

AAINews

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Practical Session at a Farm in Hasaki (Training Course on Vegetable Cultivation Technology)

At the JICA Tsukuba International Center, the curriculum for the training course on vegetable cultivation technology II is designed to achieve a number of objectives through a series of lectures and practical sessions. The practical sessions are designed to help the participants acquire knowledge of high yield/quality cultivation and seed production techniques, which enable farmers to follow environmentally friendly farming practices. Another objective is for the participants to gain good understanding on the activities of agricultural cooperatives and research centers as well as agricultural extension organizations. The curriculum includes visits to farmers, however, it is difficult for the participants to understand cultivation techniques which farmers have acquired through their individual experiences and learn the critical points of various practical techniques. Therefore, we decided to include a practical session at working farms, which provide an opportunity to experience farming activities and farming livelihood at the same time. This practical session enables the participants to further their understanding on how what they learned during the course is applied in reality, through their first hand experiences of technique applications that are the backbone of sustainable farming.

In selecting farmers for the practical session, we focused on green house cultivation farmers so that the practical activities would not be influenced by the weather. We also considered areas with easy communication. With these criteria in mind, we contacted the Hasaki Branch Office of JA Shiosai, which is officially designated as production center for green peppers and host farmers were selected. We explained to the staff at the center about our plan regarding the objectives of the practical session, and after detailed consultation with the officers at the Hasaki division, we decided to hold two-days practical session. JA Shiosai Hasaki district had experience in receiving agricultural trainees from China, however, it was the first time to receive JICA trainees. Therefore, in order to reduce the burden on the part of the host farmers, accommodation and meals were arranged by us. However, we asked the farmers to let the participants take meals at their house. In addition, an AAI staff member accompanied each of the three groups as interpreter to assist with the language barrier, which was considered the biggest problem.

The farmers who accepted the participants were active farmers who were also playing an official role at the Hasaki division. Many have participated in study trips to visit farms overseas. Some have prior experience in accepting trainees such as extension officers or students, and had agricultural trainees from China as employees. The JICA participants joined the farmers from 8:00 in the morning until 8:00 in the evening, and participated in various forms of work ranging from harvesting, selecting and boxing green peppers, to pruning and training. The host farmers actively worked on the participants, showing them various work methods and techniques. In addition, between operations, the farmers told the participants about their philosophies and the realities associated with various farming techniques. During lunch and dinner, the farmers also told the participants about their farming lives over generations. Participants were also asking questions related to farmers' families, as well as telling the host farmers about lives in their own countries.

According to the questionnaire survey with host farmers after the training session, all the three host farmers highly appreciated the practical session and provided the following constructive opinions;

- As this was the first session, we were little worried in the beginning. However, we gained valuable experience in understanding the issues people are facing in the participants' countries.
- Through discussion with the participants, we realized the importance of our farming activities and of sharing our works and experiences.
- The 1.5-day session was rather short and it can be possible to extend it to 2-3 days. In order to enhance exchange with participants, it would be meaningful to create opportunities for the participants to interact with children.
- In this practical session, we could have quite a lot of time for discussing as there were limited field works due to cultivation schedule. However, it is doubtful that we could make effective use of our time without an interpreter, and therefore we are very grateful for our interpreter's presence and assistance.

All the participants were very satisfied with the practical session, however, many commented that it could have been longer than two days. It is considered that practical sessions with farmers serve as an effective method for maximizing training impact. In addition, we should not overlook the positive benefit to the hosts of the practical sessions.



Green Pepper Harvest



Transporting the Harvest



Practical Session at Sorting Facility