

# **Consumers Union of Japan**

## **Japan Resources**

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### **Contents:**

**From the Editors: The Future of Food in 2024**

**The First CRISPR Tomatoes Now on the Shelves in Japan**

**Clinical test of eggs produced by genome-edited chickens selected as AMED research project**

**Shizuoka Prefectural Assembly Passes Resolution Calling for Genome-edited Food Labeling**

**Report from UPOV Workshop**

**Statement: Calling for an Immediate Halt to Armed Action in Israel and Palestine**

### ***From the Editors:***

## **The Future of Food in 2024**

Consumers Union of Japan and other organizations started the campaign against genetically modified food in 1996, and fought hard for labelling rules as well as local production without GMOs here in Japan.

However, the first wave of genome-edited foods have now reached supermarket shelves in 2024. We are concerned about the safety but also

the effects on biological diversity. At the same time, rules for “plant variety protection” under UPOV seem to bring massive benefits for a few corporations, with no concern for farmers or consumers. How about the future?

Stay tuned to our campaigns and join us as we keep up the good work...

- Editors



*Gaba tomatoes sold in supermarkets in Tokyo, produced using genome-editing (CRISPR Cas) New Genetic Engineering Techniques*

### **The First CRISPR Tomatoes Now on the Shelves in Japan**

According to Testbiotech, the Munich, Germany based NGO:

“...there is no doubt the composition of the tomatoes is changed significantly, in particular, the content in gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA) is said to be four to six, in some fruits even twenty times higher, compared to conventionally bred varieties. The French authority ANSES as well as experts at the Austrian Environment Agency, point out that only a few genetic changes were necessary to bring about this drastic change in the NGT tomatoes. Nevertheless, they assume it is very unlikely that these tomatoes could be obtained by conventional breeding methods.

The ‘GABA tomato’ was developed with new genetic engineering techniques (NGTs). This is shown by

photo just recently taken in a supermarket in the Tokyo region. According to the information on the packages, the tomatoes will lower blood pressure, relieve mental stress and improve sleep quality. Experts are doubting that the consumption of the fruits goes along with such effects. At the same time, according to the Japanese functional food register, the consumption of the tomatoes is not recommended for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and small children.”

Testbiotech notes that tomatoes like this could soon be available in supermarkets in Europe as well, without detailed risk assessment and labelling.

Source:

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/news/crispr-tomatoes-now-shelves>

(Published 5 February 2024)

### **Clinical test of eggs produced by genome-edited chickens selected as AMED research project**

Kewpie announced that the clinical testing for the allergy-reduced eggs produced from genome-edited chickens, developed jointly by Kewpie and Hiroshima University, to be conducted by Sagamihara National Hospital, was selected as a "Practical Immunology and Allergy Diseases Research Project" for 2023 under a public call by the Japan Agency for

Medical Research and Development (AMED). The clinical testing is scheduled to last until 31 March 2026.

(Kewpie-Aohata News 2014/1/18)

### **Shizuoka Prefectural Assembly Passes Resolution Calling for Genome-edited Food Labeling**

On 13 October 2023, the Shizuoka Prefectural Assembly passed and adopted a "written opinion calling for consideration of how information should be provided to consumers, including the labeling of food products applying genome-editing technology." This is the first time a local government council has passed a resolution calling for the labeling of genome-edited foods. The documents will be submitted to seven locations, including the chairmen of both houses of the Japanese parliament and the prime minister.

(Source: Bio Journal, November 2023)

### **Report from UPOV Workshop**

*By Hirouchi Kaori, CUJ International Committee member*

In October 2023, a regional workshop on seed and plant variety protection was held in Malaysia by civil society organizations under the leadership of Third World Network. The main agenda was to reaffirm the

importance of farmers' seed systems for people's livelihoods, protecting biodiversity, and the right to food.

Also, we discussed the significant impact of UPOV that will undermine farmers' seed system.

In Southeast Asia, there are solid farmers' seed systems in place, although the ratio between "formal" seed system and farmers' seed system varies by country and crop type. Various efforts are being made at the civil society level to strengthen farmers' seed systems. On the other hand, many countries have seed laws, mostly under the name of Plant Variety Protection law (PVP law), to protect breeders' rights that are tailored to their specific circumstances.

Such seed laws contain exceptions to ensure that they do not excessively deprive farmers of their rights and livelihoods based on fundamental principle of food security. However, UPOV91 is an attempt to bring a uniform system into the seed laws of each country.

A researcher from Vietnam, which is said to have implemented an excellent example of UPOV, showed that agricultural development in Vietnam in the last three decades was achieved in combination with various factors. It was emphasized that the narrative often made by UPOV proponents that UPOV is the sole contributor of Vietnamese

agricultural development is in fact misleading.

Three civil society organization members joined the workshop and introduced the current situation in Japan and the movement of citizens and farmers' groups. We expressed concern that the Japanese government has become a flag bearer for the promotion of UPOV, and particularly the strict UPOV91, in Asia.

The rights of farmers are based on respect and gratitude to the people who have been nurturing seeds for thousands of years, and monopolization and privatization of the seeds is what should be restricted. We were encouraged by the civil society groups in the workshop and will continue to oppose any moves to neglect the rights of seeds and farmers together with our friends and allies in Southeast Asia and around the world.

**Statement: Calling for an Immediate Halt to Armed Action in Israel and Palestine**

Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ) has been carrying out grassroots movements under the slogan of "For a healthy life into the future". The deprivation of precious lives is currently happening in many parts of the world. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, military clashes between Israel and the Palestinian

Gaza Strip have already resulted in thousands of casualties and extensive damage. Israel has also stated that it will invade the Gaza Strip militarily, which is set to cause even more misery.

We urge both sides to immediately reach a ceasefire in order to stop the horrific situation without further loss of life. It is impossible to tolerate any violence that takes human life, whether civilian or military. We also call for the blockade of the Gaza Strip to be lifted, and for the supply of electricity and water, and the delivery of food, medicine and other supplies to be guaranteed, so that people can regain a secure life.

The Constitution of Japan clearly renounces war and military action. It also pledges that "all peoples of the world shall be free from fear and want and shall have the right to live in peace" (Preamble to the Constitution of Japan).

In compliance with the spirit of the Constitution, the Government of Japan should use all diplomatic means at its disposal to urgently launch an appeal for a ceasefire, not only to Israel and Palestine, but to all the countries concerned and the UN. In particular, we strongly urge the Kishida Government, which calls for strengthening the US-Japan alliance, not to follow the US lead and not to go down the path of military expansion.

All people on this planet have the right to “live peacefully and securely”. We see the threats to this as our own, and will continue to speak out and act accordingly.

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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.**

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