

Farm visiting reports <Part 3>

Nursey farmer – Iizumi farm –

As the third article in our irregular series focusing on Japanese farms, we introduce “Iizumi-farm,” as a seedling nursery farm running for more than 40 years in Tsukuba city, Ibaraki prefecture, and a destination of study-tours for the vegetable cultivation technology course carried out at JICA Tsukuba by AAI.

Iizumi-farm was established by the grand-father of the current president, Mr. Keisei IIZUMI more than 40 years ago, and Keisei also has more than 20 years of experience in producing grafted and own-root seedlings, since Keisei inherited his family business.

He has several 0.1 hectare plastic houses specialized for nursing seedlings. Plastic houses are equipped with heating boilers and hot water supply piping systems for nursing seedling beds. Portable steam soil-sterilization machines and containers are also installed.

About 40,000 pots of grafted and own-root seedlings are produced and sold by Keisei's family members and hired field technicians for a season between



Seedlings are sold on site

February and the end of the spring holidays in May. In the case of grafted seedling of watermelons, they can produce more than 1,000 grafted seedlings per day with 6 persons consist of 2 persons for preparation (cutting) of scions and rootstocks, 2 persons for grafting (connecting scion and rootstock) and the remaining 2 persons for potting (re-planting the grafted seedling into a pot). The speed and accuracy of the operation is astonishing!

The items are grafted and own-root seedlings mainly of fruit vegetables including tomato, eggplant (brinjal), piman (Japanese green pepper), chili-pepper, watermelon, sweet melon, cucumber and other Cucurbits. Seedlings are sold directly at the farm gate. Recently we can find that vegetable seedlings are sold at DIY stores however the difference in the quality of Keisei's seedlings is obvious compared to them.

In times past, neighbouring commercial producers purchased their seedlings in blocks of 1,000 pots at a time, however sales have dwindled to 50 to 100 pots because

of the aging farmer population. The main buyers are now ordinary garden owners buying a few pots for their private use. Even under such circumstances, Iizumi receives a lot of inquiries about their seedlings from old friends and neighbouring customers seeking healthy seedlings bred with higher technical skills and from retail shops of agricultural materials who have heard of the Iizumi reputation.



Grafting watermelon

Production plans including kinds of crops/cultivars, and production quantities are decided based on the previous sales record. In rare cases, novel/ unprecedented crops are tentatively released, however customers come back to the regular/ familiar items at the end. Keisei also cultivates regular agricultural produce after he produces and sells vegetable seedlings and these are his major production items within a short period of time between February and May.

At the JICA vegetable cultivation technology course we emphasize the old Japanese farmer saying “nae- hansaku” (healthy seedlings are half the battle for a good harvest). Grafting is also practiced as a useful pest and disease control method to reduce environmental burden. Keisei always readily gives training course participants a chance of on-site practical experience of grafting methods when we visit his farm.

We hope the maintenance and development of his nursery farm for the purpose of perpetuating these techniques and grafting skills continues despite the obvious increasing popularity of DIY stores.



Participants trying grafting