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Changing Eating Habits of the Younger Generations in Japan

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1. Introduction

JCCU has published its annual survey on the “food needs” of working housewives. These are women who work both in and outside of her houses, both paid and unpaid respectively-- as the 2001 annual report indicates. According to Fusako Chikamoto, Researcher, CCIJ, this year the survey focused on basic values, which affect the changing eating habit. Chikamoto’s research indicates that the eating habit reflect not one factor, but many factors of society as a whole such as the family, the working style of both husband and wife and their economic conditions, variation in availability of food, people’s value and behavior and so on. It appears that the change in eating habits, due to pluralistic and various other indicators, should not be judged to be headed in a negative direction, but thought of more as an inevitable

process or change in society. We cannot say what are the correct or normal eating habits in our society. But at least we can try to eat for good health and for enjoyment. Chikamoto asserts that we should value the new important indicators as a way to observe the changing eating habit. Trends such as: the introduction of cheap and tasty semi-cooked foods and intermediate food industries, the change of consciousness of women toward household work and the trend toward long working hours in the workplace. Based on her survey, Chikamoto has estimated that the time women take to prepare food in the kitchen will diminish just as the amount of time that women spend on household work has decreased or the way that women virtually do not make their own clothes anymore. Nevertheless, it is true that humans must all eat.

2. Generation Gap in Eating Habits

Hiroko Misawa, Consumer's Problems Analyst, has pointed some important aspect of the results of the survey. She said that this survey has two applications: first it focuses on the consciousness of consumers and secondly on the purchasing behavior of consumers. She indicates, based on the survey, the factor of the difference in household income is less a factor than that of the difference in generations when analyzing the food market. In other words, economic indicators are not more important than the social and cultural indicators when analyzing consumers' eating habits. In terms of regional diversity, a remarkable difference in eating habits cannot be found in consumer behavior in different regions because of the conformity in the food supply and the demand by the big food distributors to develop supermarket chain stores at the regional and local levels.

According to the survey, the younger generation has little concern for food security. This is partly due to the consciousness that they have developed as members of consumer cooperatives and they simply feel that the food system is safe and they trust that cooperative's provide a safe food supply. This is partly due to their trust in the national food certificate label system. However, only 40 percent of respondents indicated that they have used the

food safety guidelines for members issued by consumer cooperatives. The rest of the respondents indicated that they believe in food safety without any information. In Japan there are mainly two styles of eating: the Japanese style centered on rice and the so-called Western style centered on bread. Many of the older generation, of course, prefer Japanese style, where dishes are normally served warm or hot. "Eat up while it's still hot!" is a common expression often heard at the table of a typical family. Family members traditionally have breakfast and/or dinners together because of the desire to all eat warm food together and the distaste for food when it is cold. The traditional style of having lunch with all family members derived from this idea of good tasting hot food. On the other hand, when we look at the differences in generations, we find that eating bread is increasing among all generations. Among the older generation, those over 60 years old, eating bread is increasing because of its convenience. This new phenomenon may become the target of a new strategy for food marketing. Contrary to what you might think, the younger generation prefers to prepare food from scratch while the older generation is more likely to buy processed foods which are easy to cook, or to buy "direct to the table side dishes" and "side dishes that need no cooking." The survey points out that some older people find cooking more and more difficult as they age.

Table 1. Foods Cost According to Generations

	Age to 29	30-39	30-49	50-59	60-69	Over 70
Yearly Food Cost(1000 yen)	202	219	263	316	355	351
Engel's coefeciency	20%	24%	25%	24%	28%	29%

3. Eating-Habit Trends of Younger Members

The survey showed that 60 percent of the surveyed members ordinarily prepare meals from scratch while the remaining 40 percent utilize processed foods and ready-made side dishes. Sixty percent of full-time female workers utilize processed foods. Younger women satisfy their need to cook by preparing some dishes from scratch while also utilized processed foods. Among the respondents from the younger generation, 35 percentages indicated that all family members eat the same breakfast together, while 50 percent eat dinner together. This is due to the long commuting hours and the long working hours of both husbands and wives. The different types of breakfasts-eaters can be classified as: (1) 50 percent are “early-riser eaters,” 25 percent are bread eaters and the remaining 25 percent have

a mixed style of eating. Over ten percent of the surveyed members do not buy fish needed preparing cooking. Half of the surveyed members prepare box lunches one or two times a week for themselves, their husbands and their children including adult working children. According to the survey, members under 30 years of age frequently eat processed foods either as a main dish or as a side dish of frozen vegetables along with some other processed foods in the meal. Members in their forties prefer a la carte dishes for their meals. The older generation utilizes ready-made food that needs no cooking and only requires defrosting or reheating in a microwave. Seventy percent of the surveyed members gain their information on how to cook from watching members of their family cook, while fifty percent learn to cook by watching TV or reading cooking magazines. Young women often start to learn to cook after they marry.

Table 2. For Whom Do Wives Prepare Box Lunches? (Plural answer)

	Me	Husband, or wife	Kid(s)	Elementary	Junior	High	Univ.	Adult Children	Etc
Total (n=692)	32	48	20	6	19	18	3	12	2
Almost every day (553)	33	52	16	5	24	21	4	14	2
1 or 2 a week	29	32	37	8	2	6	1	3	4

4. Typical Eating Habits of the Younger Generation

The survey discovered some signs of the change in the eating habits of member families. For instance, it appears that people no longer enjoy breakfast. It seems that members think

of breakfast as their obligation to obtain some nutrition. So the variety of foods and the number of dishes on the breakfast table are decreasing and many of them are prepared foods that require no cooking. For example, one household that consists of a wife, husband and one-year old baby, indicated that they had

adopted the European eating habit of having a cup of coffee and banana on Sundays, cornflakes and a soft drink on Mondays, and yogurt and bread on Tuesdays and so on. In this household, no one does any cooking in the morning. In many families, the husband or father does not eat breakfast or dinner with his family because of long working hours. The labor system in Japan has had serious influence on the eating habits of the ordinary family. In another case, a 34 year-old mother who works full time and has two children, frequently utilizing frozen foods since her husband does

not help out in the kitchen. In the case of one member who worked part-time and had three little children, she indicated that there is not sufficient time to cook and she therefore depends on processed food.

We see many housewives who are bringing up little children, without receiving help from their husbands and they therefore have no time to prepare good dishes for her family. On the other hand, families, which share domestic work, often enjoy good eating habits based on better economic conditions.

End

Conference Report:.....

International Co-operative Movement Day in Japan Excerpts from a lecture on *the Slow-Food Movement*

On July 6, various countries throughout the world where the Co-operative Movement has been influential celebrate International Co-operative Day. In Japan, co-operatives at the both the federal and regional levels celebrated the day. As part of the annual celebration, about 200 representatives from different types of co-ops gathered in Tokyo outside the Japan Agricultural Co-operative Building under *the rainbow flag* to participate in the events of International Co-operative Day. The event included reports from various co-operatives as well as a report summarizing the situation of co-operatives overseas. Each year, a keynote speaker delivers a memorial lecture to inspire all the participants.

This year the speaker was Ms. Natsu Shimamura, an energetic writer and keen proponent of the *Slow-Food Movement* in Japan. In recent years, Ms. Shimamura has visited many regions around the world where the slow-food movement is gaining popularity; in particular she has visited and talked with supporters of the ever-increasing movement in Italy. What follows is a summary of her lecture.

The *Slow-Food Movement* is said to have originated in northern Italy in 1985. The name of the movement is taken from its counterpart, fast food. In fact, the *Slow-Food* supporters and the *Slow-Food Institute*, originated in Italy, although it now has members worldwide that are opposed to the ever-increasing American trend of fast food. The aim of the *Slow-Food Movement* is for each region in the world to retain its own cultural heritage through maintaining a diet based on regional and

traditional foods. Maintaining regional differences is especially important when we realize that there are certain foods such as cheeses, wines and vegetables that are disappearing because they are not part of the modern mass-marketing business culture. It is important to note that the *Slow-Food Movement* is not only concerned with eating habits and cultures, but also is a philosophy for living. The real purpose of the *Slow-Food Movement* is to encourage people to think about the nature of food and to encourage people to think about what they eat and drink. The philosophy of the movement is: *Slow Life in Beautiful*.

Ms, Shimamura expressed her concern about Japanese eating habits and the current Japanese

food culture. She remarked, “that it certainly is not normal that over half of all Japanese children are reported to eat alone.” She said the trend toward convenience and junk food in the diet needs to be addressed. She also remarked on the numerous incidents of mislabeled agricultural and livestock products, and the fact that even some co-ops are guilty of selling mislabeled products. She emphasized that all of these trends indicate that the distance between producers and consumers has grown too wide. And yet, Ms. Shimamura believes that we need not give up. She believes that the Japanese diet will improve based on the keen awareness of both food manufacturers in Japan, and the awareness and concerns of citizens.

***Upcoming Dates**

22nd JSCS's Annual Congress

The Japanese Society for Co-operative Studies will hold its 22nd Annual Autumn Congress on 5-6 October 2002 at Hirosaki University in Aomori Prefecture. The focus of the first day of the congress will be, “Construction of a Co-operative Strategy During the Current

Structural Recession.” Four reports will be presented on this them followed by general discussions. On the second day, various individual reports and regional symposiums will be delivered. Furthermore, leaders from the South Korean Agricultural Co-operatives will make reports at the sectional meetings. For further information, contact the CCIJ.