Interviewee: Yanaga san

Date: 22 March, 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee

Q: When did he start farming?

A: Four years ago, if it is by himself. He had been a trainee for three years, so overall maybe seven years ago.

Q: In this area, as a trainee?

A: in the first year, he was with a Tokamachi’s farmer, I was gonna ask him about the interview too, he is doing the organic way, he is growing rice with duck for weeding, so he doesn't need to use chemicals. He is making organic turmeric.

Q: How was the training like?

T: Do you want to ask him about the second and third training as well?

Q: Yes.

A: For the second and third year, he was with another farmer, the farmer was growing chestnut, it is like a wild kiwi fruit, it is very sour, it is the ancestor of kiwi. He was growing them, his son is also a farmer, they were involved in the local group of rice farming, they are doing tourism agriculture, Yanaga san is interested in it as well. He is kind of interested in what the farmers are doing, so he worked there as a trainee. At their farm, he got a little patch of farming land, so he grew the crops by himself.

Q: How was the training like? Did he get paid?

A: It is like a subsidy from the city hall for being a new farmer, he actually worked at those farms, but they did not pay for him, he got an amount of money from the city hall.

Q: Why did he want to start as a trainee?

A: He became to think that he wanted to be a farmer, but he has never done this kind of things before. So, he thought it would be better to study and learn from somebody, and if you don't know anything about farming but you become a farmer, it is hard to get incomes, so he thought it would be the best way for himself.

Q: What he wanted to become a farmer? What was his job before?

A: Actually, his father is running a restaurant, he was also involved in the restaurant business as a job in early 20, he also did some construction jobs around. Through involving in the business of the restaurant, he became interested in where the food in the restaurant comes from, he was wondering how it should be and what it should not be, if it is okay or not, then he became interested in making one.

Q: He was interested in how the vegetables are grown? Or the quality?

A: The quality. If you don't care much whether the product is organic or not, it is just full of chemicals, some people realize it by themselves, some people may be allergic to that, but he just came to the ideas of what they really are through...being involving in the restaurant business.

Q: How did the idea emerge? Is it because of something in the restaurant?

A: Where he was working, they have some backpackers and foreigners as guests, those people have high standard on food and they are curious about whether they are organic or not, and those topics... Through the conversations with them, he got into those topics, he thinks that is the most direct trigger. He also mentioned that he wasn't the one that would think about that kind of stuffs at all, so he was influenced by those people.

Q: I see. After three years of learning how to farm, why did he decide to start his own business?

A: from the first position, he was thinking about having his own farm, there are not many people around doing organic farming, even though they are doing it, they are earning enough to hire somebody else. It was natural for him to start his own farm, he saw it from the beginning. During those three years of training, he actually joined the activities of other organic farmers, he met some other organic farmers too. From them, he has learnt a lot, to reflect on those he gained, he wanted to have his own farm.

Q: Why is it on the third year? Is it when he felt ready?

A: Actually, the subsidy is only for two years, I heard that that the subsidy is for those who want to become a farmer, if he does not really become a farmer, he has to pay back something, so they have to be a farmer afterwards. For the first year as a trainee, he wasn’t involved in those subsidy training, he wasn’t hired by the farmer. Afterwards, he was the trainee, then he started his own farm.

Q: What is his farming feature now?

A: He doesn't use any chemicals and fertilizers (T: it was hard for me to understand what he was doing). He is using a carbon cycle farming. In this region, there are a lot of mushroom farmers, using their mushroom bedding to cover the crops. Those mushroom bedding has a lot of carbon inside and mushroom itself is really good at dissolving the carbon...Because those mushroom bedding is highly carbonated, if you put it on soil and mix it up, the bacteria would be really active because of the carbon, that’s what happened in the soil.

Q: Why did he use this method?

A: He wanted to use something which is not from animals but which is still easy to access, so mushroom bedding is something easy that he can find, he also knew someone who is doing this. His farmland has been abandoned for four years, so the soil for the farm is really infertile.

Q: Yes, I remembered that he showed the soil to us and he said that even the weed did not grow on the soil.

A: That’s true, that is what going on. The owner was growing lilies, he is popular in this area, but they rent the land to a company, the company was growing lilies. After that, the owner asked to make the land as a terrace, before that it was a piece of flat land, but because he made it a terrace, the surface soil was removed, the active layer was removed. The owner told him that they use pig shits as fertilizers, so the land must be really fertile, but it turns out that...he thinks that because they reshaped the land, the soil on the surface was removed, the inactive layer became the surface so he does not have any weeds.

Q: How about his crop choices? What kind of crops is he growing now?

A: He is making different kinds of veggies, spring onion, potatoes, tomatoes, herbs, garlics, onions, soy beans, taros...you can eat the raw one. But it is more like...eating gingers. His bigger yield last year was spring onion.

Q: What did he choose to grow a variety of vegetables? What are his considerations when he chose what to grow?

A: He is not a big farmer who has regular customers, he does not have a way to sell them as a big business, he is selling in local markets a lot. He thinks that it might be better to have different types of vegetables. He is doing the farming by himself, if he does monoculture, all the things have to happen at once, it is kind of easy for him to have different kinds of vegetables that have different timing. Most of all, because he wants to eat different types of vegetables, he does not want to eat carrot forever. He is growing something he wants to eat, he keeps growing the one that is really delicious to him. It is kind of like...the really basic reason that he started farming, he wanted to eat what he wants to eat. He has been thinking it is really simple, he wanted to eat what he wants to eat, and he wanted to share that to his children. Now he has a child, so it is a dream comes true to him.

Q: Did he face any challenges when he started by himself?

A: he is having troubles with growing the crops at the same quality and quantity, right now he has 13 patches of land, once he has really good harvest of one piece of land. when he tried the same thing on another patch of land, it just does not grow well. He is having troubles of keep on making veggies with good quality and the quantity. He switched the places because growing the same crop on the same land is not good, and he wanted to expand the land for the crops, he just tried to expand it, but it does not go the same as the other lands. He went to some farming courses, maybe the farmer shows him how good it is and maybe he can grow in a really good way, it depends on where you grow it, the weather, the soil and everything is different, it is always the same as they say, that’s the difficult part.

Q: so the difficult is that...for example he grew some delicious onion this year, but next year when he tried to do the same and expanded the land, but the quality and the yield is different, is that the challenge?

T: yes.

Q: What about the positive experiences?

A: By doing alternative farming, he met a lot of interesting people, like you, you visited him...if he only did the mainstream one, he will hang out with elders and men around. But it is not like this now, people who are interested in what he is doing came to see him, those communications and connections with those people is really cool.

Q: How did he connect with those people?

A: He is wondering why and how he met Jamie too... Maybe he was having... he was selling his veggies at Nobutai, maybe that’s why he got to talk with Jamie. He does not really remember, it happened like that. I think it is really a small community around here, youngsters just...young people are really a minority, so it is kind of easy to connect. If you connect with one person, it just expanded.

Q: Is he connected with some alternative farmers here?

A: It is really limited number of people, who is doing alternative farming around here. He is connected to some of them, he visited them, or people just came to him. He has the connection too. If one is doing alternative farming, he is going to be outstanding, because he is doing something else.

Q: He mentioned about the challenge of not knowing how to guarantee the taste and quality of the crops, did he go seek help? What did he do to solve the problems?

A: it is not like he is going to someone for advice, he knows that he has to change the quality of soil. Once he got the soil in good shape, it is going to solve all the problems, he knows that the soil has problems, it does not have anything that grows the crops, he wants to make it ... better. He is trying to do ... some ways to make it better. He is growing green manures from last year, he is challenging the most basic and really tough problem.

Q: Where did he learn this method?

A: He met a group of people who learn alternative farming in Nagano Prefecture, he kind of got the information from the group on the first year of training. He kind of realized that if he does exactly the same thing as the teacher, it does not work the same because the land and weather is really different. he kind of adjusted and understand his own farm and soil, actually the teacher was saying that it wouldn't happen in the same way in other lands, he understands deeply about what he was saying now.

(Showing him the pictures of artworks, translator explaining the artworks)

A: He likes the HK team’s artwork on your farm, the project itself, he thinks that it is the best one. He thinks that it is actually the real meaning of... you know we called it the art festival of local land, he thinks that it is really like that, about what you guys were doing. The materials and all that are natural stuffs, he thinks that the vegetables and plants themselves are kind of like art, like how they grow their leaves and how they grow, it is really artistic. The scent, you can feel it, touch it and you can taste it, you use all of your senses.

Q: Is that how he interpreted our project?

A: Yes, he thinks that your project was one of the best one.

Q: How about his own farm? Did he feel the same when he was working on his own land?

A: He feels the same way, it is kind of artistic as well. Actually when he is doing well on growing some crops, he can see the failure on their shapes too, if they don't grow well, it just shows by its looks, he can see that it is not doing well, everything is visible on the surface. When it cuts it, there is a shape of the plant. For example, if you look at the tomato closely, you feel the hair, you can feel those things by yourself. In half a year, it grows from seed to the whole plant, their whole life goes through in half a year. In the end when he harvested, he got really impressed by those crops.

Q: Does it mean that he feels like taking care of some artworks when he takes care of the crops?

A: He does not feel like he is taking care of the crops, he just feels that it grows. He does not feel that he is growing them, they grow themselves.

Q: By thinking in this way, and observing how they grow, does it help him to face the challenges of the soil, or other challenges in farming?

T: What do you mean?

Q: He just mentioned about the difficulty of taking care of the soil, and he also mentioned how he observed the plants and the different growing cycles, the pattern of the leaves...by thinking in this way and having these imaginations, does it help him to persist the difficulties?

A: Yes, he hopes that they grow well so that they have good energy too when they are harvested. He wants to make them to grow well. So, the answer is yes, that’s why he wanted to make the soil better.

Q: How does he think about his role, because he just mentioned that he does not feel like he is growing the vegetables.

A: He thinks he is responsible to make the conditions good for the crops to grow, that’s his role because he planted them on the soil, so he wanted them to grow role. It is his role to make the whole atmosphere and those seeds and crops to grow well.

Q: What does growing well mean to him?

A: If the crops have good harvest, and you can eat deliciously.

A: He loves the performance of Seppuku Pistols, he couldn't go to see the art piece, but he could see that people coming, just like the performance, where people moving around, this also inspired people and a lot of things too, he feels this way. He loves the Art Festival too. He loves the mobile shrines...each village has to make one, he loves to lift the shrine.