



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
FOCUSING ON JAPANESE
CONSUMER CO-OPERATIVES

日本生活協同組合連合会



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"Sanchoku" a unique agricultural practice by the Japanese Consumer Co-ops

What is *Sanchoku*?

Sanchoku is a Japanese word translated as direct transaction or direct buying routes from producers to consumers. Co-op devised this system more than 40 years ago to provide vegetables, fruits, meat, seafood, and other fresh food products directly, without the use of wholesalers or any other medium of transaction.

The Co-op concept of direct transaction ensures that all food labeled *Sanchoku* meets the strict safety standards set by Co-op. For many years, Co-op has been involved in various activities including *sanchoku* business, local production for local consumption, exchange between farming villages and cities, and partnership with other Co-ops such as the agriculture Co-ops and the fishery Co-ops.

The basic principles of *Sanchoku* includes:

- 1) Traceability: That is the origin of the product (production site) and the producer must be known.
- 2) Standardization: That is the method of production and breeding must follow Co-ops specification with regard to the use of agricultural chemicals, fertilizers, feed, antibiotics, additives etc.
- 3) Communication: The system must provide the opportunity for direct exchanges of information between producers and Co-op members through a platform discussion (*Sanchoku* meetings).

JCCU held the 27th nationwide "Sanchoku" Research Exchange Meeting

JCCU held the national *sanchoku* research exchange meeting on February 4th and 5th in Tokyo. This year was the 27th anniversary featuring the challenges in *sanchoku* activities regarding issues on food and agriculture, and the condition of the farming villages.

The theme was related to a research report by the Food and Agricultural Research Committee of JCCU summarizing Co-op's task on issues of food and agriculture.

The meeting listed seven tasks that co-op should accomplish as a business organization.

The first is to position *sanchoku* business as a pillar of Co-op's business activity ensuring process efficiency in all the stages in the supply chain and emphasizing on the right crop for the right land.

The second is to promote rice development and ensure the prevalence of rice consumption.

The third task is promoting the development of domestic agriculture and livestock products and ensuring prevalence of domestic animal food.

The final task is development, assortment and prevalence of manufactured food using domestic ingredients.

These tasks emphasize Co-op's positive commitment to the *sanchoku* business.

During the meeting a lecture titled 'a life-founded society: power of agriculture' was given by Ms. Keiko Nakamura, president of JT Biohistory Research Hall.

It was followed by a case study report by Mr. Seiji Saito, Miyagi Co-op's director of *sanchoku* promotion. He talked about Miyagi Co-op's 40 years commitment in *sanchoku* business and its future tasks and reported the 40-year cooperation with Kakuda Agricultural Co-op.

The report was followed by a briefing from *sanchoku* committee titled *sanchoku's* future by Mr. Shinsuke Fukunaga.

He reported about the amendment of the Quality Certification System for Agricultural Products (Co-op GAP*). He also mentioned that though the *sanchoku* business originated from member's needs for safe and secure food, it has been developed to a multipurpose activity.

Now it is time for each Co-op and its members to take a next step from the *sanchoku's* current achievement attained with the members.

On the 5th sectional meetings under different topics were held such as "Co-op's business to raise food self-sufficient ratio", Co-op's business to promote local production for local consumption" and "various ways to be involved in agricultural issues".

Three hundred participants including many *sanchoku* producers attended this year's meeting.



The scene of the meeting

GAP* (Good agricultural practices) of Co-op is based on the principals of risk prevention, risk analysis, sustainable agriculture by means of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Integrated Crop Management (ICM), which is the utmost important for protection of consumer health.

Free health check for foreign residents in Seto city

Seto city in the Aichi prefecture is a home of many foreign nationals. However, for the reason of language barrier there is communication difficulties between them and their Japanese neighbors especially when it comes to medical consultations.

To solve this local problem, and to address Co-op Aichi's agenda to network with the local community, it cooperates with the local NPO (MtoM), Host Family SETO and the South Health Co-op to organize a free health check for the foreign nationals once a year.



Scene of the health check

Delivery fee discount for the elderly Co-op Akita

As part of Co-op Akita's social commitment it offers support to the disadvantaged in the community in various ways.

It offers delivery fee discount for users more than 70 years old, families with small children and people with some disabilities.

Secondly, with the cooperation of the local police it uses its 100 delivery trucks as a patrol for children.

The third is employment support. Co-op offers a temporal paid light-job for a maximum of six months to member's family who has lost job until he/she finds a new one.

Other life support includes offering discount lunch boxes for people in poverty to get enough nutrients.

JCCU and member Co-ops expand dietary education

A survey by JCCU in 2003 and others revealed that consumers were increasingly dependent on eating out and eating fast foods, delicatessens and lunch boxes but at the same time conscious about nutrition and health. Among the issues, diet for children has become a social concern of the society and dietary education for them has become an important agenda.

Under the circumstance, since 2005 Japanese Co-ops have been expanding various dietary-education activities such as workshops, cooking classes, exchange meetings, exhibitions and festivals together with members, government officials, suppliers, producers and local groups. In 2007, the event was well attended by a total number of 27,088, which is probably one the largest social gathering of the kind in Japan.

JCCU has been playing the role of a secretariat for these events but since 2008 each member co-ops independently organizes own event in their local areas with members.

Ibaraki Co-op hosted harvest festival 2010

On November 20-21, Ibaraki Co-op and JA Zen-Noh Ibaraki co-hosted "dietary harvest festival 2010". The festival aimed at showing the importance of food and agriculture. It was the third time that the Co-op had co-hosted the event with the attendance of 23,000 people, including member's family and friends. There were about eighty booths offering food and information. One booth promoted the expansion of rice consumption and the practice of rice hilling.



Booth featuring rice grown in Ibaraki Prefecture



Kids dressed in white robe (portraying medical doctor) during experiment about juice

The activities give recommendation of nutritionally balanced diet based on a manual "food guide pyramid" developed by JCCU.

Better Eating for Life:

This is a dietary education program for elementary school kids. The kids learn about food and nutrition, how to read labels, as well as how to decipher confusing nutrition information with supporting staff.

Co-op's Nutrition Education Program offers education materials free-of-charge to the elementary schools kids. The materials encourage children and their families to practice to promote better health.

In 2009, 2,334 members in 47 Co-ops participated in the program with 443 supporting staff.



Vegetable flower quiz



Producer's booth selling food samples



Kids exercising at playground during the event

New Co-op Brand product released on March 1

JCCU has released a new Co-op brand vegetable drink product (product name in Japanese: 'Co-op Oishii Yasai' translated as 'tasty vegetable' on March 1 2011 and it is on sale nation-wide at the primary co-ops.

Three different kinds of domestic vegetables are used as recipe for the product.

Nowadays many popular vegetable juices are commonly made from varying combinations of vegetables, which makes it difficult to feel the real taste and flavor of the juice.

Co-op vegetable juice is produced under a different concept. It pursued the lusciousness of natural taste of vegetables and contains only tomatoes, carrots and sweet potatoes.

All ingredients are domestically produced, and the juice contains no salt, flavors or food additives. Simple taste from the ingredients is the juice's characteristic feature. The sweet potato brings subtle mild sweetness.

Members' voices have been incorporated into the development of this product.

JCCU keeps supporting Japanese agriculture by developing products using domestic materials as ingredient. There are more than 4,000 Co-op Brand products all of which satisfy the product development strict safety measures.



Vegetable juice 'Co-op Oishii Yasai'

Shopping Support and Regional Community Development

In December 2010, Saitama Co-op opened a delivery station where members could receive their pre-ordered goods from Co-op Deli delivery service.

It started as a model business to promote community cohesion by supporting people living in places where there is inconvenience in shopping as a result of closure of grocery store in the community due to population decrease.

Prior to opening the station, Saitama Co-op made a trial exercise in the area by organizing some food sampling and sales together with events offering shopping consultation to make the place more regional-friendly for the residents. Now it has about 100 registered users as at the end of January.



Celebrating the opening

The delivery service of pre-ordered goods started on January 10. On the opening day, free sweet red-bean soup was offered and a lottery event was held with about 100 participants including children and those who had pre-ordered their goods.



Chatting over warm red-bean soup

Delivery is made once a week after a pre-order, and the ordered goods could be picked at a time designated by Co-op.

This activity forms part of Saitama Co-op's contribution towards promotion of regional welfare, in response to the region's rapid social changes including lifestyle, community, ageing and low birthrate.

A case study of efficient office operation (Introduction of iPad)

Although the use of mobile PC has already increased in JCCU, CO-OP CLEAN Co., Ltd. which is a detergent company affiliated with JCCU have introduced the use of iPad for promoting information sharing on a trial basis in the areas such as business trip, research and examination and paperless meetings.

iPad is not only easier to carry than laptops, but also has more advantages on security. It is used at meetings discussing development and research of new products. It facilitates speedy access to the server to browse documents and/or data, besides reducing documents and making presentations more efficient.



Staff using iPad for presentation

Saitama Co-op concludes an agreement with the Local Government

On February 25, Saitama Co-op concluded a welfare co-operation agreement with the local government of Kitamoto city in the Saitama prefecture.

In this agreement Saitama Co-op pledged that in the event of natural disaster such as earthquakes, typhoons etc., the Co-op would provide emergency daily commodities, transport necessary supplies using their home delivery trucks and support the relocation of disaster victims to temporary housing units.

Many other consumer co-ops nationwide have similar agreement with their local governments as part of their social obligations.



Ceremony of agreement

Consumer affairs

Co-op Kagoshima

To build an environment in which consumer can maintain their right, and to make consumers independent, Co-op continues to promote activities to enlighten and educate consumers on current issues concerning consumer problems

Co-op Kagoshima organized a lecture titled: Current Consumer Affairs and Legal Amendment to the Board members at a board training meeting held on January 13, 2011.

The lecture focused on the protection and services that the national and prefecture consumer administrations offer as well as the roles of the Consumer Agency and the Consumer Commission.

The lecture also highlighted on the consumer self-help - tips & resources to resolve consumer complaints as practiced at the prefecture consumer affairs center.

The center handles complaints related with billing fraud and multiple debts.

Other topic in the lecture was about consumer damages, especially to senior citizens and younger generation.

The audience showed anxiety when some cases of consumer damages in the elderly citizens (fraud around investment, house renovation and house check-up) and their causes (decreased judgment skills), and how to 'pay attention' to these people were explained, along with reality of youth's damages (internet and other problems).

The lecture ended with an explanation about the amended credit sales law.



Board members receiving lectures on consumer affairs

News in Brief

JCCU receives delegates from China

A delegation of six from China paid a day visit to JCCU on February 25, 2011 to get familiarized with the business and management activities of the Japanese Consumer Co-operatives.

They consisted of three from the Ningxia Provincial Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives, two from Linghan Fishery Cooperative, Ningxia, and one each from Ningxia Jinqiao Logistics Co., Ltd and the General Office of Ningxia Provincial Government.

They were received by the manager of the international department, Mr. Haruyoshi Amano who gave a brief welcome note followed by detail explanation of the consumer co-operative business in a round table discussion format.

After the briefing, the president of JCCU, Mr. Toshifumi Yamashita had a short chat with the delegates exchanging opinions regarding the co-operative activities in both countries.

Finally, Mr. Yamashita thanked the delegates for the visit to JCCU and hoped that their visit would be fruitful.



Delegates receiving briefings about JCCU



Group photograph after the meeting

International Year of Co-operatives 2012 (IYC 2012)

We are only a year away from the biggest opportunity the co-operative sector has ever had, the UN International Year of Cooperatives 2012.

The Japanese Co-operative Societies are working around the clock to make sure that the occasion becomes meaningful, successful with lots of impact on the Government and the society as a whole.

The nationwide planning committee for IYC 2012 has already been formed and had its third meeting on January 18 to plan events and celebrations for the occasion.

The meeting updated members about the official theme of IYC 2012, that is; Co-operative enterprises build a better world.

The committee has developed an IYC website (Japanese only) to serve as the medium of getting information to the government, members and stakeholders.



<http://www.iyc2012japan.coop/index.html>

Besides the website, the committee has also developed and distributed a "national call to action" information pack in the form of leaflet to the organizations of the committee members throughout Japan. The purpose of the information pack is to assist co-operatives to understand the meaning and the implication of IYC 2012 and to get involved.

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