Interviewee: Rika and Murata chan

Date: 20 March 2019

Q: Interviewer R: Rika M: Murata

Q: When they did start farming?

R: Her grandparents are farmers, she helped them since she was little, she majored in farming in university, she came here after graduated from university. Because she was helping her grandparents when she was little, she wanted to be involved in the issue of food security, you have to eat to live, she wanted to involve in making food.

M: She came here three years ago.

Q: Did she have any farming experiences before?

M: She was doing totally different things, she knew nothing about farming.

Q: What did she do before?

M: She wanted to be a PE teacher for junior high school and high school, she got the license but she has never been a teacher.

Q: Why did she come here?

M: The job is about playing basketball, it was like an optional thing about farming.

Q: Oh, so she came here for basketball?

M: Yes.

Q: Why did she want to play basketball here?

M: She visited here once before, she saw some locals, she wanted to be one of them because they are so nice. She thought that if she comes here, she can get closer to who are they.

Q: What impressions did the locals give her?

M: It was the first time she met that person, but he just offered to her if she wanted to take some veggies from his farm, something like that. In other places that she had been to, it wasn't normal, it just happened if we got to know each other. She thought that it was really cool to give such an offer and say such a thing to strangers.

Q: How about Rika, why did she come here?

R: There is no other place in Japan that has the combination of farming and basketball, so it is really something special.

Q: Why did she come here?

R: It was 2016, so it has been three years. They came here together.

Q: What kind of farming are they doing now?

R: She was so surprised, she only saw rice fields on flat land but not on steep mountains before. She realized that the amount of efforts to work on flat land and rice terraces are really different. For the first year, they were only doing rice farming and a little bit of soy beans for making tofu. From last year, in Jyoyama they revived the abandoned land and grow vegetables.

Q: Are they doing different things than Morita kun?

R: In the Jyoyama farming site, they do not use chemicals and the fertilizers are organic. The rice fields on Jyoyama, they tried to do the same things.

Q: They also have their own rice fields than Morita kun?

R: They are doing with Morita kun. But for the vegetables, she is the one mainly taking care of them.

Q: How's their daily routine like, between basketball training and farming?

R: There are only three of them, so they cannot make a team yet, now they practice together with the Tokamachi basketball team. Now farming is their main job now, if they have many members and make a team, farming and basketball training will be 50:50.

Q: How did Murata chan feel about farming? Because she had no experience before.

M: The first year was super hard, she did not know what to do. Even though she was told about what to do, she couldn't do it well, she didn't know how to pull out her legs out from the muddy field.

Q: How does she feel now, after three years?

M: She learnt more than before, it is still hard and tough. She found the fun in farming, she got more crops than last year, the plants are dried out and died, like the natural cycle of the plants, she started to enjoy it. It is either she got more yields, or they died, but in both ways she is enjoying it.

Q: What about Rika, how does she feel about doing both basketball and farming together?

R: she wanted to do farming and basketball, it is really good. Before she came here, she had been thinking that she can only do one thing, she has to choose either basketball or farming, she is not sure if she can do both of them really in good way, but still it is such a good opportunity for her. Eating the vegetables that she grows by herself is really good, so overall she is enjoying it.

Q: Can she share more about the basketball part, when did she start it and why she likes it?

R: When she was 7 years old, she started. She started playing basketball because her father was involved in the local basketball team, she started playing around and she found it really fun and she enjoyed it, that's why she kept doing this.

Q: Is it a strange job in Japan to do farming and basketball together?

R: Yes.

M: She never came to this thought, it is not a normal combination.

Q: Where did they see the job?

R: It is from someone from a basketball team.

M: Her teacher in the university knew it, so the professor recommended it.

Q: How about the farming, is it normal for young people like them to get a job in the farming field?

T: I think the farmers in Japan are decreasing, there is an under supply of farming labour, there are farming job recruitments online, some people just want to get involved, but it is not mainstream. Lately, the law changed, so big company can invest in rice fields and farms, they can grow veggies and sell them.

Q: Is it like they can run it like a business so they hire people?

T: Yes. In Japan the food self-sufficiency is super low, so they changed the law and let big companies to run the farm right now. It causes another problem...it is weird to combine basketball and farming, but thinking about doing something about farming as a company or an organization, it is not so strange.

Q: Murata chan just mentioned that she was attracted by the locals here. How does she feel about the local people now?

M: It is the same as the first impression, if it wasn't the locals that help her on farming, she wouldn't be able to keep on doing what she is doing right now.

Q: What are the interactions with locals? Could she give some examples?

M: There are so many things and people that she is involved in, she has a farming teacher here. She is living in Nunagawa campus, the neigbours and villagers are all in her life. As a basketball player, she interacted with so many people and is involved in a lot of things. She cannot tell exactly...there are a lot of people she is interacting with.

R: She is living in Taihei. Nunagawa is more like a village when compared with Taihei, there are more than 100 houses there, it is quite a big village. The landscape is different, Nunagawas is like many houses in one place, for Taihei the houses are more scattered. Because she has the basketball team and the village team event together, so she could not involve in the village event. So she is mainly involved with people in their jobs, in farming and the basketball team. The locals just made her wear Kimono, they treated her like their own grandchild. They have a lot of relationships with locals.

(Showing them pictures of artworks)

R: She likes the dragonfly one, it is in the atmosphere, it does not feel strange but it is still outstanding. She likes it.

M: She is not quite interested in those art pieces, but her job is to take care of them, so she dug them out of the snow, she did that kind of job. People around here would be really pleased if they perform (Seppuku Pistols), this is the drum group from South Island, the locals are very pleased when they come here to perform. They realize that locals love Japanese drum. I just told them that all the Japanese basically loves them, they said maybe the locals love more than average Japanese, and all the festivals. I agree, they like karaoke, each village has their own karaoke machine.

Q: Did Murata chan join the local event?

M: The basketball trainings clash with local events on weekend, but when she has free weekend, she tried to join the local events too.

Q: How do they feel about having artworks next to their farm, and in their daily life?

R: She thinks that having those artworks around the farming sites, people see those farms as long as there are art pieces. Even though they are not interested in farming, they see those things and she mentioned that there are a lot of people passing through her farm, when she offered some vegetables, they tasted them and told her it is delicious. It would also look nice if they see those farming sites as long as there are art pieces there. She thinks that artwork can be a tool to show people who is not interested in farming about farming.

Q: How about Murata chan?

M: When you see this artwork, it looks really good. But when she has to work on weeding, she got very nervous. If she hurt those artworks, it will cause a lot of money and she know it. It is annoying... it is not convenient to work on those fields, they make her work harder.

Q: In general, how do they feel about the art festival? Do they feel that it offers any opportunity to then?

R: If she only involves in farming and basketball, she is only involved in these two things. But now the art aspect exists, there is a variety of people and things going on around her, she got more supports from people from other areas, that is the good opportunity.

Q: What kind of supports?

R: Just for supporting them for being a basketball player, all the basketball teams have supporters and their own fans, without those fans they cannot be a professional team.

M: The people that she met, all the people who come and visit the art festival, it is really good to meeting them. If she gets a job in an ordinary company, maybe she has to do the same things in her routines, but not like a variety of things that she has to take care of now. It is really a good opportunity and experience for her.

Q: What are their plans for the future? Do they plan to stay here for farming and basketball?

R: In the future, she just wants to do basketball and farming as well.

M: She sees those elders having proud on what they are doing on farming, she thinks that those people are so cool, but she is not really sure if she is going to keep doing basketball and farming in the future. But for now, she just wanted to keep on doing it.

Q: How do feel in general about being a young people and farming in the countryside?

R: She just said that she has been in the countryside most of her life, she was in Amori Prefecture. She has been in the countryside in her whole life.

M: If the number of farmers decrease, then farming would disappear in Japan, it is important to have someone keep on doing on farming, she thinks that it is really important.