

Spilled GM canola growing in Japan - Citizens' survey results 2007

Written by Keisuke Amagasa (NO! GMO Campaign)

On July 7, 2007, NO! GMO Campaign published the findings of a survey of spilled GM canola found growing in Japan. The survey was carried out from March 2007 onwards by citizens in 43 out of the total of 47 prefectures in Japan. In total, 1617 samples were tested and of these 37 showed up as GMO positive. A similar survey was also conducted in South Korea*.

The samples were collected not only around ports where canola (oilseed rape) is imported, and around factories where canola oil is extracted, as well as along canola transportation routes, but also in some urban areas and on farmland.

Oilseed rape is not cultivated much in Japan, so Japan mostly imports it from Canada and Australia. 80% of the canola imports come from Canada, and are presumably GM. Non-GM canola is imported from Australia.

GM canola produced in Canada is all herbicide tolerant - half to Monsanto's 'Roundup' and half to Bayer CropScience's 'Basta'.

Imported canola seeds are stored in port warehouses, then driven to oil extraction facilities by trucks. Seeds are easily spilled during transportation to warehouses and factories, and also during loading and unloading.

Surveying spilled GM canola began in 2005, so this is the 3rd year of citizens' surveys. In 2005 and 2006, GM canola was confirmed to be growing around Chiba port, Kashima port, Nagoya port, Shimizu port, Yokkaichi port, Kobe port, Uno port, and Hakata port. Moreover, high proportions of the GM canola were confirmed to be growing around oil extraction facilities and near to transportation routes. There were some cases where GM canola was found growing away from transportation routes, including along residential streets in Nagano prefecture and Oita Prefecture. This confirms that GM canola pollution is much more widespread than expected.

According to this year's findings, GM canola found near to an oil extraction factory in Chiba prefecture was tolerant to both Roundup and Basta. As there is no GM canola variety currently available which has transgenes for both types of herbicide tolerance, this GM canola must have been crossed at a seed or cultivation stage, or possibly at the spot where it was spilled.

Another finding, according to surveys conducted by a team lead by Professor Masaharu Kawata (Yokkaichi University) in Mie prefecture between 2005 and 2007, is that GM canola is becoming perennial. It is not common for canola to be biennial due to the cold Canadian winters, but in the warmer winters in Japan, canola can survive for several years and become like a bushy tree, and pollen from GM canola then continues to spread year after year. Thus, the environmental impact caused by spilled GM canola seeds is potentially very serious in Japan.

According to Professor Kawata, "There are leaf mustard and conventional rapeseed growing around the spilled GM canola plants, so it is only a matter of time before they are crossed and contaminated by GMOs. Also, some other cruciferous vegetables like Japanese radish and Chinese cabbage are in danger of GM contamination."

A common finding in 2007 was that the GM positive canolas were found growing around ports in Yashiro City in Kumamoto prefecture and Shibushi City in Kagoshima prefecture where animal feed factories are situated. Rapeseed meal is produced after the oil is extracted and is then used for animal feed. From now on, samples will also need to be collected around ports near feed factories.

Japan does not produce any GM crops. However, because Japan imports GM canola from Canada, GM contamination has already occurred and it is spreading to a much greater degree than one could imagine. If GM crops are cultivated, then this kind of pollution will spread even more. Judging by the ominous precedent of Canada, once GM crops are cultivated, segregation between GM and non-GM will become almost impossible, and keeping pure non-GM varieties away from GM contamination will be very hard.

The clear conclusion from the findings is that cultivating or importing GM crops, leads to GM pollution and once this pollution begins, it can cause irreversible damage.

The nationwide survey of spilled GM canola in 2007

Prefecture	/ samples	/ Roundup	/ Basta
Fukuoka	/ 402	/ 14	/ 9
Kumamoto	/ 37	/ 0	/ 1
Kagoshima	/ 22	/ 0	/ 1
Hyogo	/ 27	/ 1	/ 1
Osaka	/ 114	/ 0	/ 1
Chiba	/ 170	/ 3	/ 2
Shizuoka	/ 43	/ 2	/ 2
Other 36			
prefectures	/ 802	/ 0	/ 0
Total	/ 1617	/ 20	/ 17

This survey was conducted by citizens all over Japan. 1500 people participated.