Respondent: Shibata san

Date and time: 6 March, 2019, 1pm

Q: Interviewer; A: interviewee

Q: When did you start farming?

A: Around five years ago…more than 20 years he moved here, he came to Tokamachi 7 years ago. He didn’t mean to involve in farming, it wasn’t in his plan, but he started 5 years ago.

Q: When did he move here?

A: He likes somebody who lives in here…he met somebody who was having such a nice life in this mountain, he really admired and was inspired by that person, kind of like fell in love humanly, it is through his job that he met that guy, that was the main reason he actually moved to this place. When he was in the Forestry Association where he was working a logger, he met that guy. He was in Matsunoyama, after the Earthquake that guy moved away, but that guy actually made him think about moving and having a life here in Matsunoyama.

Q: When did he start farming?

A: He had a blurred vision about having a life in the countryside at first, he wanted to have some places where people could gather around, like guesthouse maybe, but that was a blurred idea. When he saw the field of the holy basil, it was something really impressed him so much, this is the reason he started it. He happened to meet a family who was living in Nagano Prefecture, he was about to join the native American ceremony, but he happened to stop by the house, the family was growing holy basil, the view of having the holy basil in front of their house and there was a very beautiful mountain behind their house, he was just shocked by the view, it was just so beautiful. He asked, ‘what is that beautiful purple flower?’, and that was the holy basil, he began to think that maybe he wanted to have that view in front of his house too. In this Prefecture, there is also a beautiful mountain view here, so he could have the same view here with his own holy basil flowers from his house.

A: He didn’t know that the holy basil could be a tea, it is just the purple flowers he met, he had no idea that it could make a tea. It was just the flower for him at first, then somebody offered him to try the holy basil tea, it was so good, that’s how he figured it out. He looked up what holy basil is, he figured out it could be medicine, it is really good to the body, like super herb. Yanaga san happened to have the seed, Shibata san asked him for some seeds and he started growing it, somehow the farm expanded and became a holy basil farmer.

Q: Where did his grow the holy basil? Is it just outside of his house?

A: In front of his house and five or six pieces of small farmland in this region. In total, it is around 10m x 10m.

Q: Are they originally rice fields?

A: Some of them used to be rice fields, some of them is just abandoned.

Q: How would you describe your farming characteristics?

A: It is a basic thing that he does not use any fertilizers and chemicals, he thinks that the most important thing in his farming is to get people involved with him, like having people farming together in his farm, it is the most important thing in his farming. He also mentioned that he is only a beginner in farming, but what he thinks the most important thing in his farming is to get people involved. I think that’s why he is doing all those harvesting, planting activities on Facebook.

Q: Are there any challenges he faced in his farming?

A: It is about the skills to grow the crop properly, right now climate change is serious, something abnormal thing comes each season, like typhoon coming all of a sudden, dry summer, too much rain suddenly. Considering all the environmental problems and climate change, he thinks that he needs to be more skilled to keep growing the holy basil. That’s the challenge he is facing, and it will persist in the future because of climate change. Sales is not a big problem for him because he knows how he grew the holy basil, so he can communicate the love and how he took care of them to people. If people understand it, they will buy his products and … as we are doing right now, we just feel so good about the tea. If people understand it, they will buy it, he is not so worried about the sales, it is not challenging. The challenge is really about how to make sure a stable harvest of the holy basil with same quality.

Q: Usually how does he promote the messages to his customers? He would he frame the products?

A: What he does is that when he sent the packages to the customers, he put his own words, like letters. He thinks this is about taking care of the customers and communicating that he is thinking about the customers individually and the customers can take his heart. This automatically increased the customers, maybe some customers just offered to their friends, and they also liked it so they also ordered it from him. He does not sell the tea actively, but his customers just do it for him. Originally, he is showing the care to the customers, that’s the important and meaningful thing to him.

Q: I think he is really enjoying the process of growing the holy basil and communicate the process to the customers, that’s why he would do it in this way. Are there any positive experiences associated with his farming?

A: what he enjoys most is that people gather on his farm, it is not just about the farming process, but also the atmosphere of people going to his farm and working together. That’s what he enjoyed the most, maybe the customers just come to join the work of holy basil farming, and they enjoyed it too.

(showing him the pictures of the artwork)

(Translator explaining the pictures briefly and asking him if there is anyone that he likes, and the reason why)

A: He likes this one (human re-entering nature), he likes it because it changes as the seasons change, that’s his favourite part. And the people and the tree are connected, that’s the image he likes.

Q: Why do you like the image?

A: He doesn’t know… but he likes the whole image, he likes the part that it is connected to the tree, maybe to the nature. In the nature cycle, it just exists…the tree next is it just gets old, it doesn’t remind in the same condition, it is aging every year, changing every year.

Q: How would he connect these thoughts to his farming?

A: It is not specifically to farming, but life here. In this snow country, four seasons are typical, each season is different from one another, so people have to fit in the season and live according to the season, that’s how we survive. That’s doing something that fits the season is something makes our life ‘snow country life’, it is different from the city and other parts of Japan, that’s what he likes and what he feels from that artwork and from his life. It is changing every season, he likes the changes, he feels it in this art and his life.

Q: He mentioned about the challenges of adapting to climate change, how would he relate the aspect about adapting to season and nature to this point?

T: I’m trying to understand your question. He agreed that change itself, about climate change, it is also the changes of season, it is involved in the season.

Q: Is the changes in season also important to farming?

A: He thinks that the changes are really important, especially in winter, the most cultivated soil is covered by snow, the land itself is resting, in that case, farmers are also resting. Winter is the resting season, this makes soil and humans healthy and in good shape. If this region doesn’t have the snow, people have to think about farming all the time, soil and farmers would be working all the time, people will just keep working and make the farm working. So, he thinks it is really important to have winter like this so people and farm also rest here. Also, because it is kind of hard in winter to survive, when we have Spring, it is such a joy, it is more than just having Spring, it is … because it was hard to survive in winter, we just enjoy the Spring so much. It is also about ups and downs, living and changing, that’s why we feel more grateful about Spring, he thinks it is really important to have the change in the season.

Q: This is exactly about what he just mentioned about the connection between human and nature, it is in the lifestyle. Did he see this artwork himself?

A: Yes, maybe once, but he passed this artwork all the time. His most favourite one is not in the picture, it is the ‘Rainbow Heart’. The last time it was in Nagano Greenpark. Through the sunshine and water, it makes a rainbow, those materials are something that goes to nature again. It makes the space like dancing in the rainbow, he likes this piece the most because of the artist. The character of the artist is humanistic, the festival itself is also like this style. That art piece… when you see it, it is really beautiful. There are some energies that you can’t see but you just feel it, maybe it is because it just used sunshine and water to make the rainbow. He feels in that way, he thinks it is really beautiful, that’s the beauty that he likes.

Q: From his answers, he cares a lot about humans, and also the energy between humans and nature. Can he say more about this?

A: it is kind of connected to why he takes importantly about getting people involve in his farm, we like planting rice by hands because it somehow makes rice more delicious. That’s one of the reasons is that because we used our hands, there are some energies that we cannot see but by touching those crops and plants by hands, those good energies just go to the plants and the Earth. He believes the power of this, that’s why he wants to have more people to be involved in his farming and he can get a lot of good power from a variety of people. They may not recognize it, but he thinks that just getting to be involved in his farming, or just touching those plants, people have some impacts to those plants in good way. That’s why he takes really important to get people in his farming so that he gets a lot of good energy from his friend.

Q: Is it a two-way process that he let people energize the farm, and at the same time, people can also experience energy of the nature?

A: Maybe some ordinary people won’t see the energy, if they couldn’t see then they do not know how much energy they have, or we could have an impact on something. To the nature, we don’t really recognize it. Maybe through these energies, people could realize that through joining those farming process.

Q: Did he tell people explicitly to feel the energy?

A: He didn’t say anything; he didn’t mention any of them. But people who joined his activity are already interested in his farming, so they enjoy the process so much. The process of enjoying farming is already a positive energy; he does not say anything about the farming. They are just giving those positive energies to the plants without meaning it.