

The simple minimalistic life in the mist of a fast complicated age (Agriculture and its crucial relevance to the people who practice it)

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Due to the global health and environmental movement in recent years, organic food is gaining more and more popularity. Japan did not pick up the organic craze as quickly as the rest of the world with only 0.17% growth rate of organic food in Japan for the past 20 years up till 2009 according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry (MAFF). But lately, Japan's consumers have become aware of the benefits of organic food and Japanese farmers are more aware of the profits of organic agriculture. According to Helen Browning, Soil Association food and farming director as quoted in The Japan Times (Sept. 5, 2007), not only does organic agriculture provide high quality, natural food to the consumers but it also uses 30% less energy than commercial farming.

It is said that a limited 12,500 acres of land is usable for organic farming, and the farm in Fujieda which we visited was among those lands. Though Japan imports most of its food supplies to feed its dense metropolitan cities, Japan's agricultural culture and lifestyle still exist. And some places such as the farm we visited in Fujieda still practice farming the natural way without using chemical pesticides or fertilizers. We were told that, though it was difficult at first, eventually nature took over and the ecosystem balanced out with even numbers of prey and predator and top soil rich in nutrient from dead insects or fallen leaves.

Apparently the fallout of the Fukushima nuclear plant hit the Kinezuka family's plantation hard. Despite the vast distance between Fukushima and Fujieda, it was said that radionuclide was detected in the tea from their plantation. Even though it was well below the restricted level of 500 mSv with 150 mSv detected but the fact that there were traces of radionuclide in their produce sadden the farmers. For a family who has worked hard to promote organic farming and contented with the simple country life, this incident left them with a slight pain of disappointment and frustration. Though the fallout at the Fukushima nuclear plant also affected other agricultural land, but I think it affects organic farmers more because it takes a longer time for them to regrow and return the balance of nature compared to commercial farming which can easily manipulate crops using chemical substances.

We were also given the opportunity to receive words of wisdom by Kousaka san who wrote a book about organic farming and the minimalistic lifestyle. We were reminded that though we live in a materialistic governed world, we must not forget to seek joy and happiness. And that those can be achieved should we choose to balance our material belongings alongside our passion. A band was also invited to perform at Fujieda with songs about nature in a cultural Okinawa



style. It was very moving for it allows us to connect emotionally to nature which we have somewhat forgotten due to the hassle and bustle of city life.

We were given the privilege to try our hands at planting paddy seedlings in a patch of paddy field. For me, it was my very first time seeing such scenery not to mention having the opportunity of experiencing it. It would most probably be one of my most memorable moment with I shall carry with my forever. And finally, we were given a platform to converse with the local residents about their life and opinions on organic agriculture. We realized that it isn't always wonderful and beautiful there, and that they face many challenges as farmers. It takes a lot of patients and faith to work the field, and that they wish to bestow these knowledge upon the younger generations to continue these cultures. As a FOLENS student with a different major, I was not only able to learn from the local residents but also from the other students as well. We could bounce ideas off each other freely gaining more knowledge along the way and combining them into a grand idea. That, to me was the absolute peak learning experience of the trip.

Lastly, though the Japanese people are known for their hospitality, but the generosity that I experienced that weekend with the Kinezuka family and the locals were beyond my imagination. And that shall stay with me always.