

Farm visiting reports <Part 1>

Visiting Minami-Ashigara Farm, International Agricultural Development Inc.

While engaged in overseas technical cooperation projects, we have often thought, "How can we get involved in Japanese regional communities and agricultural activities?". As opportunities arose, we visited farms that were taking new approaches, and learned a lot from them. In this series, we would like to introduce farms we have visited, and write about our thoughts and impressions. In this issue, we take up the case of a farm operating under the auspices of International Agricultural Development Incorporated (IADI) in Minami-Ashigara City, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, where we were invited to join in the mandarin orange harvesting.

IADI was established in 2016 by Mr. Kuroyanagi and his colleagues with the dream of not just making Japanese Sake from their own rice but also drinking it in their own restaurants. IADI's main activities focus on agricultural production and sales, providing farm experience, capacity development and consulting. It has 15 farms in Minami-Ashigara City, with an overall size of approximately 40,000 square meters. On this occasion, we visited two of them; one was a 1,115 square meters mandarin orange orchard and the other comprised a 1,000 square meters vegetable garden in Nuda, Minami-Ashigara City.

The farms of IADI are blessed with abundant water and a mild climate, with views of the Hakone and Tanzawa Mountains. The Sakawa River flows from Mt. Fuji and the Tanzawa Mountains and the warm sea breeze comes from Sagami Bay in the south. IADI produces and sells rice, vegetables, fruits, shiitake mushrooms, and other products in the region.

On our visit to the mandarin orange orchard, we encountered a variety called Unshu being cultivated using conventional farming methods. Mr. Kuroyanagi explained in detail that the view of Mt. Fuji, the clean water, and the thermal springs were the reasons why they selected Minami-Ashigara region as their production base. He also explained that agricultural activities are only viable if they have roots in the region. Therefore, he stressed, it is important to contribute to the local community, as well as to think beyond that, to contribute to the regional community through nationwide and international business development. After hearing his thoughts and his inspiring

visions for the future we threw ourselves into the work of helping harvest the mandarins with enthusiasm!

Although the mandarin orange harvesting was not the same as the so-called "agri-tourism program", arrangements were carefully made so that anyone could easily participate. After finishing the picking, the mandarin oranges were sorted by size, packed in wooden crates, and brought to storage for drying. These oranges will be shipped to member delivery services and regional 'marchés' (markets). During our lunch break, we could enjoy various products from each farm such as rice balls, figs, and pork miso soup with organic vegetables, cherry tomatoes, and homemade mandarin orange juice. All activities were fulfilling and we felt a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day. When we had finished, we all received bags full mandarin oranges, figs, and tomatoes, which we enjoyed tremendously!

We learned from IADI's ingenious approach to utilizing the functions of farmland to move it beyond mere production and to make it an enjoyable space. They had brought the slogan of "Enjoy Minami-Ashigara" to life. Furthermore, we felt that such utilization of farmland enhances the value of regional agriculture, leads to the conservation of agricultural land, and promotes the discovery of the attractiveness of the Minami-Ashigara region. On the way home, Mr. Kuroyanagi guided us to visit a 1,000 square meters vegetable plot. The field and its roads were established and are maintained by Mr. Kuroyanagi himself, and we were again impressed by his extraordinary efforts for the farm.

Our two farm visits offered a view of farming that successfully connects the producers working on the farms, friends, regional supporters, and the rich natural resources of Minami-Ashigara region. This visit was a great opportunity for us to learn the real joy of "food" and "agriculture." We experienced it through interaction with others, our taste buds and feeling a sense of accomplishment. A great lesson learned to help us implement our yearning for regional revitalization!



Mr. Kuroyanagi greeting his visitors in a mandarin orange field