

# AAINews

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## **Reflections on Japan's Food Culture (Regional Resource Circulation Survey in Miyakonojo, Miyazaki)**

In late 2003, I took part in a survey to assess the current situation of local resource utilization in the Miyakonojo area, concentrating mainly on stock raising farms. We visited fattening and breeding farms of cattle to survey the current situation of fodder production, utilization of cattle excreta as manure, types and amount of imported fodder, and so forth. The purpose of this survey was to understand the impact of utilization of locally available resources and the introduction of outside resources from the viewpoint of energy and resource circulation. The targeted Miyakonojo area is a valley located in the southwest part of Miyazaki Prefecture next to Kagoshima Prefecture to the south and the Kirishima mountain range to the west, and the area has a thriving livestock industry.

The farms surveyed this time are mostly producing rice for self-consumption and fodder for their cattle, and most animal excreta is being used in the farms for fodder production. In general, cattle breeding farms are smaller family businesses compared with cattle fattening farms. In cattle breeding farms most of the fodder is obtained locally, while cattle fattening farms are larger in scale and many of them depend on imported fodder. Mixed feed is purchased from the local agricultural co-operatives or private companies, and most of this seems to be processed imported feed. In fact, the raw materials of mixed feed, such as corn, wheat and wheat bran are not produced in a great quantity within the country. Therefore, mostly it must be imported. Under these circumstances, farmers in the Miyakonojo area are trying to promote the local livestock industry by more active utilization of locally available organic materials and a focus on environmental conservation, and they are making good efforts to produce safe and high-quality meat.

This survey was to consider the energy and resource circulation from the holistic viewpoint of local agricultural activities with the livestock industry of the Miyakonojo area as one case study. Through this survey I was made to think about Japan's system of food production and consumption.

The statistics for FY 2002 show that Japan's food self-sufficiency was 40% on a calorie basis, and the self-sufficiency rate when it comes to cereals including fodder is merely 28%. According to calculations by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the cultivated area in Japan is only 4,760,000ha, while the land area outside Japan, which is cultivated for food production for this country amounts to 12,000,000ha, and a huge amount of transport costs (energy) also arise. Another calculation indicates that the amount of water resources used overseas for cereal production for Japan is approximately 48 billion tons, the amount which almost approaches the agricultural water use within Japan (56 billion tons). We can say that we are indirectly importing this amount of water from overseas as well. While a large amount of food is imported, at the expense of huge amount of overseas water resources and energy, it is said that 25% of the food is wasted during the process of marketing and individual consumption inside the country. When we think of today's food issues, we should think not only about securing the quantity and safety of food, but at the same time we should consider the relationship of our food security with the issue of global environmental conservation.

(By Zaitzu, after the farm survey in Miyakonojo, 2004)



**Cowshed of a cattle fattening farm**



**Italian rye production farm in winter**



**Storing fodder (rolled bale and silage)**