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Heated Debates

This summer has been the hottest on record, Japan's weather agency reports. The abnormal heat, reaching above 40 degrees Celsius in several places, has caused thousands of cases of heatstroke and damaged industries, including agriculture and fisheries.

It has indeed been a summer of heated debates about peace, as we remember the end of WW2 this August.

We must also consider the children who go back to school this month. One issue some students face is the fragrance pollution problem, that CUJ and the Network to Stop Fragrance Pollution have highlighted.

We hope you will take advantage of our new online feature to contribute to Consumers Union of Japan, with a donation online.

- Editors

#DialogueOverForce: Citizens Unite for Peace in Asia Symposium

By Michiyo Kouketsu, Secretary General, Consumers Union of Japan

One year ago, Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ), along with other organizations, issued the “Joint Statement for Peace in Asia”. We continue to advocate for expanding and deepening connections between people seeking peace, and for maintaining dialogue and exchange to ensure war is never allowed to occur again.

This month, marking 80 years since the end of WW2, CUJ and the Japan Housewives' Federation (Japan's oldest consumer organization) held a symposium titled “Citizens Connect for Peace in Asia.” Approximately 100 people attended.

At the symposium, Mr. Chihiro Ito, a journalist advocating the significance of Article 9 of Japan's Constitution, which renounces war, both domestically and internationally, gave a lecture on examples of people power transforming societies across Asia. He shared the understanding that peace, too, can be built through people power. Additionally, citizen groups opposing military expansion from various parts of Japan reported on their respective initiatives. Solidarity messages were received from organizations in South Korea and Taiwan that endorse the Asian Peace Joint Statement.

We are seeking organizations to endorse the Asian Peace Joint Statement. We look forward to your endorsement.

English version of the Asian Peace Joint Statement

https://www.nishoren.org/en/?page_id=3160

English endorsement form

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf8gRg-jNGEdjnZ6bNNbcqELMy8LVnqQQn9nE27GmsbHj0IAg/viewform>



The East Asia Plant Variety Protection Forum and UPOV 1991: Implications for Seed Systems in Southeast Asia

Published by Third World Network and authored by Sangeeta Shashikant.

Download the book [here](#)

Webinar date: 16 July 2025

This publication discusses the motivations and commercial interests behind the East Asia Plant Variety Protection (EAPVP) Forum, how it has evolved into a key platform for aggressively promoting the adoption of the 1991 Act of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) in the Southeast Asia region.

The webinar will bring together experts in intellectual property, agriculture, and farmers' rights to discuss the economic and political dynamics behind the campaign for UPOV 1991 and its implications for developing countries.

Webinar Speaker:

- Sangeeta Shashikant, Programme Coordinator, Third World Network

Commentators:

- Nori Ignacio, Executive Director, Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE)
- NurFitri Amir Muhammad, Food Sovereignty Forum Malaysia

- Inyaku Tomoya, Secretary General, OK Seed Project, Japan

Quote: "...the paper concludes that the EAPVP Forum primarily serves as a strategic tool for Japan and the UPOV Secretariat to pressure South East Asian countries into adopting the rigid UPOV 1991 framework, threatening their policy space and agricultural sovereignty.

SEA countries, especially non-UPOV members, should critically reassess their participation and advocate for a reorientation of the Forum towards: genuine collaboration based on recognition of the sovereign right of each country to preserve the flexibility to have and implement a national PVP system distinct from UPOV Conventions; promoting critical, evidence-based discussions; engagement of diverse perspectives, in particular local stakeholders in SEA such as smallholder farmers, local and indigenous communities; establishment of an independent secretariat; and ensuring greater transparency and accountability of the Forum's activities."

Trend: Current Status of Genetically Altered Rice

Rice is one of the world's main staple crops, serving as a staple food for half of the world's population and providing about 80% of the necessary daily calorie intake. A large part of the world's rice production and consumption is in China and India, and the majority of rice is produced and consumed as a staple food in East and Southeast Asian countries.

The crop is characterized by low imports and exports, and currently 89.8% of rice is consumed domestically. (Source: FAO 2020/21)

Genetically altered rice, such as genetically modified or genome-edited rice, is not currently on the market. However, development is active, and genetically altered rice is often distributed illegally. Currently, genetically modified rice varieties that have been developed are herbicide and pest resistant, resistant to environmental stresses such as high temperature and cold damage, and rice varieties with enhanced nutrition.

In recent developments, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has approved two genome-edited rice varieties. One is Pusa DST Rice 1, which is tolerant to salty and alkaline soils, and the other is DRR Dhan 100 Kamala, which aims to be resilient to climate change, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce water use, and increase yields.

In response, the farmer-led [Coalition for a GMO-Free India](#) issued a statement calling for the suspension of the development of these two genome-edited rice varieties. The statement points out: (1) There is a possibility of foreign genes remaining or genetic modification, (2) off-target impact assessments have not been obtained due to lax regulations on genome-edited crops, and (3) these genome-edited rice plants have negative impacts on the environment and human health, and there is the possibility that seed sovereignty could be sold out to large corporations. Venugopal Badaravada, who has

spoken as a farmers' representative at ICAR, which approved the rice, supported the statement and was subsequently removed from his position.

China is also actively developing genetically modified rice. In 2023, A Chinese researcher tested a long-stemmed genetically modified rice plant and reported on the harvest. The researcher says that growing taller plants increases production and imparts resistance to pests and floods.

In December 2024, the Chinese government also granted safety certificates to new genome-edited rice varieties as part of its GMO initiative to boost yields and improve food security. However, specific traits and cultivation plans are unknown. China's Nanjing Agricultural University is also reported to have formed a partnership with the US University of Missouri to develop genome-edited rice that is resistant to bacterial diseases. These efforts are only at the research or testing stage, and commercial cultivation is unlikely anytime soon.

In Italy, public opposition to GMOs is so strong that 15 out of 18 regions across the country are GMO-free, according to [Via Campesina Europe](#). But as the European Union has accelerated its acceptance of new crops that apply some kind of gene modification technology, such as genome editing, there is now a move for even Italy to begin to grow genome-edited crops. In May 2024, Italy began field trials of a blast resistant genome-edited rice plant called Arborio rice RIS8imo.

However, cultivation was stopped within months of planting, the crop cut, and the experiment suspended. Nevertheless, researchers collected seeds from the cut rice and are continuing the research.

The Philippines attempted to cultivate golden rice, but citizens have blocked commercial cultivation. Golden rice has been touted and developed as a genetically modified crop that will combat vitamin A deficiency (VAD), which has serious and sometimes fatal health effects among the world's poorest people. While there is broad consensus on preventing VAD, there are strong doubts about the efficacy and safety of golden rice. Golden rice was approved for cultivation in the Philippines between 2021 and 24, but the approval was eventually revoked by the courts due to environmental and food safety concerns.

The GM Contamination Register, a global database that tracks GMO contamination of non-GMO crops, foods and wild relatives, reports that genetic contamination of rice accounts for about one-third of all documented GMO contamination cases. Since 2006, unapproved genetically modified rice has been repeatedly detected in global supply chains. It is unclear whether the contamination was caused by test cultivation or illegal cultivation. This GMO contamination is having a serious impact on small farmers in developing countries who depend on rice production for their livelihoods.

(Source: Non-GMO Project 13 June 2025)

In the News: Fragrance Sensitivity Affects 1 in 10 Students, Survey Finds

(The Asahi Shimbun, 21 August 2025)

Quotes: "Around 10 percent of Japanese elementary and junior high school students have suffered health problems due to fragranced products such as laundry soap and perfumes, according to a current survey.

The findings highlight growing concerns over fragrance sensitivity, prompting renewed calls for national guidelines in schools.

The ongoing study, released on Aug. 20, is being jointly conducted by the Japanese Society of Clinical Ecology and the Society of Indoor Environment.

Since May last year, the researchers have collected online responses from more than 10,000 parents from 21 municipalities across nine prefectures.

This is the first academic study of its kind on fragrance-related health complaints among children in Japan."

"...the survey found that 2.1 percent of children refused to attend school or day care due to scent-related discomfort.

"These symptoms tend to increase as children spend more time at school. It's likely that the learning environment for many students is being negatively affected," said Ryoichi Terada, a professor emeritus at Meiji University and an environmental sociologist on the research team.

He emphasized the need for continued investigation into the issue.”

Link (Eng):

<https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15978381>

In the News: The Mainichi Shimbun Editorial for “Stable Rice Supply”

(The Mainichi Shimbun, 19 August 2025)

Quote: “The Japanese government is shifting its agricultural policy to increase rice production, as recently instructed by Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba to attendees at a meeting of Cabinet ministers concerned. The challenge lies in formulating a strategy to ensure a stable supply of this staple in the future.

The government aims to enhance productivity through production scale expansion and digitalization, while also boosting exports.

This shift is driven by the rice shortage and soaring prices experienced since last year. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries analyzed the causes and reportedly found that consumption expanded beyond expectations, in part due to demand from inbound visitors, while the intense summer heat led to a decline in crop quality, resulting in insufficient supply. The previous explanation, which blamed "distribution bottlenecks" as the main cause, was incorrect.

The government had passively accepted the assumption that consumption would continue to

decline and failed to adequately grasp the realities of production and distribution. The failure of the "de facto acreage reduction policy," which aimed to curb production according to demand forecasts, is evident. The agriculture ministry and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) bear grave responsibility for this.”

Link (Eng):

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20250819/p2a/00m/0op/007000c>

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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