

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

Part 4: Consumer marketing, aigamo(duck)-paddy cultivation, and vitality from rural life...

Along the Den-en-toshi Line in Aoba-ku, Yokohama city, Kanagawa Prefecture, there is a shopping mall that specializes in organic products called “Plant’s”. The mall contains restaurants, shops and showrooms which deal in organic products while promoting an ‘organic’ life-style. Here events and exhibitions are also organized on related issues as well. This is a form of disseminating information and marketing targeted to those interested in organic products, and is also designed to stimulate interest in other people. The owner of the mall is interested in an ‘organic lifestyle’ in every aspect of life, and wishes to share such a lifestyle with others by marketing related products/commodities. In collaboration with organic farmers, the owner wholesales organic vegetables to other department stores and restaurants. Because of its non-sterile connotation, some people might associate the word ‘organic’ with something that is muddy or crude, but the atmosphere in the mall is very clean and sophisticated. Horticulture products are on sale outside, and inside you can find various selected organic products such as vegetables, processed foods, clothing, daily-use and kitchen goods, books and so forth. Popular products often get sold out. The restaurant that specializes in organic vegetable dishes is very popular and when I went there on a Saturday people were having to wait some half an hour in a queue to get seated and served.

Mr. Takao Furuno is a farmer in Keisen-machi, Fukuoka Prefecture. He is known as a pioneer of aigamo(duck)-paddy cultivation in Japan. Ducks are freely kept in the paddy field so that they eat weeds and insects while providing organic droppings to the field, stir the mud while swimming and stimulate growth of the rice while picking at the bottom of the paddy with their beaks and webbed feet. He grows ‘azora’ (a kind of fern eaten by duck) and loaches in the same paddy field, and calls it “azora-fish-aigamo-paddy simultaneous cultivation (aigamo-paddy cultivation for short)”. To put it simply, this is a method that involves the simultaneous practice of paddy cultivation, livestock keeping and aquaculture. Mr. Furuno owns paddy fields and a forested hill, and has practiced perfect organic farming with no use of pesticides for over twenty years. His farming is not limited to rice cultivation. He also grows various crops in rotation, such as vegetables, soy and cereals, grows fruits and mushrooms, and keeps chickens for eggs and bees for honey. He processes preserved foods such as miso paste, moromi (unrefined sake) and pickles, and incubates duck chicks. The whole family is happily engaged in this complex farming and they also interact with consumers face to face to sell their products. After the first decade of his farming career struggling with weeds, Mr. Furuno started trying the aigamo-paddy method. Since then he has visited farming villages in various Asian countries. He says that through the interaction with many farmers of different countries he has learned not only about the aigamo-paddy cultivation method but also a lot about many other things. He still travels with Mrs. Furuno whenever he is called for, whether within or outside the country. He also welcomes visitors and trainees at any time, so he keeps himself quite busy everyday. His pickup truck carries a slogan which reveals Mr. Furuno’s conviction: “Towards Harmony of Nature and Humans”.

What kind of lifestyle is desirable for us to lead a truly rich and spiritual existence? The answer is evident when we see the savage urban cities packed with people and commodities and then see peaceful rural villages deteriorating in many countries in the world, including the US and Japan, where monetary / market-oriented society has been established praising the “global standard”. In the field of farming, we should consider small-scale, self-sufficient family farming, where the entire family is engaged in crop cultivation and livestock keeping, as an alternative to large-scale mechanized mono-culture farming which promotes cultivation of cash crops in huge areas of fields to feed into the market economy. Such small-scale farming was a very common farming style all over the world. In Japan also such a traditional style of farming could easily be found until the 1960-70s, forming a very Japanese and beautiful landscape. Such a traditional, wasteless lifestyle, where people are engaged in forestry and fisheries in addition to farming, producing only necessary things using various manual techniques, and supporting and sharing among those involved, seems to be a truly rich, healthy and enjoyable lifestyle. We at AAI would like to keep making efforts to find out how such a desirable lifestyle can be harmonized with modern society. We wish to recover the sort of society where vitality comes from farming villages.



Organic shop “Plant’s”



Ducks happily swimming



**Left side: duck-paddy field
Right side: normal paddy field**