

Japan: A Decade of Endless Struggle Against GMO Contamination

It has been just over 10 years since the first report about wild-growing GM canola was released by Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The following year, concerned citizens formed groups to voluntarily investigate dozens of locations near harbours, cooking oil factories as well as roadsides throughout Japan. Back then, nobody knew that the investigation and cleanup projects by citizens would last this long.

As time goes by, the situation has gotten worse. In 2006, wild-growing GM canola plants were found that were perennials, meaning they had survived more than one year in the wild. This was followed by the detection of wild-growing stacked GM plants with the traits of both Liberty Link and Roundup Ready. The list of crossings include native rapeseeds, mustards, broccoli...on and on. Hybrids with weeds also indicated the possibility of intergenetic crossing. Finally in 2010, farmers in Mie Prefecture, famous for a local rapeseed as a specialty product, had to make a tough decision to give up historically and culturally important rapeseed saving because of the high risk of contamination. Experts note an increasingly complicated pattern. Some test results indicating "negative" with a simple test-kit are overturned to "positive" (indicating the presence of GM traits) with more precise and expensive PCR analysis.

Meanwhile, hundreds of consumers organizations, farmers organizations, cooperatives and others are calling for immediate measures to stop the contamination. Officially, some small steps, such as joint research and cleanups, are being taken by the responsible ministries and by the factories. However, their ad hoc response is far from enough. It is only our movement's high level of vigilance that has kept the GM contamination from spreading even further. The contamination has cost us tens of thousands of dollars for testing each year, and imposed a burden of time-consuming and expensive cleanups. But we know we have to do this to keep the biodiversity of the affected areas. We have also held nation-wide meetings annually. Our large GMO-Free Zone gathering earlier this year in March, 2015 was attended by over 500 participants! From that large number you can understand how highly aware people in Japan are about this issue.

Here in Japan, no farmer has cultivated any GM crop commercially. This is the success of our movement, despite the fact that the government has approved dozens of GM crops for planting since 2004. Farmers know that they would lose their market by growing GM crops. And consumers have kept up the pressure to not buy GM foods.

Starting to import GM canola a decade ago regrettably opened the door to the endless struggle over contamination. Without a major turnabout, GM seeds will continue to sprout and grow every today. We urge other countries to not repeat the mistake. Do not grow GM crops, and do not import GM seeds. Let's work towards a GM-free world together!

NO! GMO Campaign in Japan (Spring 2015)