

## Agriculture and farmers in Kurdish region <Part 5>

### Iraqi farmers' characters and promotion of agriculture

As discussed in AAINews No. 70, Kurdish farmers are very open and kind, and warmly welcomed us although we were sudden visitors. The Kurdish people in general seem to have warm feelings for the Japanese people.

This open and kind nature of the Kurdish people is also felt in their farming activities but in a different way. In other words, many residents who were in farming seemed to have a very weak notion of profits. They almost never had a clear answer to our questions such as "how much is your profit?" and "how much do you produce?" Although many Kurdish residents are farmers, it seems difficult for many of them to sustain livelihoods from farming income alone. A rain-fed wheat farmer told me with a smile, "The rain was too variable this year and there is no hope for much of a harvest." We also often heard about getting a job with Peshmerga when farming income is not sufficient. Peshmerga is the traditional name for the army of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Many of the Kurdish farmers have large families. In addition to farming income, they sustain household economy with parents' pensions, non-farming incomes and income from their children brought in through various types of work. Many of the farmers supplement their income through temporary work with Peshmerga. It seems that the government is supporting farmers by offering such opportunities. Although I don't know the details, it seems that they can join the army easily.

On the other hand, in order to improve the unstable situation of agricultural production, the government is making a great effort with agricultural extension. According to extension officers, they conduct a number of extension activities, ranging from lectures targeting farmers, farm visits, and demonstration of farming methods and technologies at demonstration farms. However, the impacts of these efforts are feared to be not sufficient. I heard that extension methods are mainly through training at extension organizations and demonstration at farms. The target farmers tend to be those who are in leadership positions, and information tends not to reach small scale farmers. We also could not find any agricultural extension materials such as pamphlets and cultivation manuals in farmers' houses.

According to the discussion with the Kurdish extension organizations, it seems that the contents of lectures are totally up to the discretion of the lecturers. Lecture materials are not kept at the extension organization. Given that some farmers are illiterate, it is necessary to develop extension materials and establish a distribution system.

Under these circumstances, extension activities conducted by farming material companies seem to play an important role. We introduced in the past the cases whereby farming material companies offer some new technology to farmers when they sell materials. There seems to be a form of cooperation in part between the seller and user of the materials. We also heard that greenhouse material sales shops were planning to develop a cultivation guidance manual. In addition, they offer machinery and equipment that is necessary for new crop production to farmers who don't have financial resources to purchase them. In return, their farms work as demonstration farms to advertise the companies and their machinery.

Another example is related to vegetable cultivation extension activities supported by an NGO. The NGO provided materials and employed local farming technicians and requested the participation of local farmers. Farmers provide a certain amount of their labor for sustaining the farming plot, and divide profits from the harvests. According to the NGO staff, the biggest difficulty they had was to persuade the elders to participate. Young people participate in this kind of joint work relatively readily, but for the elderly, it is difficult for them to understand this kind of cooperative cultivation. However, I believe this kind of effort is a good example for future extension activity.

In recent years, research organizations that only had a limited amount of involvement in extension activities, are now actively participating in extension activities. It is important for research organizations which promote cultivation techniques to be fully involved in extension work. However, extension work and research activities have different viewpoints. Therefore it is important to support bridging of the two kinds of activities. We hope to continue to support the warm and friendly people in their quest to be self-sufficient farmers in the bread basket of the Kurdish region in Iraq.



NGO cultivation activities in a mountainous area



Hearing from fruit farmers



Farmers in traditional costume