

JICA Tsukuba's challenge: exploring vegetable marketing training methods

In developing countries, information on techniques to increase productivity of agriculture is limited. In addition, even though production is expected to meet market needs for increasing incomes, one cannot say that there is sufficient effort to nurture extension workers who can provide sufficient and appropriate levels of support to farmers. It is urgent to nurture human resources that can play a leading role in agricultural development. With this background, a marketing method module was added to the Group Training Course on Vegetable Cultivation Technology for Small Scale Farmers at JICA Tsukuba. The year of 2013 is the first year of the marketing method module and we would like to introduce the progress here.

We explained that Japan's vegetable cultivation technologies are based on market needs, and aim to increase business sustainability by providing product which responds to the needs of various customers with different demands. In addition to promoting vegetable cultivation technologies for different families of vegetables, the marketing method module included a field survey at a large scale supermarket to find out the reality of vegetable sales at retail points. This field survey aimed to show examples of how appropriate technologies have been developed directly responding to market needs.



Survey on vegetable sales

Participants conducted visits to farmers from April as they planted cabbage, potato and tomato. In these visits, they learned vegetable cultivation techniques on farms, and enhanced their understanding on how agricultural cooperatives work – how their shipping section keeps vegetables fresh, and how they promote sales and marketing. Then, we conducted visits to a public wholesale market, which is a major distribution point. In this visit the participants increased their understanding of the functions and roles of public markets in relation to distribution of goods to consumers, and on health and hygiene inspections to ensure safety and security of product. The participants also visited roadside farmers' markets which are one of the existing sales channels, learning about various sales promotion methods (product lines, pricing, packaging and display methods).



Kobe city's public wholesale market

The training course was designed to enable participants to learn how to understand market needs, product distribution, price setting methods, sales and farming business management methods. With regards to

marketing, it is possible to communicate basic points through lectures and visits, however for participants who have little experience with actually cultivating and selling vegetables, what we teach tends to remain theoretical. Therefore we also conducted a "direct sales practical session" providing the participants either the opportunity to learn from first-hand experiences.

Items sold at the direct sales market were cabbage, potato, onion, sweet corn and tomato, which were all produced by the participants. The sales were conducted in late June. Participants calculated the production cost, and determined direct sales price conforming with the price trends at the public market. They measured the weight of vegetables and packaged them in sales units. Furthermore, in order to promote sales, they created vegetable exhibits and information displays that explained the features of the vegetables. They prepared sales talks about the vegetables they cultivated for customers, creating a memo based on their advanced research on cultivation and cooking methods, rehearsing the talks in advance.

Many comments were heard from the participants after the direct sales session: "I could understand the consumers' view point about seeking safe vegetables." "My main duty at work is research and testing, but I felt that it was very important to understand consumer needs when developing vegetable production technologies that lead to producers' benefits." "Calculation of production costs and a method for determining sales prices are very useful for my work."



Attracting customers by wearing red polo shirt to promote tomato

At the end, we introduced marketing related activities that are currently under way in developing countries through JICA technical cooperation program. We asked the participants to analyze the case studies using the 4P framework (Product, Place, Price and Promotion) which is a key marketing concept. Through these activities, the participants could deepen their understanding on information collection and sales promotion activities that should be conducted before and after production, and development of vegetable cultivation technologies that respond to their own country's market needs to increase farmers' incomes. We hope that this will enable the participants to be able to utilize the 4P view points in their work in a balanced fashion and to take a leading role in guiding the farmers in their daily work.



Analysis of project cases using the 4P framework

(By Hasegawa, November 2013)