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Prospects for a Sustainable Society from the Perspective of the Relationship between Food and Agriculture: Looking ahead to a Post-COVID-19 Society

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I focus on the efforts to link food and agriculture in North America and Japan, and discuss what role COVID-19 can play in shifting the food system away from dependence on markets. I also examine the historical trends in the relationship between food and agriculture, and the impact that the spread of COVID-19 has had on those trends. Then, based on the experience of COVID-19, I discuss the prospects for a sustainable society after COVID-19 from the perspective of the relationship between food and agriculture.

Key words: local food system, community food security, transition from dependence on markets

1. Introduction

Originally, the acquisition of food was not limited to the market, but also involved a variety of situations, such as the establishment of systems by the national and local governments, the sharing of food in local communities and events, and self-sufficiency by families. In modern society, however, non-market functions have declined, and the reliance on efficiently networked markets for food and agriculture all over the world has become overwhelmingly high. This has led to many problems such as poverty, racism, economic disparity, access to food, and food safety, as Lang described food issues as a microcosm of society (Lang 1999). In order to solve these problems, it is necessary to shift from dependence on the global market and to regain the functions and roles of national and local governments, local communities, and families in the acquisition of food.

In this paper, I focus on the food and agriculture activities that constitute AFNs (Alternative Food Networks), which are spatially defined as regions where activities of local production for local consumption are carried out, and where food (consumption) and agriculture (production) are combined in a direct or face-to-face relationship. Specifically, farmers' markets (FMs), community supported agriculture (CSA), co-ops, and direct sales stores are the main types of AFNs, but they also include community gardens, assistance for farmers, food education, and school lunch using local agricultural products. In addition, there are also community cafeterias for children, food banks, etc., where a similar

relationship between food and agriculture can be seen. Many individual activities are small in scale with few participants, and agricultural products are supplied outside the market, so they do not appear in statistics. However, it is a front-line activity to deal with social distortions and social problems, and it is a noteworthy area where new activities are emerging one after another. In this paper, I focus on the activities that link food and agriculture, what role they can play in shifting from dependence on global markets, and how COVID-19 has influenced this shift, then I examine the historical trends in the relationship between food and agriculture and the impact of the spread of COVID-19 on these trends. In addition, I would like to look at the expected changes in the relationship between food and agriculture in the future. In this paper, I focus on North America and Japan. The analysis will focus on the role and function of the Food Policy Council (FPC), which has been established in North America, in addition to individual activities linked to food and agriculture.

2. Transition of the Relationship between Food and Agriculture

In North America, the impact of the global market on the food system became apparent early on (Goodman and Watts 1997), leading to widespread public debate on issues of economic inequality, food, and health. The sharing of such issues created a social climate that embraced food democracy, and collaboration between citizens and government was born (Welsh and MacRae, 1998). The collaboration was facilitated

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by the sharing of ideas about food and food systems, the measurement of Community Food Security, and the sharing of measurement results, which made the problems of the food system visible and the contents of support concrete. Through this series of activities, as in the case of the city of Toronto, it can be said that activities through food have been systematized.

On the other hand, in the case of Japan, the activities included in the AFNs have continued since the 1970s, and government-led measures have been taken in the 2000s. However, this did not lead to a movement to broaden the scope of activities to solve social problems through collaboration between the government and AFNs. On the other hand, since the Great East Japan Earthquake, there has been a movement to broaden the scope of food and agriculture activities to include the fields of poverty and welfare, but these activities are led by the private sector, although there is some support from the government. This form of cooperation between the government and the private sector to deal with social problems has yet to be found.

3. The Impact of COVID-19 to Local Food System

North America experienced long-distance food system disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, and local food systems were perceived by consumers as having easier access to food. It is also noteworthy that self-sufficiency in community gardens has increased. In addition, AFNs in North America have a long history of dealing with food insecurity, including social issues related to inequality, the environment, and social justice, and therefore the increased food insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact in the form of increased demand for AFNs. In addition, the U.S. has expanded its existing system of support for SNAP and other programs with an emergency budget, and the city of Toronto and several states in North America have declared FMs to be essential for the acquisition of daily food, and policies have also promoted increased demand for AFNs. Similarly, in Japan, the demand for AFNs such as co-ops and CSAs has increased.

In North America, AFNs were able to respond to the increasing demand in a systematic way by organizing networks of AFNs or by cooperation among different types of AFNs. In the course of such collaboration, the sharing of information on how to respond to the shift to online services has also progressed, which has enabled people to respond to the increasing demand. On the other hand, in Japan, the

increase in demand for AFNs differed depending on the existence of the organization and the scale of its activities, and JA and co-ops with multiple sales channels and inter-organizational networks expanded their business scale by taking in the increase in demand, while those operating alone could not respond to the increase in demand or did not respond in anticipation of the reaction after the convergence of COVID-19. In addition, no trend toward online AFNs, triggered by COVID-19, was evident. This indicates that AFNs could not become an indispensable means of food acquisition for daily life, and this is a major difference between North America and Japan, where AFNs are concerned. The contrast can be drawn between North America, which was able to innovate in the face of environmental changes by incorporating the power of the network between the government and the AFNs beyond the limits of the AFNs' individual responses, and Japan, which was not able to respond to environmental changes and failed to take the opportunity to innovate or shift from market dependence. This difference can be seen as a result of the fact that the government and the private sector have been working together to deal with social issues concerning the relationship between food and agriculture.

4. Conclusion

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on AFNs was expressed as increased demand in both North America and Japan. It can be easily inferred that people have a desire to be directly connected to agriculture in order to obtain food in times of emergency. In a widespread and simultaneous crisis such as a pandemic, the long-distance food system was vulnerable and the local food system was strong. On the other hand, if a particular area is hit by a disaster, people have to rely on the long-distance food system. This indicates that it is necessary to have multiple lines in the food system for emergency situations (Nakashima 2012).

In order to strengthen the local food system, it is necessary to link it with the idea that it is possible to approach local problems by linking food and agriculture. In fact, in North America, against the background of racism, economic disparity, and poverty issues, the development of AFNs was positioned in the movement to concretely solve social problems from the perspective of food security, with food sovereignty and social justice as the fundamental motivations. In contrast, activities related to food and agriculture in Japan have been mainly focused on its position as a source of fresh

and safe food or as a sales channel for local agricultural products, and little awareness has been fostered about approaching social problems from the perspective of the relationship between food and agriculture, as pointed out earlier. After the earthquake, the relationship between food and agriculture has finally changed, and as seen in the efforts of food banks and community cafeterias for children, approaches to social problems by linking food and agriculture have begun in Japan. I would like to conclude by pointing out some points for the prospect of a new relationship between food and agriculture in Japan. One of the implications of the North American case is the importance of FPCs in connecting citizens and government. This led to the consideration of security on a community basis, as was seen in Toronto, and played an important role in reflecting the problems occurring in the community in the policies. It also facilitated the creation of linkages among AFNs.

Here, I would like to introduce two concepts that have emerged from the efforts of AFNs in North America and are key to the development of AFNs. It is food citizens, as distinguished from passive consumers, who have been leading the development of AFNs activities, or have been the bearers of FPCs (Welsh and MacRae 1998). Another concept is foodshed, a concept that captures where food is produced and through what distribution channels it arrives, giving people a sense of connection and responsibility to a particular region (Kloppenburger *et al.* 1996). Just as taking a concrete view of the issues for food security at the community level has yielded results, considering the route and scope of one's food delivery can lead to a concrete and deep understanding of the issues. Food citizens will act to build a concrete relationship between food and agriculture based on their own foodsheds.

Referring to the results in North America, an organization with an FPC-like role has been established under the name of Shoku to Nou no Mirai Kaigi and has started its practice (Akitsu 2021). A characteristic feature of the Shoku to Nou no Mirai Kaigi is that it is linked to regional development in rural areas against the background of the disparity between urban and rural areas. Unlike in North America, where food sovereignty is the foundation and the goal is to eliminate food insecurity, in Japan, where there is little awareness of food rights, it would be a realistic idea to solve social problems by linking them to community development rather than conceiving of social problems from the perspective of rights. On the other hand, approaches to social issues through food and agriculture have also begun, as seen in children's

cafeterias and food banks. It is possible that food insecurity and a sense of entitlement will be fostered in the field, and this will become the driving force for activities. In addition, taking a concrete view of the food-sheds introduced earlier will also be useful for the materialization of the local food system. Hara *et al.* (2016) clarified the scope of local production for local consumption in Osaka City and the self-sufficiency rate that can be achieved within that scope using the concept of foodshed. Nishiyama *et al.* (2021) also derive the extent of the food-shed by investigating the distribution of agricultural products outside the market. However, in the current situation where the self-sufficiency rate at the national level does not stimulate a sense of crisis any more, the increase of local children's cafeterias and food banks, the recognition of food citizens by citizens involved in food and agriculture activities in Kashiwa City and other cities, and the materialization of foodsheds as a place for such activities will be important materials for shifting the food system from market-dependent to market-oriented. The realization of foodsheds, which are the places for such activities, may be an important factor for shifting the food system from dependence on the market.

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