

Background to the Campaign Against GM Wheat

There have been large-scale opposition movements against GM food throughout Japan since GM crops first entered Japan in 1996. Now an especially strong movement has sprung up to oppose the planting and commercialization of GM wheat.

Last year (2003) the Japanese Flour Millers Association and a South Korean consumer group held press conferences and so on in the USA to express their strong concern over the commercialization of GM wheat. We have also had a request from a Japanese resident in the United States to express the views of Japanese consumers concerning GM wheat in Canada and the United States.

The NO! GMO Campaign submitted a formal letter to Monsanto Japan (CEO Mr. Seiichiro Yamane) on 16 September 2003 requesting that he inform the Monsanto Company head office that Japanese consumers are opposed to GM wheat, and that they are demanding that the application for GM wheat in both countries (the USA and Canada) not be approved. The letter also requested that Monsanto Japan should not apply for approval of GM wheat in Japan. A letter was also submitted to the Japanese Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, Mr. Yoshiyuki Kamei, requesting that he inform the governments of both countries that Japanese consumers are opposed to GM wheat, and that they are demanding that the application for GM wheat in both countries (the USA and Canada) not be approved. This letter also requested that there be no submission of an application for approval of GM wheat in Japan.

Letters were also submitted to the embassies of the USA and Canada in Japan on 18 September demanding that the applications for GM wheat in the respective countries not be approved. (The letters to the United States were addressed to President George Bush, the American Ambassador to Japan, Howard H. Baker, Jr, and to the Senior Agricultural Attaché, Clay Hamilton, and the letters to Canada were addressed to the Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, and the Canadian Ambassador to Japan, Robert G. Wright.)

On the same day an appeal entitled "Please Join Consumers in Opposing GM Wheat" was submitted to the Japanese Flour Millers Association, a trade organization which represents the large and medium-sized flour millers in Japan, who between them handle 85% of Japan's milled wheat. Further, on 3 October, a similar appeal was submitted to the Chairman of the All Japan Flour Milling Association (CEO Ryuichi Soga), which handles the remaining 15% share of milled wheat.

A discussion was held with a group from the Flour Millers Association including the Executive Director, Mr. Tsutomu Shigeta, in which he stated that there was no change in the position of the Association from that set out in the statement of 21 February 2001 (*1).

Further, in a written reply to a questionnaire concerning GM wheat, the All Japan Flour Milling Association made it clear that they would not handle GM wheat. (*2)

Results of a separate questionnaire to flour milling companies show that millers are taking the same stance as the millers' associations, in summary that "we absolutely refuse to handle anything that consumers do not wish to buy". We are happy to have verified that the milling companies and millers' associations are taking a common stance in their firm opposition to GM wheat,

414 organizations and companies, representing 1,124,054 people, have signed up to the recent "group" petition which asked them to sign a declaration demanding the application for GM wheat not be approved. Among the signatories are consumer groups, large and small co-operative unions, labour organizations, companies, and various NGOs, who have related to us their fears concerning GM wheat. Activities concerning the submission of this petition will take place from 22 March to 27 March jointly with American and Canadian consumers organizations and farmers organizations. As well as submissions of the petition in Ottawa, and Bismark, North Dakota, press conferences, gatherings, and exchange meetings are scheduled to take place in Winnipeg and other locations in Canada and the USA.