

## ***Mini-Series: Work and life in farms - Various movements in Japan***

### **Part 1: Return to farming and Joy in farming - The younger generation in farming**

The pendulum of our lifestyle, which has over-swung to the unnatural, too urban direction due to the rapid economic growth and the resulting “Bubble Economy” seems to be swinging back today at an accelerating speed. Such a trend is visible in agriculture and it looks as if this movement is a result of the human instinct to avoid or alleviate danger or dangerous circumstances. Today the primary industries of agriculture, forestry and fisheries are gradually regaining their past recognition. This new mini-series of essays will discuss some of these movements. In a way Japan climbed up to the top of a cliff only to fall off it, and it does not know how it should move on in the future. The dilemma of today’s Japan may offer an important lesson for developing countries not to walk on the same “descending” path.

Nowadays it is not difficult to find young people who have grown suspicious about the future course of Japanese society which is heavily dependent on the secondary and tertiary industries based on the monetary system. These people then move out of cities and try to start farming. They abandon the practice of earning money through labor in the complex web of human/social relationships, but instead try to engage themselves in agricultural labor to produce their own food. In many rural areas of the country today there are young people farming energetically and happily. One of them is Mr. Masaki Miyata, a 36-year-old farmer living in Kashiwa Village, Yamaguchi Prefecture. Nine years since he started farming in this little village of six house holds, today he is an established farmer with terraced fields of about 1 acre at 300m above sea level. He grows organic rice with no chemical pesticides or fertilizer, self-supplies vegetables, and keeps 450 free-range chickens to produce his naturally fertilized eggs for marketing. At the beginning of his farming career he faced many challenges; he could not cultivate rice in the way he wanted, his chicks were attacked by mice, and he had to work hard to establish and explore marketing routes for rice and broiler eggs. Even today he has to fight the wild boars coming to damage his paddy fields, worry about the water supply in summer to the terraced fields which depends on stream water, and wonder what to do about the surrounding hills deteriorating due to lack of proper management. Despite all these problems, his farm is wonderful. It is located at the far end of the village, few people pass in front of his farm, there is absolutely no artificial noise around, and the view of early morning clouds forming up is truly fascinating. His life style consists of living in a thatched old farm house, preparing hot baths with fire wood, getting water from the well and harvesting food from the surrounding hills. It is, in the real sense, a rich life with only a minimum amount of money required. He said, “I am very happy that I’ve moved here. I’d like those who come here to feel that this place is home, too.”

In Karasuyama town, Tochigi Prefecture, there is “Kinou-shijuku”, a school for young would-be-farmers to study agriculture together. It was established by Mr. Tadashi Tomatsu in 1982 for the purpose of fostering the future of Japanese agriculture. Presently headed by Mr Tomatsu’s elder son, Mitsuo, (31 years old), the school has so far sent out over 70 graduates who now practice farming in various parts of the country. The school has 8ha of farmland on which some 80 varieties of vegetables are grown organically and some 600 chickens are kept free range. The products from the farm are sold directly to 150 contracted households as well as to retailers including supermarkets. The school is full board with no tuition fees. Training lasts basically two years and it is expected and encouraged that students learn from each other. At the moment a total of ten students, both male and female, all in their early twenties, are studying here. On the farm they learn cultivation techniques through actual crop production, and off the farm they learn how to make business with the outside society through such tasks as products delivery, collection of money, publicizing their products and finding new customers. Youngsters who wish to live in harmony with soil and nature come to this school, work with other students and learn from each other, then complete the training and start farming on their own. Being relatively young, the students have various worries and sense many difficulties, but they are very energetic and all say smilingly that they enjoy learning at this school. I was very impressed by their straight and lively eyes and confident, happy expressions and words, which are absent from those of the same generation and age group living in urban environments.

Music (on-gaku: joy of sound) is the art of expressing ideas and emotions with sounds. Then maybe we can coin a new word, nou-gaku (joy of farming), the art of expressing oneself through farming. We cannot detach ourselves completely from money as long as we live in the framework of a monetary system. But apparently for those pursuing agriculture money doesn’t come as a priority, and what is most important for them in life is to enjoy farming surrounded by nature, just in the same way that people enjoy music.



**Free-range chickens for production of naturally fertilized eggs**



**Terraced paddy fields of Mr Miyata**



**Planting of vegetable seedlings by Kinou-shijuku students**