



# The Right Livelihood Award

*for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people*

## Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative (Japan)

**Honorary Award (1989)**



*...for creating the most successful, sustainable model of production and consumption in the industrialised world.*

Ikuko Sazaki, Taeko Ogwara, Ryoko Shimizu  
??Photo: Wolfgang Schmidt

The Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative (SCCC) of Japan is a unique organisation of its kind, combining formidable business and professional skills with strict social and ecological principles and a vision of a community- and people-centred economy that provides a radical alternative to both socialist and capitalist industrialisation.

SCCC traces its foundation back to 1965, when a single Tokyo housewife organised 200 women to buy 300 bottles of milk to reduce the price. In 1968 Seikatsu Club was incorporated as Seikatsu Club Consumers Co-operatives. Since then, Seikatsu Club has expanded its activities under a motto of 'autonomous control of our lives', including production, distribution, consumption and disposal, the environment, social services and politics. Presently, 29 Seikatsu Club Consumers co-ops (affiliates to SCCCU) in over 19 prefectures conduct independent and unique activities.

As SCCCU wants 'safe food at reasonable prices', it decides the specification (materials, production process, packing materials, environmental consciousness, etc.) of food and other consumer goods in cooperation with the producers, and purchases them by pre-ordering. This pre-order collective purchase system enables producers to plan in advance and guarantee product freshness. When the Club cannot find products of adequate quality to meet its ecological or social standards, it will consider producing them itself, as it now does with milk and soap. Much emphasis is placed on direct contact between producers and consumers to humanise the market, especially in the area of food production, where consumers regularly visit farmers to observe production methods and/or to lend a hand.

The purchase model is organized in 'Hans', meaning a small group with between five and 12 members each. They order and purchase by group and the members help each other. There are various group activities, such as childcare, developing within this system.

The Seikatsu Club, which in 2009 had about 320,000 members, is a significant business enterprise. By 2008, the total annual retail sales had reached 87 billion yen (about US\$ 870 million), while the accumulated funds (the investment of members) stand at about 30 billion yen. Since the 1980s, the Club has started over 600 workers' collectives, running restaurants, bakeries, used goods stores, soap factories and caring for elderly people. In 2007 they employed 17,000 staff.

In their campaigns against synthetic detergents, Club members realised the importance of the political process and formed independent networks in different prefectures to contest local elections. In 1979 the first network member was elected to Tokyo city government and in 2008 there were more than 141 Seikatsu Club members serving as local councilors.

SCCC has greatly contributed to the reduction of CO2 emissions by using returnable bottles and containers. 44 food items such as soft drinks, soy sauce, and jams are delivered to members in returnable bottles. In 2007, about 5,690 t of containers and bottles were retrieved, which meant a reduction of about 2,121 t of CO2.

While Japanese consumers face flooding food imports, especially genetically modified food, SCCC declared itself "GMO Free" in 1997. In cooperation with producers, SCCC has inspected every consumer material while proceeding with its own labelling system and the exclusion of GM food, feed, and additives.

The Club has determined itself to promoting self-sufficiency in food and the sustainability of local agriculture, even though this runs counter to international pressure, provoked by the World Trade Organisation, which threatens to destroy family farming. The Seikatsu Club also aims to diversify working opportunities for women and has committed itself to exploring the scope for a people-oriented welfare system.

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