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GM soybeans in organic foods

On 28 August the Japanese Mainichi Newspaper scooped a story, Co-mingling of GMO soybeans in 30% of certified organic Tofu and Natto . The facts behind this story are considered in the following article.

The Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) recently conducted a DNA analysis on 80 items of organic Tofus and Nattos. They found 30% of the products (25 items) contained GE soybeans. Some of the tested products were not 'certified organic', but were described as 'made with organic soybean'. Under the Japanese Agriculture Organic (JAS) law these products do not need to be certified but must use JAS certified organic soybean. Some of the tested items were Organic JAS certified Tofu and Natto, but MAFF did not mention how much GE soybean they contained.

MAFF had wanted to research the cause of the contamination before making an announcement about the contamination. However, before the follow-up research could take place, the results of the analyses were leaked to the newspaper, Mainichi. Consequently, MAFF was forced to make their own announcement about the contamination.

In Japan there is a labelling regulation concerned with GM food that defines which products can claim to be 'non-GMO'. It allows soybean prod-

ucts to be defined as 'non-GMO' if less than 5% GM soybean is detected. The 5% allowance is granted although the production is expected to follow the Identity Preserved (IP) handling system.

Confusion has precipitated in the market between the general allowance of less than 5% for non-GMO claims and organic products. The Japanese Organic regulation states 'Organic food is not produced by using GMO technology'. It has given the impression to consumers that organic foods are free of GMOs, *i.e.* that they contain no modified genes. As it is, conventional foods with less than 5% may claim to be non-GMO, whilst consumers expect certified organic foods to be 100% GMO free.

It is not clear at the moment how the general allowance for less than 5% relates to certified organic products and how the Japanese authorities will reconcile the two.

Recently, to avoid any possibility of buying in contaminated soybeans importers have been shifting their contracts with soybean farms from USA or Canada to China. Importers, particularly for organic soybeans, are

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