

**Japan update: October 2007**  
**Japanese consumers will not accept GM food**

This update was written by Akiko Frid, October 18 2007

The debate about genetically modified food started among consumers in Japan back in the autumn of 1996. As early as April the following year, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare received a petition from NO! GMO Campaign signed by 448,028 people, opposing GM food and demanding proper labelling. And by April 1998, the Health Ministry had received over 2 million signatures opposing GM food, plus 1,050 written requests from municipalities all over Japan calling for GM food labelling.

The Japanese government introduced a GM food labelling law in April 2001. However, the law had many loopholes, so it did not meet the demand of consumers to be able to exercise their right to avoid GM food. In July 2002, the Ministry of Public Management and Home Affairs announced the result of its own public opinion poll: 84% of respondents said that labelling is needed if a product is derived from GM crops even when the amount is very small; 76% said that labelling is needed if a product is derived from GM crops regardless of whether it contains any GM material or not, e.g. edible oil and soy sauce.

Consumers in Japan were made aware of the issue of GM contamination when the unapproved GM maize StarLink was found first in animal feed in May 2000 and then in food products in October. In addition, unapproved "NewLeaf" GM potatoes were found in snacks in 2001. A number of well known companies, like Calbee Foods, House Foods and Bourbon, recalled contaminated products. In the case of Bourbon, the sales of the potato snack totalled 1.1 billion yen in the 2000/01 fiscal year, against the company's total sales of 86.47 billion yen, and the recall cost the company about 80 million yen. Japan suffered further contamination via unapproved GM papaya, another unapproved GM maize (Bt10), and unapproved GM rice (Bt rice, LLRICE601).

The concern over GM canola contamination increased when Percy Schmeiser visited Japan in July 2003, and told Japanese consumers and farmers what had happened to his farm and family, as well as to many other canola farmers in Canada. He visited Japan again in July 2005. "The Genetic Matrix: The Schmeiser Case and the Fight for the Future of Life" was translated into Japanese in July 2006.

In June 2004, the first reports emerged of spilled GM canola being found growing in Japan. A survey had been conducted in 2002 and in 2003 by the Japan Wildlife Research Center and others commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry. According to the survey, GM canola was found growing close to the Kashima port area. Since then, consumers and farmers in Japan have been conducting citizens' surveys every year to see how much spilled GM canola there is growing in Japan and how far it has spread. The results of the most recent survey confirmed that year by year the contamination is spreading more and more widely.

Keisuke Amagasa of NO! GMO Campaign notes that, "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." (Spilled GM canola growing in Japan - Citizens' survey results 2007)

In October 2007, a delegation from the NO! GMO Campaign, an alliance of more than 80 Japanese consumer groups, together with farmers' groups and 300 individuals, visited Australia, to deliver a petition asking state premiers to extend their moratoria on GM food crops. The petition is signed by 155 Japanese consumer organisations, consumer cooperatives, labour organisations and cooking oil producers whose total membership represents 2.9 million Japanese consumers.

Japanese consumer organizations also previously visited Canada and the United States to protest against GM wheat, and several European countries as well as Asian countries to join events and conferences to protect our food from GMOs, and to prevent our soil and seeds from being contaminated. NO! GMO Campaign has also been participating actively in the International Conference on GMO Free Regions, Biodiversity and Rural Development over the years. Moreover, the Consumers Union of Japan is working together with Consumers International to make the voice of consumers heard at the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Codex Task Force on Food Derived from Biotechnology.

There have been a number of campaigns opposing GM food initiated by consumer groups within Japan, and Japanese farmers have become active in preventing GM contamination of their farms and seeds. Last year, the environmental organization, Greenpeace got on board and launched its own campaign in September 2006 by producing the True Food Guide in Japan, which includes information on 100 major food companies' use of GM ingredients. The guide exposed the fact that many Japanese food companies are using GM derived ingredients without telling consumers. The good news was that the confectionery company Bourbon, after experiencing the recall in 2001, made it a strict policy to avoid using any ingredients that are derived from GM crops, and so became a Green rated company in the True Food Guide. Over 110,000 copies of the True Food Guide have been distributed in Japan, including to many hospitals and schools as of October 2007.

Moreover, the documentary, "The Future of Food" was translated into Japanese and released in Japan in October 2006 by the Japan Organic Agriculture Association, and its screenings are always attended by many people. It was also screened at the Tokyo Peace Film Festival in July 2007.

In March 2007, NO! GMO Campaign, Greenpeace and Toziba (a young people's group that has a project called Soybean Revolution, in order to increase the domestic cultivation of Japanese soybeans), together with many other groups and companies, held a press conference and launched a campaign to collect 1 million signatures to demand stricter GM food labelling. The organizations, companies and shops involved now number over 90 from all over Japan(\*). And in November of this year, a big gathering and concert called "Earth & Peace Festival - Society

changes by each and every person putting a seed into the Earth" organized by Operation Seeding (Tanemaki Daisakusen lead by Toziba) will be held in Shiba Park near the Tokyo Tower in Tokyo. A large audience is expected at the festival, and groups will be collecting signatures.

It should be clear that consumers in Japan will not accept GM food and GM agriculture, and they are building more and more alliances to say "No!" to GMOs. Additionally, Japanese consumers are also aware of the debate over fuel production via GM crops. Whatever the intended purpose, Japanese consumers will not support GM plants and GM animals and they also oppose patents on life.

Further reading about Japan and the GM issue in English:

- Japan Resources by Consumers Union of Japan: <http://cujtokyo.wordpress.com/>
- Bio Journal by Citizens' Biotechnology Information Center: <http://www5d.biglobe.ne.jp/~cbic/english/index.html>
- Greenpeace Canola Contamination Report: <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/canola-report>

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- Greenpeace Japan: <http://www.greenpeace.or.jp/> NF BLDG. 2F 8-13-11 Nishishinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0023 Japan Tel: +81-3-5338-9800 / Fax: +81-3-5338-9817 E-mail: [gmofree@greenpeace.or.jp](mailto:gmofree@greenpeace.or.jp) True Food Guide: <http://www.greenpeace.or.jp/campaign/gm/truefood/>
- Toziba: <http://www.tanemaki2007.jp/sb.cgi?eid=27> Operation Seeding (Tanemaki Daisakusen) 5-16-10-1003 Sendagaya, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 151-0051 Japan Tel: +81-3-3351-2712 / Fax: +81-3-5637-7789 E-mail: [seed@tanemaki2007.jp](mailto:seed@tanemaki2007.jp)
- Japan Organic Agriculture Association: <http://www.joaa.net/> No.501, Mizusima-mansion, 3-17-12, Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033 Japan Tel: +81-3-3818-3078 / Fax: +81-3--3818-3417 E-mail: [info@joaa.net](mailto:info@joaa.net)

(\*) 1 million signatures to demand stricter GM food labelling alliance:

[http://www.greenpeace.or.jp/campaign/gm/activity/sando\\_shomei](http://www.greenpeace.or.jp/campaign/gm/activity/sando_shomei)