Chapter 3 Efforts toward Revitalization of Rural Areas

(1) Current state of rural areas and farming communities

○ Prefecture-by-prefecture population changes

Prefecture-by-prefecture population changes from 2005 to 2010 indicate population growth in nine prefectures and accelerated drops in rural prefectures. Population drops are particularly large in Akita, Aomori and Kochi.

Future regional population estimates indicate that population in the three metropolitan regions in 2035 may fall to 92% of the 2005 level, with the aged population rate rising from 18% to 32%. Population in rural regions is estimated to decline to 81% of the 2005 level, with the aged population rate rising from 22% to 35%.


Notes: 1) Population represents an index based on 100 for 2005.
2) The three metropolitan regions are the Tokyo region (Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefectures), the Nagoya region (Gifu, Aichi and Mie Prefectures) and the Osaka region (Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo and Nara Prefectures). Rural regions cover prefectures excluding those in the three metropolitan regions.
Problems and fears regarding rural life

As rural population declines and ages, farmers cite such life-related problems as abandoned cultivated land, farmland care, wildlife damage, employment and emergency medical services. Under the situation, a decline in community functions and depopulation are seen for some rural communities.

Current status of rural areas as seen by consumers

Regarding the current status of agriculture and rural areas, on average, 29% of consumers see worn-out farms and vacated houses as conspicuous. The percentage is higher for Tohoku, Chugoku/Shikoku and Kyushu.

Source: MAFF, “Survey on Consciousness/Intentions about Sustainable Use of Food, Agriculture, Rural Area and Fisheries Resources,” released in May 2011
Notes: 1) A questionnaire survey covering 2,000 farming monitors (response rate at 81.4%)
2) Respondents were asked to select and rank their five largest problems or fears regarding rural life over the next decade. Each figure in the graph is the total number of respondents giving first to fifth rankings for each problem.

Source: MAFF, “Survey on Consciousness/Intentions about Sustainable Use of Food, Agriculture, Rural Area and Fisheries Resources,” released in May 2011
Notes: 1) A questionnaire survey covering 1,800 consumer monitors (response rate at 90.3%)
2) Survey targets regarding this question were 1,166 persons who live or return to their home in areas other than specified cities in the three major metropolitan regions, ordinance-designated major cities and prefectural capitals.
3) Kanto includes Yamanashi, Nagano and Shizuoka prefectures.
Organization of agricultural associations and community meetings

Of all rural communities in Japan, those with agricultural associations, the most basic organizations for agricultural production, accounted for 73% in 2010. Those where community meetings are held accounted for 93%. Each percentage declined 6 points from a decade earlier.

Topics taken up frequently at community meetings include “agricultural community event plans and promotion,” “environmental beautification and natural environment conservation,” and “management of farm roads, agricultural irrigation and drainage channels, and irrigation reservoirs.”

Urban residents’ consciousness about the roles of rural areas

Many urban residents have recognized the importance of rural areas’ multifunctional roles (including food production, environmental conservation, living space provision and education).

Urban residents’ opinions on maintenance of rural communities

Many urban residents believe that rural communities in hilly and mountainous areas, which are difficult to maintain, should be conserved. Efforts to maintain and invigorate rural communities should be promoted further.

Source: Cabinet Office, “Survey on Roles of Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas” (released in November 2008)
Notes: 1) The survey covered 5,000 people aged 20 or more throughout Japan (response rate at 62.9%).
2) Urban region resident monitors were sampled.

Source: MAFF, “Census of Agriculture and Forestry” (2010)

Source: MAFF, “Survey on Consciousness about Rural Areas” (released in February 2011)
Note: The questionnaire survey targeted urban residents (1,081 respondents).
(2) Efforts to conserve local resources in rural areas

- Achievements of the program for direct payments to hilly and mountainous areas

At the end of FY2009, 28,765 agreements under the system existed to cover 664,000 hectares in agricultural land, contributing to the conservation of national land and the invigoration of rural communities.

- Achievements of the measures to Conserve and Improve Land, Water and the Environment

At the end of FY2009, a total of 19,154 organizations were implementing measures to conserve 1.43 million hectares in agricultural land in Japan. These measures are effective for conserving and improving regional environments and invigorating regional communities.

(3) Animal damage prevention efforts

- Crop damage by wild animals

Crop damage by wild animals in Japan has remained at around 20 billion yen. Such damage by beasts has followed an upward trend over the recent years. Crop damage by beasts has been serious in such regions as Hokkaido, Kyushu and Kanto/Tosan.

Regional communities should be united to make arrangements for preventing animal damage. Such measures as the establishment of buffer zones between humans and animals should be implemented comprehensively.

(Changes in crop damage by wild animals) (Region-by-region crop damage by wild animals (2009))
(4) Roles of urban agriculture

○ Suspected roles and functions of urban agriculture

Urban agriculture plays great roles in supplying fresh, safe farm products and providing a place for exchange and relief, as recognized by urban residents. In future, further efforts are required for developing allotment gardens and urban residents’ farming experiences.

Tokyo residents’ willingness to experience farming

Those willing to experience farming account for about 60% of urban (Tokyo) residents. Younger people are more willing to do so.

Changes allotment gardens

The number of allotment gardens has increased year by year in Japan, standing at 3,596 at the end of FY2009. Particularly, the increase has been remarkable in urban regions. However, supply shortages are seen in greater cities where competition for allotment gardens is fiercer.
(5) Efforts for exchanges between urban and rural residents

Diverse patterns of exchanges between urban and rural regions

Patterns of exchanges between urban and rural regions range widely from short stays for green tourism (stays for recreation in rural areas) to living in both urban and rural regions, and permanent settlement in rural areas.

Exchanges between urban and rural residents

Permanent settlement | Living in both urban and rural areas | Short stays

Green tourism

- Farm inns
  - Farm stays
  - Experience-oriented school trips
  - Farming experiences
  - Local food materials, food education
- Farm stands
- Tourist farms
- Allotment gardens for stayers
- Farming-support volunteers (working holidays)
- Nature experiences, recreation

Purposes of exchanges
- Public facilities
- Local food materials, food education

Source: Prepared by MAFF

Activities urban residents want to implement in rural areas (multiple answers are allowed)

Frequently cited activities that urban residents want to implement include visiting farm stands, visiting farm restaurants, nature experiences and recreation, visiting tourist farms and staying at farm inns. Based on these needs, we must promote exchanges between urban and rural regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting farm stands</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting farm restaurants</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature experiences and recreation</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting tourist farms</td>
<td>25.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staying at farm inns</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping home or relative farming households</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming experiences</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term (several days) stays</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience-oriented school trips for children</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using allotment gardens for stayers</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MAFF, “Survey on Requests Regarding Rural Areas” (released in February 2011)
Note: An Internet survey targeting urban residents (1,081 respondents)

Changes in lodgers at green tourism facilities and in farm inns

The number of farm inns in 2010 increased to 2,006 in Japan. The number of lodgers at green tourism facilities has increased year by year, standing at 8.48 million in FY2009.

Source: MAFF, “Census of Agriculture and Forestry,” MAFF surveys
(6) Developing bonds between food and local communities

- **Efforts by multiple entities to revitalize the vigor of “food” and “rural communities”**
  
  While rural communities as the foundation of agriculture, forestry and fisheries have lost their vigor, some regions have promoted efforts to invigorate local communities through exchanges between urban and rural regions based on bonds among farmers, consumers and business operators. These efforts should be promoted on a nationwide basis.

1. **Efforts led by local residents, farmers, local councils or industry-government collaboration organizations**
   - **Urahoro Town, Hokkaido Prefecture**
     In order to lead children to become confident and proud of their communities, the Urahoro Style Promotion Council implements lessons at elementary and junior high schools where children experience rural lives and make town-building proposals. Their proposals are implemented with help provided by adults.
   - **Shima City, Mie Prefecture**
     The Shima Isobue Kai association has created the Kirari (twinkling) Recipe for Shima local dishes in cooperation with divers and fishermen. It has also developed “Shinju Tekone Sushi” using pearl shell scallops, and original dishes using sea lettuce in a bid to invigorate the regional economy.
   - **Gokase Town, Miyazaki Prefecture**
     The Yuhinosato Zukuri promotion council has implemented local development programs taking advantage of local landscapes for exchanges with urban residents. It implements tours and events for urban residents, accepts educational tours from abroad and manages the Yuhinosato Bussankan shop for selling local indigenous products.

2. **Efforts led by agricultural cooperatives, fishery cooperatives, or agricultural producers' cooperative corporations**
   - **Kurayoshi City, Tottori Prefecture**
     The Tottori Central Agricultural Cooperative has opened the “Agri Kids School” for learning through agricultural experiences in a bid to allow children to recognize the importance of agriculture, love home towns and nurture rich spirits. It has been expanding school activities in cooperation with senior high school students serving as assistant instructors.

3. **Efforts led by universities, specified nonprofit corporations or foundations**
   - **Izumisano City, Osaka Prefecture**
     The Izumisano Town Green Association has opened a market to promote understanding about agriculture, forestry and fisheries, step up exchanges between urban and rural residents and improve the food self-sufficiency ratio. It has also tackled a resources-recycling business to contribute to environmental conservation by feeding cattle with wild grass to lower production and management costs.

4. **Efforts led by enterprises**
   - **Murayama City, Yamagata Prefecture**
     Kunitachifarm Girls Farm has implemented an agriculture experience program that targets women university students and focuses on dialogue between women in their 20’s, leading participants to change their images of and consciousness about agriculture. It has also taken advantage of women’s sensitivity to produce confectionery using imperfect vegetables.
   - **Nagano City, Nagano Prefecture**
     Tanpopo Inc. processes and sells local farm products grown by women farmers, handles parcels for sending products to remote customers and undertakes biweekly lunch delivery services for elderly people. Its activities have prompted spouses of Tanpopo members to produce wine using idle farmlands.

Sources: MAFF surveys