

AAINews

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Lessons from a Tiny Farm Continued

What our staff holding in his hands in the photo is a bunch of radishes called “Ofukuro” in Japanese. The word means Mom and these vegetables are ideal for making oden, the Japanese hodgepodge dish. If you recall, in AAINews Vol. 26 I reported about a tiny block of farmland AAI rented for farming practice. The project is still going on. It was started with the idea of nurturing rich biological diversity by organic farming with no ploughing, no fertilizers and pesticides, and with no priority being placed on productivity. This basic philosophy remains in place. However, some argued that there should be a certain amount of harvest we could enjoy, and also that it would be interesting to compare ploughed and non-ploughed farms. Accordingly, last year we ploughed a half of the little plot and left the other half untouched, though both remained organic with no chemicals used. The last summer’s harvest from the non-ploughed plot included French beans, mulukhiya, and cherry tomatoes. Ground cucumbers were also successful deep under the grass. As we ploughed the other half of the plot, it was very tempting to start weeding this wild unploughed plot as well. Suppressing such temptation, we have kept the half of the plot unploughed for two years, though of course we did a little trimming to some extent. As a result, the ground of the unploughed half has become very soft, offering earthy comfort for those who walk on it, and it hosts a lot of insects.



For almost two years we have tried to learn something through this tiny, 9.09-tsubo (approx. 30-m²) plot of farmland; something more than the mere enjoyment of working with the soil and harvesting. Some people argued disapprovingly saying, “What on earth do you expect to learn or understand from such a tiny piece of farmland? What a big mouth, what arrogance! The work of real farmers who have to struggle every day of their lives is nothing comparable.” That is true, and we appreciate such comments. I dare say, however, that the whole point for us to have this farm is to create opportunities to feel and contemplate something through the work with the soil, in which we can engage ourselves only as a sideline of our everyday work as agricultural development consultants.

After all, humans are animals. It is natural for us animals to go insane if we remain deprived of nature, and to feel relieved in natural surroundings. Therefore, it may be quite understandable that humans whether grown-ups or children, go mad if they constantly remain in an unnatural environment. We after all cannot live away from soil. What we eat on a daily basis - rice, bread, vegetables, meat, fish - all comes from, and returns, to soil. Today, the self-sufficiency of Japan’s cereal supply is less than 30%. Japan buys a great amount of foodstuffs from abroad with the money she earns by exporting industrial goods. In supermarkets and convenience stores polished, good-looking vegetables are lined up side by side, and one can buy any of them with money. Food is not an industrial product, though. Have people forgotten that food is grown with the blessing of soil, water and the sun? Have they forgotten the joy of growing crops and appreciating the real tastes of food? Do they ever think carefully, while enjoying food, how it was made or harvested? Have they lost the sense of appreciation engraved in the phrases “Itadakimasu” and “Gochiso sama”? Are they taking it for granted that any foodstuff can be purchased and enjoyed with money? Has anyone in this country recently experienced desperate hunger, one of the five major desires

that humans possess? Do we ever walk on soil while traveling between home and work? Can we Japanese survive only by letting children use computers for so-called IT education, instead of ploughs? These questions make me feel like cooking oden with radish for today’s dinner.

(By Fuyuki Kojima, Machida City, Tokyo, February, 2001)

