

Policy Recommendations for Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture

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Food security consists of affordability and accessibility. A lot of people in some developing countries cannot afford to buy food or get access to food due to the lack of infrastructure even when food arrives at a port. Although Japan is a net food importing country, Japanese can afford to buy food in 2008 when the grain price quadrupled. Japan, however, would suffer from lack of imports when the sea lane is disrupted by a military attack or labour strike at a port of an exporting country.

In such a food crisis, we have no other way than to consume stockpiled food in the short period of time and expand food production by use of agricultural resources such as land.

We have lived on rice which is produced in paddy fields. Contrary to dry farming, paddy fields are immune to replant failure, soil erosion and salinization. We have produced rice every year in more than 3 thousand years. In addition, paddy fields are much more productive than dry farming. That is why the Monsoon Asia has supported the lives of the two-thirds of the world population. Rice production is very sustainable over a long period of time and paddy fields are magnificent agricultural resources.

Japanese agricultural policy has, however, ruined paddy fields by maintaining the acreage reduction program for half a century in order to peg a very high rice price. Japan has lost 1 out of 3.5 million hectares of paddy fields since 1970 when the acreage reduction program was introduced. Now 1 out of 2.5 million hectares of paddy fields is set-aside for the sake of the reduction of rice production. The high rice price has kept a lot of inefficient small-scaled part-time or old farmers in the rice industry so that full time farmers could not expand their farm size by consolidating farmland. 8 out of 10 farmers produce rice but their production is less than 20 % of the total agricultural production in Japan. You can tell how inefficient rice farming is among Japanese agriculture. Agricultural policy has damaged the sustainability of paddy fields to a considerable extent.

But every cloud has a silver lining. The farming population shows a remarkable decline. This enables full time farmers to expand their farm size and deprives the farm lobby of their political clout. For the first time in 70 years the Abe administration finally started the reform of agricultural cooperatives, the strongest political group in the post-war period, which supported high rice price and the acreage reduction program.

The structural reform of agriculture is indispensable or a prerequisite for utilization of high-tech devices or IT/AI. Not small-scaled or part-time farmers but full time farmers can have time and resources for the utilization. Take unmanned operation of tractors by utilization

of GPS for example. It can only be made possible on a very large parcel of land. Then we can have a virtuous cycle. Full time farmers have a competitive edge over small-scaled or part-time farmers with the result that more and more land will be leased or sold to full time farmers.

Time will come to do away with the acreage reduction program because small-scaled farmers who have relied on high rice price quit the rice industry. Then rice price would drop well below the international price of the equivalent quality of rice. Japan can begin to export substantial amount of rice with paddy fields fully utilized. This contributes not only to the world-wide food security but to Japanese food security; in the food crisis we consume rice exported in normal times and utilize paddy fields, which have been maintained and fully utilized for the supply of rice domestically and internationally, for the production of high-calorie food such as rice or potatoes. Exportation works as stockpiling without costs. Free trade which the Japanese farm lobby has long detested turns out to be the basis of food security. Japanese agriculture needs TPP indeed.