Interviewee: Koji san

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Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee T: Translator

Q: When did he start farming?

A: When he was 17 or 18 years old, his family was making rice. As he was working outside, he helped his family too.

T: I asked him how old you are, he said 17 years old. He is like that all the time. He is 70 years old.

Q: Is he from here?

A: He kept working in the company as a worker until he was 55 years old, he was doing the same thing as many locals here, he was working outside and farming until 55 years old. Usually Japanese retires at 60, but he got early retirement and ready to start by himself while he was still working in the company. So, he built this house, this is really a Snow country greenhouse, the structure is different if you go to a warmer place. He was born in here and lives here most of the time in his life.

Q: What was his farming mode before retirement?

A: 26 years ago, he started this duck rice farming. Before he became full time farmer, he has been doing this duck rice farming, but he did not have this greenhouse and growing seedlings. When he was a part time farmer, he was only doing the rice farming, but after he turned full time, he started growing wild edible plants and the seedlings.

Q: Why he started the duck rice farming?

A: He read a book about duck rice farming, before that everybody, including him, was using chemicals to weed or fertilize, he was so shocked by what the farmer is doing in the book, so he wanted to do it by himself. He did it and became really successful in his business. He knows that how the chemicals for weeding are made of, and he don't want to use it. There are farmers who use chemicals around here, when he saw how the weeds are dying and become yellow-ish, he just doesn't like to use it, it is really toxic, he does not like toxic things. For the farming lands, he does not use chemicals, maybe a little bit. He only uses organic fertilizers.

Q: Since when he thinks that the chemicals are toxic, before he read the book?

A: It was when he read the book, he was so impressed by what they said in the book. He just mentioned about using chemicals, maybe in one square meter, there are 3000 creatures there, if you once put chemicals in it, it is going to destroy all of them. To fix the situation... to revive the land, it is going to take 5 or 6 years, so the impact of the chemicals is really strong.

Q: Was it risky to change to a new method at that time?

A: He bought those ducks from someone else, wild animals were trying to eat the ducks, that was his risk maybe, but all the other things are positive. He had so much fun, it was more fun to have ducks on the field, he saw those ducks every day, he just loves it. It is actually still rare to have organic farmers, it was already rare 26 years ago, but it is still weird nowadays. Around this area, he only knows one organic farmer in the next village, the others are still using chemicals, he wants to inspire them not to use those chemicals, but he kind of understands their situation, it is too risky for them to change the way they farm. They are afraid of having too many weeds, even though they do organic farming, they do not know how to sell them. (T: He is really successful in selling rice to people in the city, he knows people who need safe and good quality rice, he knows it is needed among those people, but most of the organic farmers there would not have the way to sell them) It is easier for them to do what JA told them, and they just sell all their rice to JA, it is much easier for them so they just keep doing the same thing. He also mentioned that if there is any disagreement with neighbors when he started the duck farming, he said there is no such a reaction. they are just not inspired; they just keep on doing their things.

Q: How did he develop the sales channel?

A: It's kind of like ... he is saying that it is another people to people things, people just connect to each other so that he got more customers, but there is actually a platform for duck farming in Japan, it is called Japan duck farming forum, they organize seminars and they meet once a year. They share all that information, some rice shop owners and rice selling companies would come and buy rice from them. In city, there are many people who want good food even though they are expensive. For those companies, they want to buy good things. His sales kind of developed in this way. He just said that if i quit drinking a coffee per day, I could eat a better, organic rice, it is simple like that, and it would be better for your health as well. His customers and relatives were saying that eating organic rice help them think calmly, their brain is clear, and they can control themselves. If you eat the one with chemicals, people would lose their temper easily, they would be violent and wild. He actually got the first prize in national rice tasting competition in the organic division, so people just come and buy his rice.

Q: After becoming a full-time farmer, he expanded his business by having the green house and selling the seedlings, where does the idea come from?

A: He has the urge to try anything he wants to try. When he was working in the company, he could get salary every month. If he quits, he got to make his own salary, that's why he is trying to do anything he wanted to do.

Q: He could do anything to maintain the income, or any interesting things he wanted to try?

T: He has to try all his ideas to get money from them.

A: He always thinks about what consumers want; what people are looking for. The tomato stick is on the list, he is making different types of flavor, he has a variety of things to do with his customers, there are always demands and needs, he looks for those and tries to turn them to a sales opportunity. One of his customers is a hotel around here, in summer they got like 2000 guests, and they wanted different types of tomatoes, he is trying to take those demands and needs from the customers, that's why he grew a lot of species. He delivered 150kg tomatoes every two days. He does not only sell veggies to the hotel through summer, he does not sell his veggies through market, he is selling directly to his customer. For the hotel, usually they go to market or a middleman to get those vegetables, those companies and markets just contact him but in that way they took commission. By selling directly to the hotel, he gets more money. He talks a lot with the hotel chief about when they want what throughout the year, so he meets them regularly throughout the year. (T: He is doing really well in his farming business). In summer, he planted tomatoes, cucumbers, in winter he grew wild edible plants.

Q: Did he face any challenges in his farming?

A: No, it is always fun, challenges are fun. He is really happy that people are glad to have his veggies, and his vegetables make people happy, he is really grateful for that. He does not really complain about anything, there are many things that trouble him, but he loves troubles. He is away from mental sickness because he does not complain.

(showing him pictures of artworks)

T: I asked him if he has any impressions on these artworks, he does not say anything, but he just mentioned that he is really happy to see people are happy having his veggies, their happiness means his happiness. How should I ask...?

Q: Did he see those artworks before?

A: He has seen this, this and this.

(Sayako introducing the artworks)

Q: Did he like the artworks?

A: He was really impressed by going through those artworks, he thinks that he should have this on his rice field so that everybody can see it. His fields are around here, it is obvious if anything is standing on it, it is really clear to see it around here, he wants to be outstanding, he wants to be seen by people. He wants to put some human figures on the rice fields, one of them should look like farmer, one of them looks like a party person, so he will put them on duck rice farming site, it will be interesting and funny. It is outstanding and you can see it very easily, that's why he wanted to do it.

T: I told him it might be scary.

A: (Referring to the Rice Field) Those people have cows to work together, he said cows are better because they move very slowly, so they obey to people, but horses are really independent animals. it was easier to handle cows than horses. It looks like that horses are dragging these tools, but it is more like people are in front of them, and dragging them with their noses, people are pulling them to work, that was the actual view that he remembered when he was a kid. He has thought about that having cows on the rice fields would be interesting too, he is attracted to new and old thing, it seems fun and challenging, he just loves it.