

## *Japan's agriculture and AAI*

### **Part 2: Report from producers – What we can see from the home delivery system of organic vegetables**

In recent years, we often see and hear the term “food safety and security.” There is a trend that more and more farmers are producing organic vegetables, aiming for safe and secure food. However, organic vegetable cultivation naturally requires a substantial amount of work and labour. This limits the size of cultivation areas and generally pushes up the prices compared with to the cost of ordinary vegetables. Despite the growing need for food safety and security, the production and distribution volume of organic vegetables remains extremely low. The small size of the organic vegetable market indicates the difficulty associated with organic vegetable production.

This time, we visited our former colleague Mr. K in Hitachi-ohta City in Ibaraki Prefecture, who is working on organic vegetable production. We also had an opportunity to meet with other residents in the area and exchange information and opinions. The participants in the meeting were involved in farming in many different ways. There were farmers - organic farmers, livestock farmers and part-time farmers. There was also agricultural cooperative and municipality office staff, as well as representatives of non-profit organizations (NPOs). Through this exchange meeting, we could meet an organic farming group, hear many interesting stories and even had a chance to work on their plots. Their organic farming group members are relatively young including members in their 20s, compared with the average age of surrounding farmers which is over 70. Instead of chemical fertilizers and insecticides, they use dung from livestock and chickens that is provided by neighboring dairy farmers. In many cases, they rent farming plots that are abandoned due to a lack of labor force, therefore farming plots tend to be scattered around, and their soil conditions differ. Many plots are small and therefore it is difficult to use machines. The products are directly delivered to customers found through private networks and also directly to their homes. Although the distribution volume is still quite small, it is steadily expanding (refer to the next page).

The producers are growing organic vegetables with high motivation, feeling a sense of crisis over Japan's troubled agriculture sector with problems such as safety of produce and a lack of successors in farming communities. However, they also face many problems. One of these is that their income from organic farming is not yet financially sufficient to sustain themselves and their families. In addition, perhaps due to the fact that many producers do not have prior farming experiences, there is room for improvement in cultivation techniques. Moreover, they have not sufficiently developed relationships with local administrations and agricultural cooperatives, due to their lack of local information. The AAI has accumulated a variety of experiences in agriculture and rural development projects through our support in developing countries. We wonder if it may be possible to make use of our experiences in supporting various programs overseas such as cultivation technique improvement for local farmers, livelihood enhancement programs, and training and extension activities, for the future of Japan's agriculture.

With this exchange as a trigger, we would like to continue exchange activities in different ways. Some of the possible activities are information exchanges through group mailing, promoting exchanges between city dwellers and farmers in collaboration with local NPOs, organization of events to introduce activities in developing countries, and participation in monthly meetings of organic farming groups. A more direct exchange could be to purchase their organic vegetables. There are also farmers nearby who are trying to produce vegetables with reduced levels of chemical fertilizers and insecticides aiming for safe products. We should also exchange information in order to develop a sustainable agricultural system based on resource circulation in the future. We think it is also important to work on the effective utilization of local resources through building groups and networks among neighboring farmers.



Farming areas and mountains in Hitachi-ohta City



Transplanting organic leeks



Dairy livestock that provides manure for organic farming