Interviewee: Ikeda san

Date: 7 March 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee

Q: When did he start farming?

A: When his father was alive, he was helping his job. He was working at the police Department, he used to be a policeman, he was helping his family business 14 years ago. After his father passed away, he started by himself, that was 14 years ago.

Q: What was the business of his father?

A: His father was selling the rice, it was only 40 arcs, it wasn’t big but he was selling.

Q: The business of his father was mainly about selling rice?

A: It is like typical family farming style in this region, they can only farm from Spring to Summer, so for other seasons, they do other jobs to earn money, or go to other places to earn money. It is typical, everybody does the same thing right now too. They go to work but they also make rice and sell it too. His father also did it like this, when he was doing the rice making, he actually went out to earn money from some other jobs too. Ikeda san’s wife is doing her own farming too.

Q: Why did he start by himself 14 years ago?

A: His father passed away 14 years ago, so he took over the rice field and started by himself. 5 years ago, he was working as a policeman and farming too.

Q: So he was doing part-time farming before, but now he has already quitted the firefighting job and just farming now?

A: Yes.

Q: Is he doing it on a full-time basis now?

A: He is working as a sports teacher in high school as a part time job in winter. He is also voluntarily doing volleyball teaching because he likes volleyball, he is not earning any money.

Q: What are the features of his farming practices?

A: He does not use chemicals, he has some rice terraces that have the JAS mark, it is not about JA, it is just an organic certification by government. He is doing natural drying as well, that’s his main feature.

Q: Why would he choose such style?

A: It just happened… 10 years ago, he met a rice farmer in Kawanashi area, he was doing JAS mark rice. At that time, there was a group of people doing JAS rice farming, that was around 30 people. The guy sold his rice to some people who are sensitive to chemicals, they cannot eat normal rice, so they bought JAS rice from this guy. He was selling a lot of rice to those customers successfully, and Ikeda san wanted to join the group and be one of the members of the JAS rice farming.

Q: Why did he want to join?

A: It sounds interesting to him. Because the guy was selling his rice successfully, so he thought it would be interesting. They put extra worth to the rice, so that’s why the rice is expensive, but people just buy it because of the worth of it, he saw this part but he realized how hard it is to not using any chemicals in the field on the first year. The weeding…he kind of started not using chemicals for the first year without knowing anything. He did not know anything, he just started. Actually on the first year of this kind of soil, there are still some residual chemicals in the soil. At the beginning, there was no weed, but in July, a lot of weeds suddenly came up. He had no idea that the weed could be that much, he had no idea how it gonna be, there is no other way to get rid of the weeds except by hands. It was like a style of 60 years ago, he found that he was doing something 60 years ago.

Q: Why does he continue?

A: He had been buying the shootings from JA, but from 11 years ago, when he started to do JAS rice, he has been growing his own shootings. By doing that, growing from seeds to harvest, he feels that he is taking care of his own children. He realized that what he is doing right now was normal 60 years ago, it was not so special at that time, but right now it is so rare to do in this way. And the soil changes, he recognized that there are so many animals, like microanimals, he noticed the increase of those animals in his fields.

Q: Are there any challenges in his farming now?

A: It is still weeding. He learnt when to do what, with some primitive tools, not even machine, he learnt how to do it, so it became a bit easier than the first year. He eventually learnt when and how he should take care of the weed to make rice farming easier.

Q: How did he learn it? By his own observation?

A: He joined some study groups, he also asked around and tried different methods on his field. Gradually, he got the information, and through different trial and errors…

Q: What about the positive experiences?

A: What he actually is making and selling is really expensive rice, but people are very pleased with what he provides, this is really good for him.

Q: Is it like his customers appreciate his rice?

A: Yes, his customers appreciate the taste and told him that it is delicious. About JAS rice, they are in a group of 3-4 people, they are doing in a group, so he just can’t quit. Thinking about business, he needs to highlight himself by making some good products, he found that it is quite rare to have JAS rice with natural drying. Actually Tanaka san they are making organic rice as well, but they do not have the organic certificate, he is the only one around this region that has the JAS certification on his rice, and he is doing natural drying. To think about the physical labour and the time he has to put on JAS mark, it does not make sense to run it as a business because it is too much… too much time and labour on it. But he keeps doing it because it is really important that he can say he is doing JAS mark and natural drying rice.

Q: For the JAS mark, is it a cooperation? Or he can sell his rice himself and it is just a label?

A: He is selling it himself.

Q: He sells directly to his customers?

A: Yes, through the Internet, and he is selling his rice at the train station too. The customers are waiting for his rice, so he cannot quit.

(Showing him pictures of artworks)

(The translator explaining the location of the artworks)

(Ikeda san reading the pictures carefully)

A: Is it from last year (Scarecrow Project)?

Q: Yes.

A: There is no water from the rice field, it is like dying. (He paid attention to the condition of the crops)

(Ikeda san asking about the artworks, where is it, what is it…)

A: He does not really understand the meanings of those artworks. He likes this (Rice house). The name is called ‘Rice House’, he thinks it is like communicating the house.

Q: Communicating the house?

A: The stand is a house, so it looks like a house.

Q: What does it mean?

A: He likes the title, it says the house of the rice, the title and the look matches. He likes it because it is on the rice terrace. He does not really understand the meaning of the work, but he likes it. This is the one (human re-entering nature) he does not understand the most, he does not understand this art at all.

A: There is a story that a guy was trying to take care of the art piece and thought that it is better to cut those vines, the artist/NPO said that it is the way in the nature so they did not want to cut the vines, but some people just think that it is better to cut the vines so that they won’t be scolded. He knows about the story.

Q: Why he likes it when there is a house on the rice field?

A: He likes to take pictures, he actually sees those photos as photos, he likes this photo. From this photo, he can see the inside of the house from the photo, the frame is the house, and he can imagine that the house… he can see life in the house, maybe there is a kitchen, there must be a living room. In this region, there is a culture to have a house name for each house of the family. For kamiya san, her house name is Tanaka (田中), it means in the rice terraces. In that way, you can’t see the view right now, but it must be rice terraces all around and there must be her house in the middle surrounded by rice terraces in the past. He kind of sees the old vision, or the view from the past. It must be like that, he saw the historical background from the photo.

Q: How is the setting of his rice fields? Are they also surrounding a house?

A: No, but he has a rice terrace too. His rice terrace is up in the mountain behind here, it is along a river.

(Ikeda san showing the pictures of his rice terrace and his website)

Q: Why he would link the picture to the view of the past?

T: Because kamiya san’s house name shows…

Q: The picture reminded him of ‘Tanaka’, and the view of the past?

T: He doesn’t say like this is the view of the past, he could imagine from her house name that it must be surrounded by rice terraces before, must be…otherwise there is no reason that she will have a house name like that. He is sure that many decades ago, or a hundred years ago, these areas must be … a house that was surrounded by rice terraces, and you can see from the landscape that there must be a small rice terraces right behind the house. It is kind of like common sense to think in that way.

(Ikeda san showing us picture of his rice terrace)

T: That’s his rice terrace.

Q: What about those?

A: All those, but those in the front are not his, they are abandoned.

Q: Does he want to have the stand on his rice fields as well?

A: As an artwork where people come to see it, he will consider.

(Ikeda san showing us picture of another piece of his rice terrace)

Right now he is not doing this rice terrace anymore, he quitted. It was so difficult so he quitted, the water problem…and he could not use a machine there. Some rice terraces…there is no way for machine to get in, those rice terraces are more easily to be abandoned because people have to do all the works by hands. People do not like that, so they tend to abandon those rice terraces. The one he just showed us, machine cannot get in and there is water problem, it was so hard so he had to quit.

Q: Is the water problem linked to the weed?

A: The water problem was serious, there was no water when it was needed, and too much water when it was not needed. He couldn’t just adjust.

Q: How would he relate the weeding challenges he is facing to ‘human re-entering nature’

A: It is totally different kind of weed. He said, in a way, it is good, like surrounded by the plants, maybe it is okay for this artwork.

Q: In general, did the art festival give him any opportunity as a farmer?

A: He got people buying his rice during the Art festival. It is really meaningful to have people gather in this region, so it is good. The sales were really good than how it was usually.

Q: How would you relate taking photos to farming?

A: It is a hobby. It is just that he likes taking pictures of views and people, and this is the best one (photo of an artwork). He does not think that it is related to his farming. That picture he got good accomplishment from people.

Q: Did he take a lot of pictures of his rice terraces?

A: Yes. (another rice terrace in Matsunoyama) You can see how deep the rice terrace is, the house was already gone. His wife was born in that house, that is in Matsunoyama. In front of the house, there is a rice terrace. It is the typical view of countryside in Japan. This house in the mountain kind of becomes the poster of the Matsunoyama Tourism Board because it is a really typical Japanese countryside picture.

Q: Do all his rice terraces have the JAS mark?

A: No, just part of it become it is too difficult to do JAS rice farming for all the rice fields all by himself, so just part of the rice terraces he is taking care of have the JAS mark. Decades ago, the whole family would take care of the rice terraces together, that’s why they could do it by hands, but he is just doing by himself mainly. His wife and his mother help him, but not all the time. He cannot do it all.