

Keep our Land and Ocean GMO Free!

More than 400 Japanese farmers, fishermen and consumers got together in Chiba, east of Tokyo, for the "GMO Opposition Week" which took place from 26 November to 2 December.

On 26 November, the Second National Conference on GMO Free Zones was held in Asahi City (Chiba Prefecture). That is where farmers put up a huge sign in February this year to declare that their farms are GMO free. More than 200 people participated in the conference. They were mostly farmers and consumers not only from all around Japan but also from other countries like Korea and the US.

At the panel discussion, a Korean farmer Cho Teme Hyong made a presentation about his experience of declaring his rural village GMO free. After the panel, 7 farmers from different places across the country exchanged their experiences in the GMO Free Zone Campaign. In addition, a fisherman in Chiba declared his fishing area GMO free. For the GMO Opposition Week, many friends in different countries sent letters of support and splendid videos to the Campaign. GMO free activists in Japan were greatly encouraged by these messages.

From 27 November to 1 December, the 6th Session of the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Food Derived from Biotechnology was held in Makuhari, Chiba. The main agenda was to set up a guideline for the conduct of food safety assessment of foods derived from recombinant-DNA animals. It is quite worrying that the US and Australian government are trying to make an animal guideline which is almost the same as the guideline for GM plants, in spite of the fact that GM animals have their own issues to be addressed, such as animal welfare and ethical issues. The animal guideline is planned to be fixed by 2008.

Another important point of this Session was that the Task Force decided to start a new work to discuss setting up a guideline for an abbreviated safety assessment of low-level contaminants. It is an extremely worrying situation because it could legitimate contamination. We have to keep a close watch on the future discussions. The working group for this guideline is co-hosted by the US, Germany, and Thailand. The first meeting will be held in Washington DC in late February or March in 2007, and the second meeting is supposed to be held in Brussels or at one of the cities in Germany.

On 26 November, the first day of the Task Force, more than 400 citizens marched against GM food, especially against GM animals. They walked in costumes of fish, cows, pigs or other animals, chanting "We don't want to be genetically modified!".

At the end of the week, on 2 December, more than 150 people participated in the 10th anniversary of the NO! GMO Campaign. There was a conference which had 3 parts. The first part was for reviewing the 10 years' activities of the NO! GMO Campaign; the second part was about the problems around GM animals and included a report back of the Codex Task Force. And the last part was about the future activities of the Campaign: working against patenting on life forms, advocating to save our natural seeds, distributing the "True Food Guide" by Greenpeace Japan, promoting soy bean and rice trust movement, and so on.

After the conference, participants enjoyed a GMO free dinner prepared by A Seed Japan, which is an environmental protection group formed by young people.

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