GE) from regulated organisms in HSNO and reproduce the original HSNO interpretation in the Gene Technology Bill.

- Restore the precautionary principle, removed from current legislation by the Bill.

- Require labelling of products from Gene Edited organisms to protect the rights of consumers and farmers to know what they are consuming and growing.

- Restore Te Tiriti O Waitangi principles.

- Restore the right for Local and Territorial Bodies to adopt precautionary and protective rules around GE.

- Restore New Zealand sovereignty by removing all automatic approvals based on decisions of foreign Regulators for release of products from new breeding techniques (NBTs) or other products produced by genetic engineering (GE).

- Require comprehensive insurance on developers and users of gene technology to include GE pollen drift, GE seed and plant contamination, to pay costs for clean-up and to compensate for economic loss caused by the polluting party/parties.

- Require dedicated segregation facilities for GE organisms to ensure security and purity of the production chain.

- Require protection for market access and the economic advantage for New Zealand in being able to

meet the demand for GE-free products.

- Require environmental and food safety testing for all GE products, with no exemptions.
- Address the absence of diagnostic tools for health professionals to be able to detect any adverse effects from gene edited food entering the supply chain.

The Gene technology Bill is clear on the intent to enable industry but fails to balance the risks to other stakeholders and the environment, and transfers costs of the biotechnology industry onto others.

The proposal to amend and change legislation to allow exempted, unlabelled and unregulated genetically engineered/ gene edited organisms into the country has no merit. This lack of regulation is a threat to economic wellbeing, health and the environment. The scale of the economic threat has yet to be confirmed but could be a loss in value of exports between \$10-\$20 Billion per annum.



Label All Genetically Modified Foods!

On 3 December 2024, the Consumer Affairs Agency released the results of its annual opinion survey on food labelling. When asked whether they refer to the content of labels regarding genetically modified foods when purchasing food, 38.0% said they did. However, only about 10% of people responded that they understood the content of labels on genetically modified foods that contained information such as "Unsegregated" or "Identity Preserved Handling," indicating that most people do not understand the changes in the labeling system for genetically modified foods.

Regarding genome-edited foods, only 6.1% said they knew what they are. The number of people who answered, "I've never heard of it and I don't know what it is." reached 50.8%. When asked about genome-edited food labeling, of respondents who said they knew about it and those who said they had heard of it but did not know what it was, 55.7% said they wanted it to be labeled.

Source: Bio Journal January 2025

<https://www5d.biglobe.ne.jp/~cbic/english/2025/journal2501.html>

Regarding Japan's Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas

Following the revision of the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas in May 2024, work is underway to revise the Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas. The Basic Plan is an important medium- to long-term guideline for agricultural policy. This Opinion Letter was submitted by Consumers Union of Japan and other organisations to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries on 4 February 2025.

Opinion & Demands on the Revision of the Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas

We are a consumer organisation working for a safe and secure life.

The Government of Japan is currently considering revisions to the Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas. This is an important document that will shape agricultural policies for the next five to ten years, following the 2024 revision of the Basic Law. We call for the consumer/citizen perspective to be emphasised in the Basic Plan.

We have argued that food and agriculture should be valued for their importance to life and the environment, based on the idea that food is not a commodity. However, as a result of the expansion and liberalisation of imports of agricultural

products and food, Japan's food self-sufficiency rate has declined significantly. This has caused not only the decline of domestic agriculture, but also major problems in terms of food safety and the environment.

As food prices soar and shortages become more serious worldwide, it has become clear that the agricultural policies of the past, which were import-dependent and focused on efficiency, cannot protect food. Based on this, we urge you to reflect the following in the revision of the Basic Plan.

1. Regarding the policy targets set out in the Basic Plan: Please publish the Progress Report every year and deliberate on it in Parliament.
2. Regarding the aim to achieve a food self-sufficiency ratio (on a calorie basis) of 45% by 2030, please include specific measures for local production for local consumption and domestic production for domestic consumption towards 50%.
3. Clarify the targets and measures to be taken by 2030 to increase the number of farmers (number and type of farmers), the area of farmland and the utilisation rate of arable land compared to the current level.
4. Diversify the definition of farmers to include small-scale family farms, dual-income farmers and subsistence farmers in line with local conditions, and broaden the base of those who

are engaged in farming. In doing so, put a stop to the entry of companies that are not rooted in the local community. Also, develop a system that allows anyone, including urban residents, to get involved in agriculture, such as “Half Farmer, Half X”, “Citizen Farmer” and relief farming.

5. Clarify measures to promote local production for local consumption. In particular, for school lunches, basically all foodstuffs should be produced domestically, with the national average of locally produced foodstuffs to be more than 70% (currently approximately 60%).

6. Organic agriculture should be promoted on the basis of respect for life, without violating the laws of nature and without the use of modern biotechnological techniques.

7. Set a target for the promotion of organic farming of 5% of all farmland by 2030 (currently 0.6%). Also, support more municipalities to declare organic villages (currently 129). Furthermore, establish a new “Organic City Declaration” to enable urban municipalities to increase the supply of food produced by organic farming (including school lunches) in partnership with municipalities that have declared organic villages.

8. Strengthen comprehensive research, training and education to promote organic farming. Establish “Organic Farming Parks” (model

farms, training, food and agricultural education, etc.) and “Organic Farming Extension Centres” (lending of farming equipment, consultation, seed holding, etc.) in each region.

9. Promote the use of organic produce in school lunches, with more than 20% of municipalities able to do so in the immediate future (currently around 200 municipalities). Aim for 100% for organic rice and 30% for organic produce.

10. Clarify the targets for the conservation of local varieties and seeds, mainly indigenous species, in each region and for the improvement of domestic self-sufficiency in seeds. Also, provide support for domestic production of organic seeds and set plans and targets for expanding supply.

11. Specify biodiversity and environmental protection measures. In particular, quantify the negative environmental aspects of agricultural production, such as the use of pesticides and plastics for agricultural materials, and set reduction targets. In addition, take action against pollution caused by the use of sewage sludge as fertiliser, the problem of biodiversity loss due to extended drying out of paddy fields to prevent methane gas, and the pollution of agricultural land with organo-fluorine compounds (PFAS).

12. Ensure food security for people with economic difficulties. In addition

to support for food banks and children's cafeterias, consider mechanisms that can provide direct food assistance to poor households. Establish a system ensuring food security for all, while also promoting regional and domestic agriculture.

13. Regulate the production and sale of lifeless food and technologies that alter genes in ways that deviate from the natural order of things, such as genetic modification technologies, genome editing technologies, radiation breeding technologies using heavy ion beams and "food tech".

**PARC Documentary Film:
"Amazon DSP Drivers-The Hidden
Cost of Free Shipping"**

The documentary follows the actual day of an Amazon delivery service provider and sheds light on the egregious and dangerous working conditions the workers face.

Many workers say they do not have time for toilet breaks, much less a decent lunch break. Lunch is on the go, and for some people, toilets are also on the go.

Even if workers get injured during their delivery work, they are only told "it's OK to go to a hospital after work hours. Please carry on". Moreover, as these workers are considered by the company as independent contractors, the medical bills have to come out of their pockets.

No health benefits, no workers' compensation, no paid leave.

And this is only for a meager pay. According to the workers interviewed, a worker only gets about 67 yen (0.45 USD) per package, after all costs are deducted. To make minimum wage, it would require a worker to deliver a package roughly every 3 minutes. Good luck avoiding traffic jams.

After some of these realities are shown, the film moves on to share the struggles for unionization, and court battles the workers are facing.

This is a must see for anyone who has relied on online shopping. I suppose that would be most people...

Link:

<https://parc-jp.org/en/news-resources/amazon-dsp-video/>

**CNIC: Report on Radioactive
Cesium Concentrations in
Seawater**

8 February 2025

Artificial radioactive materials released from Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s (TEPCO's) Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station (NPS) are still being detected in the environment over a wide region. They are blown by wind and driven by rain, draining into the sea or accumulating in certain places, so measurements must be taken to get a grasp of the current situation. The Citizens'

Nuclear Information Center (CNIC) has been measuring radioactive cesium concentrations in seawater, lake water, food and soil.

In this issue, I would like to report the measurement results for the period of 2022 to 2024. In recent years, special attention has been paid to environmental surveys around the Fukushima Daiichi NPS, in seawater off the coast of Ibaraki Prefecture and in Tokyo Bay, and around the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant (Rokkasho plant) in Aomori Prefecture, the full-scale operation of which has been repeatedly postponed.

From the results:

“As decommissioning work at the Fukushima Daiichi NPS has proceeded, radioactive contaminated water has been released into the ocean starting from August 2023. Our measurements thus far have not confirmed higher concentrations of cesium-137 in seawater around the time of release.”

Read the full report here:

<https://cnic.jp/english/?p=8111>

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.

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