

However, "the guideline will confuse and mislead consumers," said Setsuko Yasuda, a member of the Consumer's Union of Japan.

"The guideline is not for promoting proper organic agricultural produce in Japan," she said, claiming it is merely an effort to support nonorganic farmers who grow crops that appear similar.

The guideline includes three major classifications: organic produce, produce cultivated without use of farm chemicals and produce grown with reduced amounts of chemicals.

Ministry officials said the guideline is to clarify which produce is truly organic.

In principle, consumer groups and organic farmers accept the guideline's definition for produce. It says such crops should be cultivated in a field that has been free from chemicals for more than three years. Such a field is usually fertilized with compost.

However, they oppose the two other categories.

The guideline only defines produce of the second category as having been grown without farm chemicals.

Consumer groups and farmers say the guideline fails to take into account the effects of chemicals that were used in the past and remain in the soil.

"Because some chemicals remain in the soil for a long time, produce that is supposed to have been grown without farm chemicals may contain residual substances," said Tomoyoshi Kiuchi, 72, secretary general of the Tokyo-based Japan Organic Agriculture Association, which was founded in 1970 when organic agriculture began in Japan.

The association has about 4,000 members, including consumers and organic farmers. The group is regarded as a pioneer in its field.

Kiuchi, a soil scientist and former researcher at the ministry, is particularly opposed to the guideline's definition of



ORGANIC PRODUCE is labeled at Kinokuniya, a food store, in Tokyo's Minato Ward so consumers can identify which products are free of chemicals.

produce grown with reduced amounts of farm chemicals.

It says if farmers use less than half the normal amounts of chemicals for growing, their yields can be sold as "produce grown with reduced amounts of chemicals" regardless of where they are grown.

Hokkaido, because of its cool climate, needs fewer pesticides and herbicides than Kyushu, Kiuchi said.

"Even if farmers in Kyushu make efforts to reduce the amounts of farm chemicals, they cannot reduce the amounts as much as their counterparts in Hokkaido. The ministry's guideline does not make sense," he said.

"Suppose farmers in southern Japan usually scatter 10 kg of chemicals on one acre. Their northern counterparts scatter 5 kg in a field the same size," he said. "If the southern farmers halve that amount, it equals that of the northern farmers."

Thus produce from the south would be labeled as having been grown with reduced amounts of chemicals, he noted.

Kiuchi pointed to a contradiction in the guideline.

Even if Hokkaido farmers reduce the amount of chemicals to 3 kg from the normal 5 kg, their produce cannot be labeled as having been grown with reduced amounts of chemicals, because the reduction is not half the normal amount, he said.

"That's more confusing to consumers. They cannot tell which products are safer. There is also no way to confirm that no chemicals, or smaller amounts of them, have been used. In the U.S. and Europe, only genuine organic produce can be so labeled," Kiuchi said.

Yuji Fujisawa, 40, deputy chief of the ministry's Office of Sustainable Agriculture, said that under the guideline, the labels for produce grown with reduced amounts of chemicals will contain the place of production, the name, address and telephone number of the grower and the chemical reduction rate.

"If consumers come across something they cannot understand about the products, they can ask the producer directly," Fujisawa said.

Such labeling will be beneficial for both consumers and farmers because it will encourage growers to use smaller amounts of chemicals, thus reducing the total amount used nationwide, he said.

Reading the guideline, Kiuchi suspects the ministry does not intend to promote organic agriculture, "although promotion of such farming is a clear tendency in the U.S. and Europe."

Fujisawa said: "When farmers shift from chemical agriculture to organic, productivity drops considerably. Therefore, the ministry will not recommend that farmers nationwide change to organic

growing. We should not lower the agricultural self-sufficiency rate, which is already very low by international standards."

Japan imports 88 percent of its wheat, 96 percent of its soy beans, 40 percent of its fruits and 10 percent of its vegetables, according to the latest ministry survey.

Kiuchi and Yasuda said there is another problem with the classifications under the guideline.

According to a consumer survey on the image of farm produce, it was found that more feel produce grown without farm chemicals is safer than true organic crops.

Kiuchi and Yasuda say this is contrary to the facts.

At present the ministry is preparing a pamphlet to provide information on farm produce, Fujisawa said.

Although the guideline is expected to be reviewed in 1995, consumer and organic farmer groups with long experience in such agriculture say they will continue to oppose it.

More than 150 such groups are sponsoring a meeting today from 1 p.m. at Kensei Kaikan in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, to protest the guideline.

With about 600 people expected to attend, the meeting could be a rare opportunity for formation of a nationwide network to promote proper organic agriculture in Japan, Yasuda said.