Interviewee: Kouta kun

Date and location: 26 March, 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee T: Translator

Q: When did he start farming?

A: Three years ago, he graduated from the university of agriculture in Kyoto, Kokyo Agricultural University.

Q: Why did he want to study agriculture in college?

A: He was born in Tokyo, the western part of Tokyo, it is a town, but he grew up in the countryside of this city. His family lived right next to the farmlands, the neighbours would give him vegetables and stuffs, so that was maybe the reason that he is interested in agriculture itself.

Q: What kind of agriculture did he study?

A: It's actually about farming vegetables, his dissertation is about cabbage, it is not about developing the species, it's about improving the genes of the tomato, he was doing research about preparation of the development and improvement.

Q: Like the biological features?

A: Yes. For himself, he was interested in the practical skills of farming, but he ended up doing research about this, maybe that was because of the classes he had to take, he had to follow the professor, that wasn't his first interest but he did it anyway.

Q: What does he mean about the practical farming skills?

A: Like...if it is about cabbage, it's about the part that how you could make it easier to grow, but he happened to involve in the biological things.

Q: Why is he more interested in the practical skills?

A: He actually wanted to touch the soil and work on farming, he prefers actual working on the field than doing something in the lab.

Q: Did he plan to become when he was studying?

A: He actually worked at a supermarket after he graduated, he was working in the fruit and vegetable department, but through this job, he felt he wanted to make them and it would be much more fun to grow them by himself. His father was from here, his grandfather lives here. His father knew some important people around here because they went to the same school, his father has the connections with villagers here, so when he decided to move here, he just told people that he wanted to be a farmer, but the part about salary may be difficult...Through the communication with those people, Suki san and some other people just cooperated to get the program that he could use, something like a supportive money. So for the first year, he became an intern of this village and at Suki san's company.

Q: Is it the subsidy program you mentioned before?

T: That's another program. Niigata Prefecture has an earthquake 10 years ago, now there is an earthquake foundation money, the government wanted young people to come to countryside, they cooperated with some organizations in Niigata and made a program to send those young people who are interested in living in the countryside to the countryside as an internship of the company or village or some kinds of society.

Q: Why he was interested in joining the internship but not starting a farm by himself?

T: It was actually not him...Because he can get 15,000 Yen per month and if Suki san accepted him in the internship, then Suki san can get 15,000 Yen each month too from taking care of him, so it makes it easier for them to take care of him.

Q: Yeah, I mean why he just did not come here and start a farm by himself like Katsuya?

T: Yes, I am going to ask him about it. But after joining the internship, it is more like using the governmental system, that would be easier for villagers or someone who accepted him to handle his salary, that's why they used the internship.

A: Because he did not have the confidence of starting by himself, he needed some mentors.

Q: What is he doing now in his job?

A: He is a trainee of Suki san's company, he is not a worker, it is also like using subsidy too, to start up by himself, and he is now training to start by himself. He has been working with Suki san for the third year, but second year as a trainee. His job mainly is to take care and maintain rice fields from making seedlings to harvesting and turning it to brown rice. He also delivered those to the neighbours, and because Suki san and another guy we are going to interview this afternoon, they are growing wheats and soy beans too, so he also needs to help them with their jobs. He said, there are a lot of jobs, he cannot tell what they are and there are so many jobs he is involved in. They kind of go to events as a farmer in Tokyo, when they join those events, he has to go and sell their products and introduce their farm, those are his jobs too.

Q: How does he feel now? Because when he was studying in college, he wanted to do practical farming and touch the soils. It has been three years now, how does he feel now?

A: He still likes touching the soil and being involved in farming.

Q: Is he planning to start by himself in the future?

A: Actually those subsidy thing being a new farmer lasts for two years, from this April, he is going to be independent, but actually he will keep doing what he is doing right now.

Q: Why?

A: It is kind of cooperating with a group of people, one of the reasons is that machines...maybe the risks about doing by his own...if anything happens to himself, no one can do it anymore. If they are doing it in a group, they can support each other and they can use the machines together, that's the main reason that he just keeps working with Suki san.

Q: Is he doing the organic way now?

T: Because Suki san has already mentioned that he is reducing the amount of chemicals, so they are doing it in the same way.

Q: If he starts by himself, would he do the organic way?

T: Hmm....can I ask him in another way? I think I understand his situation but I think you are not, actually literally he becomes independent, but he will still be involved in the group as a farmer, he is saying that he will keep doing the same things as what he is doing right now. Literally he is independent, but he will still cooperate with them as a group. I'm going to ask him if he will start a piece of organic land by himself.

A: He actually has his own rice fields; he also takes care of the rice fields of Suki san. About his own rice fields, he is going to plant Koshigeri with organic fertilizations.

Q: The field that he is going is for his own self-consumption?

A: It is for sales.

Q: Why would he choose to do the organic way?

A: Through three years of working with Suki san, he becomes to think that what he is doing...trying to farm in natural cycle, not breaking too much of them, he became to think that maybe it is a good way to do it as a farmer. He is actually doing exactly the same thing that Suki san taught him, on about to use those organic fertilizers things, he can maintain a sustainable cycle of farming, the rotation.

Q: Is it about the growing rotation of wheat, soba, etc.?

T: It means everything, if you use something that is not going back to nature, or having too much impacts to nature, it wouldn't give you back what it was before. He also mentioned that he wants to... if you want to have something on the rice field, he wants to reuse what comes from the rice field and put it back to the cycle too. So, in order to not breaking the cycle, he wanted to use organic fertilization.

Q: Did he face any challenges in his farming?

A: To be a company of Suki san...

T: I think Suki san drag him everywhere, trying to teach him everything, trying to make him confront the problems that he has. He is a good boss, but being together all the time would be stressful for him sometimes. Because Suki san has so many spirits, so he got annoyed by him sometimes.

Q: Does it mean that he wants some private spaces?

A: He actually thought that he is private right now, but yeah actually I don't have any private times.

T: Because he is involved in this village and everything, I have this feelings too, I am also part of something, so being myself is really ... if I'm super alone, I can have my time, but otherwise I'm part of something all the time, I cannot tell what is private time and what is working time anymore. The life itself becomes work, especially when he is living and working in the same village, even though he is drinking, is that work or private time? If you are drinking with boss, is that working time or private time? Drinking itself is a private thing, but drinking with boss would be a job...We cannot really tell, that's kind of the problems of the countryside life, he is having the same problem I think.

Q: I have a question about the farming part. He has already learnt something about farming before he came here, and he is now learning from Suki san now, does he just follow Suki san completely or he stills wants to have his own spaces?

A: About studying in university, it was just theoretical thing, it was not really practical, he kind of realize how practical it is about what Suki san is saying and doing. Right now, he understands why Suki san is saying and doing that kind of things, it is different from all the theories that are not practical on the field. He follows Suki san and accepts his ideas easily.

Q: Did this understanding happen in the first year, or it takes time for him to digest what does he mean?

A: From the beginning, he kind of knew that if you are farming in certain area, you have to aware that there is a way for those region because every place is different. He knew that he needs to respect and listen to the words of local farmers, otherwise they won't be a farmer for that long. He wanted to respect and he knew how worthy it is to listen to those stories, it does not mean all the things are all right, but basically what they are doing should be adjusting to the local environment and farming situation. From the beginning, he listens to Suki san's words.

Q: What are the positive experiences?

A: You can eat delicious milk and rice.

A: He also thinks that the rice terraces and landscape itself...he is not sure if they are art, but he just thinks that they are so beautiful.

T: He was kind of like, that's all.

Q: Did he see those art pieces before?

A: A little, he drove by those art pieces and knew those performances.

Q: How does he feel about having artworks on the rice fields?

A: Well, it's good, it does not matter, it's okay. He does not hate it, he is not really interested in those art pieces or seeing those art pieces, he cannot tell...he thinks the nature and the view of the countryside is beautiful.

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

A: Not really, it is easy to ask people to visit this area, if you come right now, there is an Art Festival here, it is going to be interesting to you. So it's easy to ask friends to come to this region, it is such a good excuse. When they have the festival, it is the busiest season for farmers, so he was occupied by those farming works, he could not involve in any part of it, maybe that's one of the reasons too. He also thinks that maybe someone can come because of this art festival and they can hang out, but he has never made it.