Farm visiting reports <Part 8>

Rooftop garden ～Edible KAYABAEN～

In April 2024, we visited Edible KAYABAEN (KAYABAEN), a rooftop garden in the office district of Kayabacho, Tokyo. KAYABAEN was opened in May 2022 through collaboration among Edible Schoolyard Japan (ESYJ), UNIVERSAL ENGEISHA Co., Ltd., and Heiwa Real Estate Co., Ltd.

ESYJ promotes the "Edible Schoolyard" initiative in Japan, originally developed by Alice Waters in Berkeley, California. Through school garden activities, ESYJ aims to support children's learning and foster local communities. Meanwhile, Heiwa Real Estate had been exploring ways to make use of rooftop spaces as part of its efforts to revitalize the Kayabacho area. UNIVERSAL ENGEISHA added the idea of creating a place where local children could experience nature and brought ESYJ into the initiative. Through this collaboration, the concept developed into KAYABAEN as a kids' garden in the heart of Tokyo's business district.

The garden at KAYABAEN covers approximately 600 m², where more than 150 varieties of crops are grown throughout the year, including cucumbers, blueberries, sweet corn, green beans, arugula, Japanese radish, and sugarcane. As temperatures in central Tokyo are several degrees higher than in surrounding areas, planting schedules are adjusted to cope with the extreme summer heat. In winter, the warmer rooftop temperatures allow crops that normally cannot survive the winter in Tokyo, such as passion fruit and chili peppers, to overwinter.

The garden also contributes to the urban ecosystem, attracting birds and other wildlife. Based on permaculture principles, KAYABAEN practices organic farming and various environmentally friendly activities, including beekeeping, the use of rainwater for a pond, and composting coffee grounds and shredded paper waste from the building.

At the same time, growing crops under rooftop conditions presents several challenges. Blueberries, in particular, require careful management. Due to restrictions on the load that can be placed on the rooftop, the amount of soil available for cultivation is limited. This makes it difficult to maintain sufficient soil moisture, and the soil tends to dry out quickly, especially during hot weather. Soil pH management is another challenge, as blueberries, which prefer acidic soil, are grown together with other fruit trees with different growing requirements. Despite these constraints, the garden continues to explore practical solutions based on permaculture principles. For example, coffee grounds are applied around the blueberries as one way of improving soil conditions and supporting their growth.

One of the core activities of KAYABAEN as a kids' garden is providing opportunities for children from the nearby Sakamoto Elementary School in Chuo Ward, Tokyo, to learn through contact with nature. For children studying in this urdan area, KAYABAEN seems to provide a relaxing and refreshing space. Second-grade students participate in the "Edible Education" program, where they learn about food and nature through hands-on activities. One child was so happy to visit KAYABAEN that the child called it "heaven."

Garden plots are also provided for partner companies in and around the building, where employees can experience growing and harvesting crops or enjoy lunch during their lunch breaks. As KAYABAEN is located on the rooftop of an office building, public access is limited. However, weekend events are held both in person and online, providing opportunities for the public to experience KAYABAEN and participate in various community activities.

KAYABAEN goes beyond simple rooftop greening. It contributes to community revitalization, creates new value, and enhances real estate value. Rooftop gardens are becoming increasingly common in urban areas across Japan, and KAYABAEN was introduced as a pioneering example of urban agriculture at the "Edible Tokyo Rally" held in May 2024.



Rooftop garden surrounded by office buildings

KAYABAEN's approach to making effective use of the constraints of an urban rooftop provides useful ideas for our activities in Japan and overseas. We hope to apply what we learned from this visit to our future activities.