

# **Consumers Union of Japan**

## **Japan Resources**

**No. 193**

**May 2024**

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

## **About Us**

Consumers Union of Japan has an international group that publishes this English newsletter, Japan Resources, as well as the English website. We hold Zoom meetings to discuss our work, which means you can join as well, where ever you are based. Please become a CUJ member to join us.

Current activities focus on food safety, food security & agriculture, chemical hazards, anti-nuclear issues and peace.

We have participated in a number of international meetings at the UN level, as well as regional NGO meetings in Asia and beyond. Of course, we would like to do more, with your help...

Get in touch. A good place to start is to participate in our symposium held in conjunction with our General Assembly, this year on 22 June in Tokyo.

- Editors

## **Symposium: Protecting Children from Toxic Chemicals**

Developmental and other disabilities in children are increasing in Japan, such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), LD (learning disorder) and ASD (autistic spectrum disorder). Infertility is also on the increase and it is becoming harder to have children in the first place. These factors may be due to the effects of toxic chemicals such as food additives, pesticides and additives in plastics and other daily products. Of particular concern to us are environmental hormones (endocrine disruptors), which can lead to intergenerational disorders due to their effects on reproductive functions.

At our General Assembly on 22 June 2024, Consumers Union of Japan will hold a symposium on this special theme, Protecting Children from Toxic Chemicals.

22 June 2024 Symposium:  
“Protecting children from toxic chemicals – What are the environmental hormones/endocrine disruptors that have adverse effects across generations?”

Date & time: 22 June (Sat), 2024,  
13:30-16:00 (Doors open 13:00)

Venue: Conference Room 402, 4th Floor, Rengo Kaikan (3-2-11 Kanda Surugadai, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo)  
Access: Shin-Ochanomizu Subway

Station, Exit B3; JR Ochanomizu Station (5 mins).

Participation fee: ¥1,000 for the general public

Language: Japanese

Capacity: 70 at the venue

Programme:

13:30-13:35 Opening remarks

13:35 – 14:35 “What are environmental hormones/endocrine disruptors such as additives and pesticides in plastics?” Kimura – Junko Kuroda, Vice-President, Environmental Neuroscience Information Centre

14:35 – 15:05 “How to live to protect children from dangerous chemicals” Satoko Kami, Representative, Parents’ Association for Children’s Environment

15:05 – 15:15 Break

15:15 – 15:55 “What we can and should do now for future generations” Kimura – Junko Kuroda and Satoko Kami (Talk session)

15:55 – 16:00 Closing remarks

Online participation is also possible, please check our Japanese website:

<https://nishoren.net/event-information/19795>

## **Genome-edited Fish Transported Alive?**

*Japanese consumers and citizens are concerned about negative impacts on biodiversity*

Genome-edited red sea bream and genome-edited tiger puffer fish are currently available in Japan. For the distribution of genome-edited organisms, no government approval is required. The developing company only needs to notify the government. In December 2023, Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ) sent a questionnaire to Regional Fish, the company that develops and sells genome-edited red sea bream and genome-edited tiger puffer fish online.

CUJ asked whether it sells and transports living genome-edited fish, fry or juvenile fish. In March 2024 the company replied that it does indeed transport live fish between its facilities. Although the company stated that, "Of course, this is done in a way that ensures the prevention of dispersal" it cannot be said that there is absolutely no possibility of genome-edited fry or juvenile fish being released into the environment in the event of an accident or otherwise.

Unfortunately, Regional Fish's fish farm in Toyama Prefecture was severely damaged by the Noto Peninsula earthquake in January 2024. The company appealed to the public for support through crowdfunding, saying that its

aquaculture facilities were half destroyed in the earthquake and that it needed support to get back on its feet. At that time, the company said that although it was a major earthquake, no fish were spilled into the ocean.

How can we know if this is true or not? CUJ checked with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and found that they had only received a report from the company, and that the government had not conducted a field survey.

Koketsu Michiyo, CUJ, comments: "We have no idea what the impact would be if genome-edited fish were released into the environment. Japan is an earthquake-prone country. Recent global warming has caused disasters in many parts of Japan every year. Japanese consumers are worried that genome-edited fish will have a negative impact on biological diversity. Therefore, we are once again sending a letter of enquiry to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) regarding the transportation of genome-edited fish and to get more information about the half-collapsed aquaculture facility of Regional Fish in Toyama Prefecture."

## **Open Letter of Enquiry on Red Yeast Rice Products**

3 April 2024

To: Ms Nanako Jimi, Minister of State for  
Consumer Affairs and Food Safety

Ms Yutaka Arai, Commissioner for  
Consumer Affairs

Kobayashi Pharmaceutical's products made from red yeast rice, have caused health problems for many users, and we believe that this incident highlights the problems with functional foods and genetic manipulation (GMO). Is it GMO or not? We request a review of the food administration based on the lessons learned from the red yeast rice incident, and request answers to the following questions.

### **1) Regarding the functional food labelling system**

There is no end to the number of health problems caused by Japan's so-called functional food labelling system, under which labelling is permitted by notification by business operators, even when there is no peer-reviewed scientific evidence of functionality and safety, that has been published.

(1) Does your agency have an understanding of how the number of health problems caused by the consumption of health foods (including supplements) has changed

since the functional food labelling system was launched?

(2) Your Agency seems to be asking businesses that sell functional foods to gather information on health damage, but does your Agency keep track of such information? If so, shouldn't the information be made public in order to prevent accidents like this one?

(3) We believe that what consumers need to improve their health is a nutritionally balanced diet, and that health foods are not that necessary. Also, do you think that functional foods help consumers to improve their health? Please answer by providing evidence for this.

(4) We believe that functional foods that cause health damage should be abolished, but how do you sum up this system? Are you considering a fundamental review?

### **2) Safety confirmation and labelling related to genetic manipulation of food products**

There is information that Kobayashi Pharmaceutical improved the productivity of red yeast rice by exposing it to strong ultraviolet light, but there is a possibility that the genes of the fungus were damaged by the ultraviolet light. The company is also seeking technology involving genome editing in the improvement of red yeast rice in 2020, and it is

possible that it was created through genome editing.

It is reported that puberulic acid has been detected, but as blue mould and red yeast belong to the same family, it is not impossible that red yeast may have carried a similar gene that led to its production by mutation. We have long been concerned that genetic modification (GMO) can cause unexpected changes in genes, leading to the production of toxic substances.

We therefore ask the following questions:

(1) Do you know what kind of manipulation or processing method was used to produce the strain of red yeast rice in question? If so, please disclose this information as soon as possible.

(2) Is genome editing of micro-organisms used as food ingredients subject to notification to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare? Is your Agency aware of the existence of genome editing in the relevant red yeast strains?

(3) Since genetic engineering cannot eliminate the possibility of producing harmful substances due to unintended genetic changes, we believe that safety confirmation (whole genome analysis and animal experiments) and labelling should be mandatory for all genetically engineered foods.



## Withdraw from Arms Exports!

On 21 March 2024, three organisations – Consumers Union of Japan, the Housewives' Federation (Shufuren) and the Network Against Arms Trade (NAJAT) – held a protest action calling on Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Mitsubishi Electric to withdraw from arms production and exports. This is part of the *Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Mitsubishi Electric must withdraw from arms production and exports! Postcard Action*, which started on 20 March.

Citizens gathered at the protest in front of the headquarter of the companies, calling on them to withdraw from arms exports, international joint development, and to withdraw from the production of enemy base attack missiles, and the joint development of next-generation fighter aircraft. Our joint letter of request was handed to both companies.

After the protest in Tokyo, a press conference on the postcard action was held. The protest and the press conference can be viewed on Youtube. Filming was made possible by citizen media broadcaster UPLAN.

Please find more information about our campaign and download the postcards from our Japanese website:

<https://nishoren.net/flash/19607>



*Shufuren, NAJAT and Consumers Union of Japan urging Mitsubishi to withdraw from arms exports at the 21 March 2024 event in Tokyo.*



*Koketsu Michiyo, CUJ introduces the postcard action campaign on 21 March 2024 in Tokyo.*

*(Photos from [www.labornetjp.org](http://www.labornetjp.org))*

## **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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