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CCIJ's 11th Annual Research Conference Focuses on Co-op Food Business

The 11th Annual CCIJ's National Conference was held on September 14, 2001 at Tokyo Electric University. This year's theme was "Reforming the Food Business of Consumer Co-ops: Application of the Food System Approach". Five lectures were given, followed by a panel discussion. About 150 Co-op board members, managers, researchers along with representatives from the private business sector participated in this conference.

Background to the Conference

One of the most important missions of Consumer Co-ops is to provide safe foods at fair prices for not only Co-op members but also for consumers at large. In light of the recent socio-economic changes in Japan, Co-op must now also address the issues of environment preservation and the recycling of both packaging and foods. In other words, Co-op needs to have a clear grasp of the whole food cycle, i.e. supply, distribution, retail, consumption, waste management and recycling. The concept of "The Food System,"

was recently proposed as a guide from which Co-op can approach their food business.

In June 2000, CCIJ organized a special research team to investigate the food business within Co-op. Subsequently, the conference in September was organized to present and discuss the results of this research team.

A Keynote Address of the Chairperson

Mr. SHOUGENJI Shinichi, Professor of Tokyo University, Department of Agro-Bio-Science, as chair of the project team, gave the keynote presentation. His presentation

focused on “Defining the Food System Approach,” since this concept was developed only six years ago and many people are still not familiar with it.

He outlined the general concept of “The Food System” as follows:

1. The Food System is a conceptual model that places agriculture and fishery businesses in the upper stream, compared to a river, the food manufacturing industry and the wholesale industry in the middle stream, and the food retailing business and the food service industry in the lower stream with consumers acting as the anchor in the lack.
2. The Food System is a concept of a systematic chain of mutual-dependent relationships among production, supply and consumption. For example, in considering the symmetry of the recycle system, “The Food System” does not view food as just moving in one direction, but views it in a circulatory pattern.

In Japan, the annual expenditure for food and drink in 1995, pointed out here to indicate the scale of the “Food System,” reached 80,440 billion yen. This represents 17% of the gross national product (483 trillion yen) in that same year. The total expenditure can be divided into four parts: 19.1% from agriculture and fisheries, which also includes imported foods, 28.3% from the food manufacturing industry, 33.5% from related distributive businesses and 19.1% from the food-service industry. In short, the ratio of raw materials is only 19.1%, and the rest of the 80.9% is from added value.

The Food System employs 11.72 million workers. Of these, 33.2% are employed in agriculture and fisheries, 12.3% in the food manufacturing industry, 31.1% in the distributive business and 23.3% in the food service industry. Two thirds of the workers belong to the value added sector, which is increasing very rapidly. This is to say that it is the lower stream that is contributing more and more to the eating expenditure of consumers.

The major problem with the “Food System” is the complicated nature of the distribution system alienates consumers from the information about the production of food. The majority of consumers depend upon the comprehensive supply side for their information about food production, as well as their supply of food. Unfortunately, the increase of processed foods in the diet has complicated the “Food System” and threatens consumer’s health. In Japan, the consumer’s viewpoint, “Consumer’s Sovereign” is often made light of (not taken seriously). With this in mind, the purpose of the “Food System” concept is to not only to study the supply side of food, but to also take a serious look at the consumption side.

Within the “Food System” conceptual model, the position of Consumer Co-ops is very interesting. According to the business classification, Co-op business belongs to the distributive/retail business. But this

classification does not adequately describe the Co-op position, for Co-op is also an organization that represents consumers and is organized democratically. This would place Co-op within the lake section of the conceptual model. As an organization, Co-op can actually be placed in three of the sections other than the upper stream section of agricultural and fisheries section. Even within this upper stream section, Co-op can also be included here when the Co-op food business of buying directly from producers through direct buying routes is considered.

Co-op business although sometimes critical of the agricultural sector is also a major supporter of Japanese agriculture. The conceptual model of the "Food System" and the principles of Co-ops have much in common with regard to their interpretation of the food stream. Therefore the theory of the "Food System" can possibly be useful as a compass to direct Co-op as it attempts to find solutions to the current issues and problem of Co-op's food business.

Outlines of Other Presentations

Following the keynote address, four lectures were given as follows

Mr. KAMEI Toshiro (MELJI Dairy Corporation) gave a lecture entitled, "How Manufacturers Ensure Food Safety: Lessons from the Large-scale Food-poisoning Incident in 2000". He spoke of how his company

handles incidents of food poisoning. When this regrettably occurs enterprises have to not only cope with the persons concerned, but with consumers in general, as soon as possible, in addition to the mass media, which is often seen as a "formidable enemy". If a company neglects its responsibility to the consumers, it will suffer fatal damages from a bad reputation. Thus in the case of accidents, the business sector has to define its own security system in a very broad way.

Mr. SATOH Kazunori (Central Agricultural General Research Center) gave a talk entitled, "Creating a Recycling System that Connects Agriculture and Food: Focusing on Household Waste". He clearly explained the serious garbage problem facing Japan with the use of abundant data. In his talk about the "Food System," he especially emphasized the importance of household garbage that is generated from families. In Japan, only 0.3% of the general household garbage is now recycled! It is therefore necessary to change not only the consciousness of the food suppliers, but also the consumer in order to reduce garbage. He advocated the widespread use of urban and household composting in order to change garbage into fertilizer. He recently introduced some of these activities and methods to Co-op.

Ms. TAKEMI Yukari (Women's Nutritional College) spoke about the "Expectations for Co-op Business Regarding Japan's Health and Nutrition Policy". She introduced the new

national health programs recently introduced by the government called “Healthy Japan 21” and the “Diet Guide”. Through her work with officers at several municipal projects, she spoke of the limited powers of these government programs. As a voluntary organization, she also expects that Co-ops (and other non-profit-organization) will fulfill the role of being information centers, food centers and community centers all in one.

Mr. NAKAJIMA Masamichi (Nihon University) gave a lecture on “Japan’s Food Production Industry and a Proposal for Co-op Merchandise Development”. He spoke of how considering the changing life style in Japan, i.e. reduction in number of full-time housewives, Co-op needs to reconsider the existing strategy of their food business.

He also evaluated the traditional Japanese diet from the viewpoint of health and culture and spoke of its nutritional value, while condemning the modern diet of processed foods.

He proposes the establishment of the new food category (semi-fresh) whereby the consumer could freely adjust the taste of the product to their liking with light spices. He also spoke about the importance of having food produced locally.

End.

***Conference Reports**

21st JSCS Research Congress

More than two hundred co-operators and researchers gathered for the annual Japanese Society for Co-operative Studies Research Congress, held on October 5-7, 2001 at Ikenobou College, Kyoto. In light of the long-term recession facing Japan and changes in the global economy, this year’s theme was “Problems and Ways to Innovate the Co-op Business.”

KOMATSU Yasunobu (Okayama University) chaired the meeting. The four speakers and the themes of their presentations were as follows:

1. SHIRAISHI Masahiko (Tokyo Agricultural University, president of JSCS), “An Overview of all Types of Co-operatives”
2. YURI Muneyuki (Chukyo University), “Credit Unions”
3. YAMANISHI Gaku (Nishi-Totori Agricultural Co-operative), “Agricultural Co-operatives”
4. KIKUCHI Yasushi (Iwate Consumer Co-operative), “Consumer Co-operatives”

ROA 100th Memorial Research Meeting

This year in commemoration of the 100th Meeting of the Robert Owen Association, a special open research meeting was planned around the theme, “The Ideas of Owen and Reviving them in 21st Century.” The Meeting was held on November 15, 2001 at the CCLJ.

The meeting included five speakers and was followed by a discussion section.

About sixty participants attended the meeting. The list of the speakers and their presentations follows:

1. TSUZUKI Chushichi (President of ROA), "Robert Owen and the 21st Century"
2. YOSHIDA Kenichi (Kogakuin University), "The Market Economy and the Local Exchange Trades"
3. TAKAMURA Yoko (Politico-economy Institute), "Joint Participation by Men and Women"
4. YOKOYAMA Masaru (Family Court), "The Present-Day Young People from the Viewpoint of Family Court"
5. SUZUKI Takashi (CCLJ), "A Thought From the Community",

***Topics**

First CCLJ Research Prize Awarded

CCLJ's Research Prize Award selection committee decided on two subjects to be considered for this year's prize. This prize, in fact, succeeds the former HUKUTAKE Prize (in commemoration of the late HUKUTAKE Tadashi).

The prizewinners and their works are as follows:

1. TOKOYAMA Hiromi (Nihon Women's University), *Economical Analysis of the Food System*, 1999,

2. OKABE Kazuaki (Toho-gakuen University), *From San Francisco: NPO for Social Reform*, 2000.

TOKOYAMA's work is a strict statistical analysis and describes a new vision from the theory of the Food System. OKABE's work gives a vivid description of the situation of several NPOs in America from a journalistic viewpoint.

This award ceremony was performed right after the CCLJ's National Research Conference on September 14, 2001.

Dr. Davis, came and lectured in CCLJ

From Britain, Dr. Peter Davis came to CCLJ to give a lecture titled, "Why Consumer Co-operatives Need Management Based on Values" on October 4, 2001. His report was based on the case study of Leister University, in response to the British Society for Co-operative Studies. According to his opinion, co-operative values can be adopted by modern consumers and must be re-evaluated by co-operators, for co-op values are based on humanity and community, in contrast to stock companies.

Professor IMAI Dies.

Mr. IMAI YOSHIO at the age of 71 died on October 8, 2001. Professor IMAI taught at Kogakuin University for many years and was a famous scholar for his work on Russian history and the co-operative movement. Professor IMAI was very dedicated to the development of both ROA and CCLJ.