

# Will TPP open the door to Frankenstein food in Japan?

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By [Hugh Ashton](#)

*A big question mark hovers over the future of genetically modified organisms in Japan*



TOKYO (majirox news) — Genetically modified crops and organisms (GM and GMOs), according to their promoters, offer greater efficiency in production, resistance against disease and pests, and overall greater profitability for all.

On the face of it, this would seem to be ideal for all involved: farmers, food processing companies, and consumers. Inside the United States, according to some sources, GMOs now comprise two-thirds of the crops grown.

However, there is significant opposition to the introduction of such biotechnology outside the US, especially in Japan, the EU, and Australasia (in 2008, according to the UK's Soil Association, the use of GMOs had cost the US \$12 billion in lost exports since 1999). One company, Monsanto, has a large stake in this aspect of agribusiness, but suffered a setback in 2003, when the British government released the results of three studies on

the effects of GMOs, wherein lasting damage to the environment was predicted if GMOs were introduced.

In addition, a British poll at that time showed that 93 percent felt that not enough was known about the long-term effects of the so-called GMO Frankenstein food products, and 86 percent saying they would not eat it. This popular reaction and these findings forced an effective halt to Monsanto's research operations in the UK (and in other European centers).

In Japan, food may be labeled as containing GMO ingredients or as being GMO-free, but this would change if a key clause in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement was to be implemented. According to the Sustainability Council of New Zealand, "the US has made clear that a priority for it in the proposed TPP is the abolition of laws requiring the labeling of GMO food" as well as the acceptance of the import of such products. This clause would apply to the Japanese market and Japanese consumers.

If this clause were to be agreed, Japanese consumers would be unwittingly exposed to any potential health hazards caused by ingestion of such food. Critics of the GMO business claim that many such health hazards exist, but that they have been swept under the rug by the companies involved.

Acceptance of this part of the TPP could also force Japanese farmers to accept the use of GMO crops, which might provide short-term profits. Though even this future profitability is subject to debate (a 2003 study showed that a Monsanto GMO cotton grown in India produced between five and seven times less net income than the indigenous variety according to an official governmental report), introduction of GMOs could bring about dramatic and drastic changes to Japan's ecology – fragile at the best of times.

It would seem imperative for the Japanese TPP negotiation team to be well aware of the ramifications associated with this aspect of the Partnership, and to think carefully before allowing Japanese consumers and the Japanese ecology to be unwittingly exposed to a technology imposed from outside, the effects of which have yet to be objectively and definitively assessed.

## NZ Food Safety/Security at Risk Over Free Trade, Activists Say

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A free trade agreement for Pacific countries might erode New Zealand standards for food safety and security, say activists who oppose genetically engineered crops.

They raised their concerns before the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

summit in Hawaii, where President Barack Obama was successful in getting “broad outlines” of an agreement among the nine countries involved in the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Obama’s efforts in Hawaii means there will be a tenth round of talks among the TPP countries that in addition to the U.S. and New Zealand include Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam.

The talks completed their ninth round last month having made progress on some legal texts of agreements, but with outstanding issues that need more time.

Still it has gone far enough to become an issue in New Zealand’s elections this month where a group called “GE-Free NZ” is saying TPP could in the future undermine the country’s bio-security and food safety standards.

GE-Free NZ fears the trade pact will override New Zealand’s current ban on the imported generically modified seeds. “New Zealand must not compromise the economic advantage of being world-class and maintaining the gold standard for the least toxic, least contaminated, and most ethical food production system,” GE-Free NZ spokesman Jon Carapiet told FoodNavigator-Asa.

Such activists just want to “whip up a frenzied fear against” against genetically engineered crops, says Katherine Rich, chief executive of the New Zealand Food and Grocery Council.

She says successive governments involved in the TPP talks have “always been extremely careful to protect New Zealand’s agricultural sectors by overseeing and requiring some of the most rigid and robust biosecurity measures in the world.”

Rich also says New Zealand allows some GE products in the country and there is no such thing as a “gold standard” against them.

Media reports about the recently ended Ninth Round in Peru said the TPP is held up on several points. Thomas Donohue, chief executive of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, has called for the TPP to be an agreement with high standards covering investment and intellectual property.

Obama said now that the “broad outlines” of an agreement has been reached, the countries involved can go to work on the details and reach a final agreement within one year. “It is an ambitious goal, but we are optimistic that we can get it done,” he said.

Obama is touting TPP as a model for future trade agreements as it will address issues not covered in previous trade pacts.

The tenth round of TPP talks will get underway in December.

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