

Starting Support Activities for Farmers in Ushimado, Okayama

We tried to brainstorm on the subject, digging up information and knowledge from agricultural fields in Japan, to explore ways to utilize this knowledge in overseas assistance, and to explore how AAI could support Japanese agriculture.

As part of AAI's effort to support domestic agriculture we have been discussing the issues surrounding the activities of community producer groups and collaboration between regions with farmers in Ushimado, Setouchi City, Okayama. We introduced this in the series. As with many other farming villages, the Ushimado area is facing the challenge of an aging population and a shortage of successors and as a result abandoned farmland is on the increase. This said, some new young farmers have arrived in Ushimado. We visited Ushimado to meet them, experienced farming work with them and discussed and recorded various challenges they face in the local farming scene. Our participation in the symposium "Serious Talk About Agriculture" organized by the Ushimado community organization "Association of Agriculture for the Future" in 2008 and 2009 proved really helpful for our activities.

Symposium-2010 was held on the grounds of the Kouboji Temple and its main theme was "The Succession Problem and Newly Incoming Farmers". It was attended by around 60 people including farmers, students, teachers, extension officers, government officials and people from the private sector. There were presentations made by them followed by question and answer sessions. New farmers explained their motivations for entering farming and talked about the current farming situation. The students made presentations on agricultural policies, community involvement in reservoir utilization, and reported on their research into students' attitudes towards farming as a profession. Researchers made a presentation on current issues related to agricultural policy and the use

of media for the promotion of agriculture. The private sector reported on their efforts to enter into new fields in agriculture, and active discussions took place. In particular, the presentations from the young farmers were very realistic and practical, stating their reasons for becoming farmers, their enthusiasm and also the difficulties they faced. Many of the students had been participating in an on-site training program prior to the symposium, and therefore there were a lot of animated discussions about the hardships and joys of farming and about the future potential for agriculture as a profession.

An ex-AAI employee, engaged in organic vegetable production in Ushimado, supported our efforts to collaborate with the local farming community. As an achievement of our exchanges with him and his colleagues, and as a result of our participation in the symposiums, AAI established a training center called "Ayn" jointly with the association. Ayn has two rooms for over-night stays, a storage room and a meeting room equipped with a computer and projector for presentations. Our intention is that Ayn will offer a place for meetings and informal gatherings for farmers in the area and accommodation for participants on training sessions, as well as to be used as a base for our activities within Japan. We hope to further consolidate the facility and continue to use it in order to promote our exchanges with the community.

The establishment of Ayn marked the start of a new phase of AAI's activities. We also consider it as an achievement of our work to be involved in Japan's agricultural development. For we, who have a limited chance to be involved in actual farming activities on site, the use of this training center provides us with opportunities to stay in touch with the reality of agriculture in Japan. It is also an important place for our own training, our exchanges with farmers and for thinking about the challenges Japan's agriculture faces. It is perhaps a small initiative. However we hope to make it a big step towards the success of our future activities.



The Ushimado Training Center known as "Ayn" (logo top left)



Inside the facility of the training center Ayn



At the "Serious Talk about Agriculture!" symposium