

Farm visiting reports <Part 2>

Agrico-en Garden

As the second article in our irregular series focusing on Japanese farmson , we introduce “Agrico-en garden”, part of “the agricultural product ownership program” implemented by Tsukuba City, Ibaraki Prefecture.

The Furuku area of Tsukuba City, where the farm is located, has many rice fields and a rural landscape. This said as Tsukuba urban area has expanded and there are now very few full-time farmers. Mr. Kaoru Kojima, the owner of the farm, did not engage in farming when he was young, but he started farming on the farm he inherited from his parents when he retired about 10 years ago.

Tsukuba City's “agricultural product owner program” has been in place since 2006, and the farm has been involved in it for about six years. The participation fee for Agri-coenthe program is 10,000 yen for the Four Seasons Course and 7,000 yen for the Spring and Autumn Course. Participants can experience various types of farm work once a month and take home freshly picked vegetables when harvested. Under the city's program, farms are required to guarantee a minimum quantity of agricultural products to participants, and in the case of this farm, 5 kg of ginger, 10 kg of potatoes, and 10 kg of onions were guaranteed.

The farm consists of a vegetable-oriented primary farm (15a) and a fruit tree oriented second farm (13a) and they grow a total of about 20 items, including spring and fall crops. In addition to growing standard vegetables, the farm incorporates brightly colored varieties such as red and yellow bell peppers and radishes that are white on the outside but red inside, in order to attract participants' interest. The farm also grows other things such as watermelon, maize, sesame, and groundnuts, which are popular because of the fun harvesting process. They are planted alternately each year so that repeat participants can have a fresh experience every year.

Our visits were on October 24 and December 5, 2020, the days of the program activities. Activities included harvesting taro, spinach, ginger, and leafy vegetables in October, and radish, Chinese cabbage, and green onions in December. Since the day in December was the last day of the year's program, there was an outdoor party on the farm after the work, and the participants enjoyed vegetable stew. About 30 participants gathered on both days, but in

order to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus, Mr. Kojima's explanation was simple on the day, and the participants kept their distance while listening to him speak. When all the participants entered the field, the field became crowded, but Mr. Kojima guided the participants appropriately to their respective plots, so there was no confusion and the work proceeded as planned. I was impressed with his careful preparation based on his experience and the efficient aactivities as planned on site.

I learned a lot from Mr. Kojima about his ideas in carrying out the activities of the program. One of the ideas that left an impression on me was that even if it rained, the activities were not postponed ut carried out as scheduled. In this way, the work was done efficiently, since there was no need to redo preparation work for the activities and there was no need to coordinate schedules with participants by phone or e-mail. For activities on rainy days, he negotiated with nearby facilities to rent space under the their eaves. For example, in the case of harvesting maize, the maize stalk was harvested together with the ear in advance. On the day of the activity, the participants were able to enjoy the harvest by picking the ears from the stalk under the eaves.

When I listened to Mr. Kojima's talk, I felt that he was always re-discovering and enjoying the fun of farming and the deliciousness of fresh vegetables, and that he was trying to convey such a fresh feeling to the participants. He also observed what the participants were happy about, and I felt that reflecting this in his activities had led to the popularity of his farm.

Although the activities at “Agrico-en garden” were well received by many repeat participants, Mr. Kojima has put his six-year-long activities on hold for the time being due to his health condition. This said, he has not completely stopped farming, and is still engaged in agriculture, mainly fruit cultivation. Looking at how active he is, many former participants would like to see him resume the program again, as long as it is not too much of a strain on his body.



Mr. Kojima instructing to the participants (Center)