

## Mini Series: – Field Note from Visit to Farmers in Hamamatsu

Mr. S produces and sells broccoli and other vegetables grown in the field in Toyooka town, Kita Ward, Hamamatsu City. He quit work at a mail catalogue shopping company six years ago, established his company and entered into the agricultural business. His company now has five full-time employees and 15 part-time employees. As the company rents abandoned farming plots, over 30 farms are scattered around the area. The average size of the farms is approximately 30a and the total size of the farms is 12 hectares. The area is about 10 km from central Hamamatsu City, and the landscape is a matrix of farms, degraded lands and residential lands. With the proximity to the large Hamamatsu city with 800,000 people, the company can target the city as a main consumer. The chief clients are supermarkets, which account for 70% of the total shipment, and the remaining 30% is sold to agricultural cooperatives. Basically, the buyers are local supermarkets and cooperatives, and the company is extremely conscious about the “*chisan chisho* (local production for local consumption)” movement and is capitalizing on its products being fresh, safe and its low “food mileage” (the distance food travels between the producers and consumers). Agricultural cooperatives require vegetables to meet certain standards eg. size and other attributes. This necessitates expending a vast amount of energy. On the other hand, with the supermarkets, it is possible to include products outside the formal standard, adjusting packages by adding extra vegetables if they are small, resulting in less waste. It also reduces distribution cost. Still, the company is not planning to increase the business with supermarkets to 100 %, in order to keep a “buffer” against over production and to maintain its good relationship with agricultural cooperatives (JA).

Given that people are increasingly concerned about food safety and security, while, at the same time more agricultural land is being abandoned, Mr. S. thinks that agricultural business run by corporations has a great growth potential. The fact that he has come into this business from outside without a farming background while he has working experience in marketing techniques makes him very innovative. He sees that there is still a lot of room for reducing intermediate costs as well as for cultivating new markets. He can also see what producers should do to increase customer satisfaction from the view point of consumers. A key for his company’s growth is to expand its business scale. Another important challenge is to achieve efficiency in the production process through mechanization.

Going down the coastal terrace of Tenryu River, in Higashi-ward, Hamamatsu City, Mr. K grows muskmelons in green houses. His family has been producing melons since his parents’ generation and he has 20 years of experience in melon growing. There has been substantial residential development in this area, and his green houses are located in the middle of residential lands. There is no atmosphere of a typical farming village. In the 1,000 tsubo (3,306 m<sup>2</sup>) plot, eight green houses (300 tsubo or 991 m<sup>2</sup>) are standing. Planting is done every 10 days for different green houses, and there are series of green houses that have been just planted and those that are about to be harvested. There is no off-day for 365 days a year. The amazing thing is that each melon stump is hand watered with great care. A uniform dripping system is not desirable as there are subtle differences in water requirements depending on the exact position of stumps in each green house. For instance, stumps in the southern row will require different amounts and timing of water from those in the north row and differences emerge if the stumps are on the eastern or western sides of the rows. Much work is put into creating melons with a perfect “net” pattern on their skins. It seems to be more like art production rather than agricultural production. Each muskmelon can fetch a retail price of between 5,000 and 20,000 yen. This is an ultimate form of Japan’s horticultural business which add value to agricultural products through labor intensification.

According to Mr. K, one should not try to grow melons. One must nurture melons. Growing melons mean watering and applying fertilizers and pesticides when it suits farmers. Nurturing means that one judges what each melon needs by looking at its “face” and providing what it lacks. It took Mr. K ten years until he understood this. Artistic melons are created by such workmanship.



Broccoli farms of Mr. S



Broccoli waiting to be shipped in a cool room



Melon greenhouse of Mr. K