

Visiting the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms

We have already visited Ushimado, Okayama Prefecture and Satomi, Ibaraki Prefecture to explore possible ways to increase AAI's involvement in Japan's agriculture. This time, we could visit the agribusiness company Nanairo (seven colors) Farm Pty. Ltd, which is run in a system that was new to us. The Nanairo Farm grows organic vegetables in 2-ha farming plots located in Yamato and Ayase, in the central part of Kanagawa Prefecture. Currently, the farm is run by seven staff dealing with everything from clerical business to farming work. The representative, Mr. Katayanagi started farming when he was 45 after running a family business upon graduating from university. After repeated trials and errors he finally came to the business model known as CSA.

CSA is an agricultural business model based on membership, often translated as "agriculture underpinned by communities" or "community supported type agriculture". In CSA farms, local residents become members of the farm, paying a certain amount to the farm in membership fees. The farms are run with these fees. Because farmers can access cash before planting, uninfluenced by unpredictable yields and transitional period, it makes it possible for them to have a stable business. Another key characteristic of the CSA is that some members want to be actively involved in farming and they participate in farming activities and distribution and shipping work after harvest as core members or volunteers, forming communities centered on agricultural. Presently, all the shipping work at the Nanairo Farm is done by volunteers. While we were listening to Mr. Katayanagi's explanation at the farm, some staff and members were busy with shipping and distribution related work. At the end of the work, everybody gathered to have lunch together. Mr. Katayanagi said that a community is something that is formed by people who gather because of mutual interest and joint activities.

The Nanairo Farm's community originates from local currency communities. Local currency is a currency traded only in a specific area. Such currencies are often distributed as rewards for local community activities including volunteer activities, and are considered to be useful for promoting community work. In the case of the

Nanairo Farm, its predecessor Toratanu Farm which produced flower seedlings was part of the local currency system. This existing local currency community, which was already acting as the core of the community activities, became a trigger for the CSA farms.

In addition to the already existing communities, the Nanairo Farm has developed a mailing list and dispatches information from the farm on a daily basis to the registered members, reporting on the work and any happenings on the farm. Those who wish to, can participate in the farming work. The members are not merely treated as clients. Rather the farm is making efforts to make people become interested in farming. By raising awareness of the consumers about the cultivation scene, they are trying to change the consumers' perceptions and understanding and expand the circle of communities. Formation of communities involving consumers, as in this example, may be possible because the farm is close to the cities and towns where consumers are living. However, the activity is interesting in that there is no division between the producers and consumers. It is about the formation of a community centered around local farming activities.

The current situation surrounding Japan's agriculture is difficult. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the average annual income of open field vegetable farmers from farming was 1.77 million yen in 2009. This is significantly lower than the average income of company employees. The Nanairo Farm's effort is characterized as trying to maintain farming under the difficult conditions in Japan, jointly with producers and all the members. Moreover, a "Farmer's Market" which sells surplus products is an important activity of the Nanaimo Farm. The Farm is eyeing the possibility of expanding the business scale using the government's various subsidy systems to become the "6th industry" (agricultural business form with diversified business components from agricultural production, processing, shipment and distribution, including the possibility for export and other outlet development). The Nanairo Farm is located close to the AAI office and we hope that there will be future opportunities for collaboration.



Seven color farm shipping and transportation centre



Vegetables on sale at the shipping centre



Listening to Mr. Katayanagi's explanation at the farm