

Analysis of rural communities

Census analysis team of the project on the structure of the agricultural industry and rural regions

Decline in the rate of communities that implemented collaborative activities due to scale-down

In 2020, the number of rural communities nationwide has reached 138,243, which indicates a decrease of only 13 communities since 2015. However, the national average (median) of farm households per community has decreased to nine households; in mountainous farming areas, the average has decreased to six. The fact that the scale of rural communities is decreasing leads to concerns about declines in the functions and activities of rural communities.

Thus, the study focuses on community gathering and tackle one of the most popular topics of this gathering, that is, *environmental protection and nature preservation*. We compare the implementation of the activities of rural communities on the topic according to the type of agricultural area. The table 1 demonstrates that the percentage of rural communities that report the lack of implementation of activities in urban and mountainous farming areas is higher than those for other types of agricultural area in the year 2020, which has increased since 2015. In addition, with regard to the rate of joint implementation (i.e., the percentage of communities that collaborated with other rural communities out of the rural communities that conducted activities) in 2020, the rate in mountainous farming areas decreased by five percentage points from 2015 to 26.5%, which is the lowest among the types of agricultural area. Examining the proportion of rural communities that report that it was a topic in community gatherings, but activities were not conducted, which is the newly surveyed item for 2020, it was slightly higher at 3.6% for urban and mountainous farming areas compared with those of the other areas.

Table 1. Ratio of communities according to the implementation of environmental protection and nature conservation activities

		Activities conducted at the local level			No activities conducted		
		By a single rural community	Jointly with other rural communities	Joint implementation rate		It was the topic of the community gatherings	
Nationwide	2015	56.1%	25.2%	31.0%	18.7%	–	
	2020	57.3%	22.6%	28.2%	20.1%	3.2%	
Classification of agricultural areas	Urban areas	2015	50.4%	23.2%	31.5%	26.4%	–
		2020	50.5%	20.7%	29.1%	28.7%	3.6%
	Flat farming areas	2015	61.4%	24.2%	28.3%	14.4%	–
		2020	61.6%	24.8%	28.7%	13.6%	2.5%
	Hilly farming areas	2015	56.7%	26.9%	32.2%	16.4%	–
		2020	58.9%	23.3%	28.4%	17.7%	3.3%
	Mountainous farming areas	2015	54.6%	25.3%	31.7%	20.1%	–
		2020	56.5%	20.4%	26.5%	23.1%	3.6%

Source: Independently compiled from the Census of Agriculture and Forestry.

Note: (1) The rural communities analyzed were 137,017 communities that were continuously consistent in the 2015 and 2020 surveys (excluding communities whose names did not match).

(2) The number of rural communities by agricultural area type is based on the classification of agricultural areas, which was revised in December 2017.

(3) Joint implementation rate refers to the percentage of communities in which activities are conducted in collaboration with other rural communities out of those that conducted activities.

(4) "It was the topic of the community gatherings" refers to the percentage of communities that did not conduct activities, although these activities became a topic during community gatherings.

Small-scale communities maintain local resource conservation activities in collaboration with other communities

We then examine conservation activities related to local resources (e.g., farmlands; agricultural drainage channels; forests; rivers and waterways; irrigation ponds; and lakes). Out of rural communities with local resources, the percentage of those that conducted conservation activities for any local resource has increased since 2010, and the percentage of activities related to agricultural drainage channels in 2020 was the highest for local resources, which exceeds 80%. In addition, in terms of collaborative conservation, which has been surveyed since 2015, we compare the joint conservation rates for 2015 and 2020 (the ratio of rural communities in collaboration with other communities out of those that conserve local resources). The result indicates a slight decrease in farmland and an increase in other local resources. Against this background of support for activities with wider area across communities under the Japanese agricultural direct payment system, the study infers that collaborative activities for the conservation of local resources are increasing.

The figure 1 illustrates the relationship between conservation activities related to agricultural drainage channels and community scale (number of farm households per community). In 2020, the percentage of communities with 10 or more farm households reached nearly 90%, while that with four or less farm households reached approximately 60%. In addition, for joint conservation rate (blue italics in the figure 1), communities with four or less farm households and five to nine farm households obtained the highest rate at 49.2%. As the community scale becomes smaller, the proportion of rural communities that implement conservation activities decreases, while the joint conservation rate increases. This result indicates that small-scale communities maintain conservation activities for local resources through collaboration with other communities.

(Analysis by HIRAKATA Kazuyo)

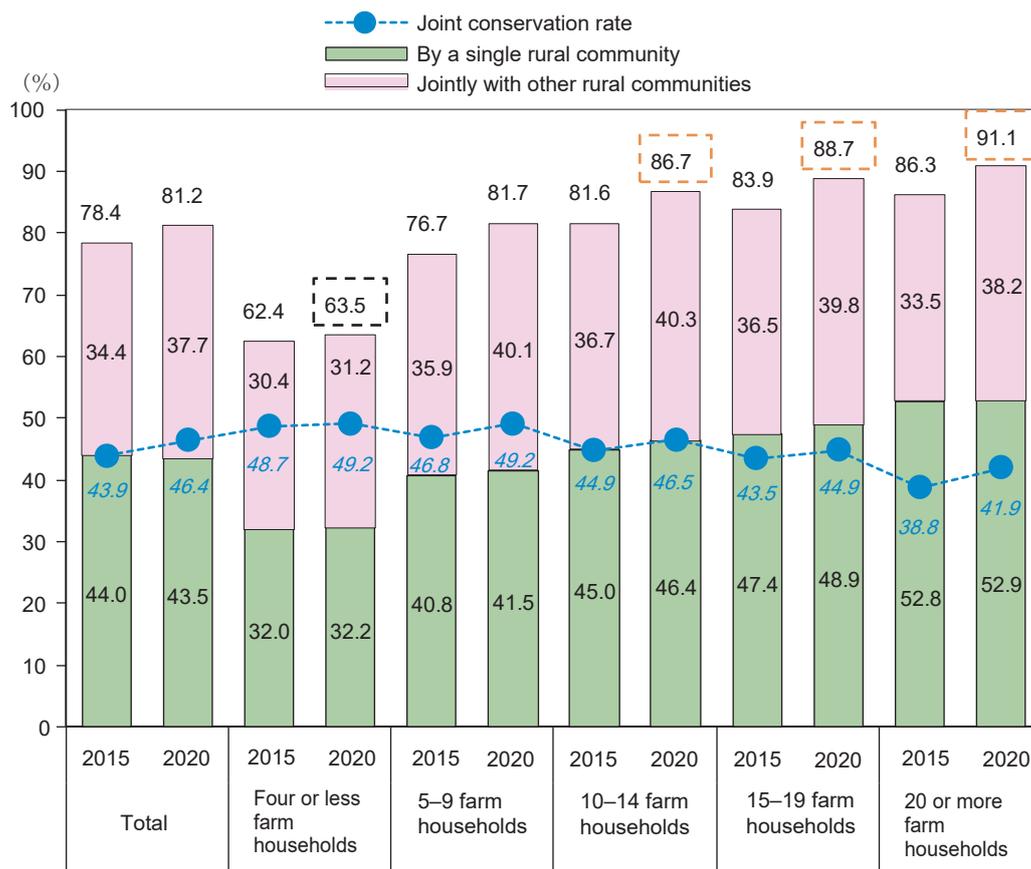


Figure 1. Ratio of communities that conserve agricultural drainage channels according to the number of farm household per community

Source: Independently compiled from the Census of Agriculture and Forestry.

Note: (1) The rural communities analyzed were 137,017 communities that were continuously consistent in the 2015 and 2020 surveys (excluding communities whose names did not match).

(2) Joint conservation rate refers to the percentage of rural communities that conserve local resources in collaboration with other rural communities.