

How to compose study tour for training <Part 3>

Case study

Study tour in the vegetable course

The curriculum of the vegetable cultivation technology of JICA Tsukuba course (hereinafter referred to as "vegetable course") consists of about 60% practical training, 25% of lectures and 15% of field visits. Although the percentage of field visits is relatively low, the purpose of the training can be covered by combining several tours and day trips, because it is a rather long-term training course of nine months. Even during the training period, it is possible to flexibly arrange visiting destinations according to the demands and necessities of the participants, which is another advantage of the course.

We often visit farmers on a study tour. We can learn not only practical aspects of cultivation techniques, but also hear interesting stories from the farmers on topics such as cropping patterns, farming planning, farm management and risk management. During the visits, generally participants ask questions to the farmer, and he/she answers the questions accordingly, so it is effective to encourage participants to prepare adequate questions for the farmer in advance. We often ask for cooperation from agricultural cooperatives or extension offices, in order to find a reliable farmer in the area to be visited.

Many diverse ways of farm management have evolved in recent years. There are multi-product cultivation farmers with small outputs who deal with direct sales shops. There are organic farmers. And corporate type of farming is also common these days. It is quite meaningful for participants to learn such various styles of farming. On the other hand, it is important to share with target farmers and participants about the purpose of the visit more concretely before the visit. This could be cultivation technology, the concept of marketing or farming, or the process that has led to current farming styles. It is rather difficult to find desirable farmers to meet the purpose through agricultural cooperatives or extension offices, so it is necessary to gather information individually by the organizer of a study tour.

Since most participants in the vegetable course are researchers or extension workers in their own country, it is a valuable experience to visit Japanese research centers and extension offices and learn their roles and specific activities. In addition, collaboration between research centers and extension offices is highly evaluated as a good example of "how our country can replicate" methods in fields such as how needs of farmers can be utilized for experimental research.

Agricultural cooperatives are an important destination to learn about agriculture in Japan. The system of Japanese agricultural cooperatives and designated-production areas is highly developed and is expected to be useful for participants to imagine future shapes/systems and activities that they can aim for in their own countries. Furthermore, in the vegetable course, participants have an opportunity to listen from a veteran officer at a cooperative farming center about the history of the formation of agricultural cooperatives and production areas. The story told by the veteran, who was a farmer's son, was very attractive and empathic to participants. His story started like this; a broker came directly to a farmer's garden and bought vegetables at a cheap price. In later years the father borrowed a truck with a fellow farmer and transported products directly to the market. When the son started to work at a cooperative office, he calculated profit sharing of collective selling with handwritten slips and an abacus until late every day. This and others like it are all true stories behind the development of agricultural cooperatives, and they attract participants' interest.

In addition to the above, we have newly developed various fascinating visiting sites, such as an agricultural sales corporation that connects direct sales shops with its own network, an administrative system responsible for ensuring safety of agricultural products, a women's group dealing with traditional vegetables production/ so-called sextiary sector development (diversified development of primary sector)/ agro-tourism, and JGAP farms. While new visiting sites could bring fresh knowledge to the course, required findings may not always be obtained as expected. In such cases, we always try to identify the cause in order to make use of the experience for the next time.

In this way, the vegetable course maintains relations with visiting sites carefully for many years, but the sites are reviewed each year based on the purpose of the training course and needs/requirements of the participants. We think that such trial and error is necessary to compose a better study tour.



Visiting a tomato farmer: participants asking about farming policy after observing procedures in the field.