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# **Exploring Visitors' Profiles of Pick-Your-Own Farms in Japan**

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# EXPLORING VISITORS' PROFILES OF PICK-YOUR-OWN FARMS IN JAPAN

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examined a recent trend of rural orientation in Japan from a perspective of diversification of rural economy. Firstly, recent trend of rising number of entrants to farming understood as a part of growing interest for rural life-style. Secondly, characteristics of visitors to pick-your-own farms were examined by statistical tests. Characteristics of up-market and niche market are revealed, which was roughly identical with the findings in the European countries such as those who have higher academic background, higher orientation for outdoor recreation, and are severe on quality of services and goods they receive. Thus, it is necessary to provide authentic quality of the service and goods on the one hand and preserve the rural environment on the other. Therefore farm policy integrating farming and rural policy measures will be necessary further.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since early 1990s, growing interest for rural life has been observed in Japan. However, little has been examined about this social phenomenon. Is really de-urbanisation happening in Japan? What is the significance of this trend for rural diversification? What characteristics do visitors of rural tourism have? How can traditional agricultural policy be harmonised with rural policy to properly cope with this trend? To answer these questions is not only for an issue of Japanese rural development, but also a topic giving common implications for other countries including transition economy with a broader perspective. Thus the aim of this paper is to evaluate directions of rural tourism in Japan by taking into account of these increasing rural interest as a background of rural tourism (for rural tourism including farm tourism in the European perspective, see

Haines and Davies, 1987; Slee, 1989; Sharpley, 1996, and for North America Luloff et al. 1994, for OECD countries, Bontron and Lasnier, 1997, for Italian and Japanese comparative analysis, Ohe and Ciani, 1999, for the international Perspective see Butler et al..1998; Page and Gets, 1997).

This paper starts with briefly reviewing the recent trend of rural orientation of urban people in Japan and tries to find some clues to understand this trend and answer these questions above. This trend of rural orientation is evaluated from two aspects; one is permanent aspect such as entrants for farming, and the other is temporary aspect such as rural tourism and recreation. Thus firstly, this paper characterises this trend of farming entrants and evaluate the significance for rural life among urban people. Secondly, this paper explores the characteristics of the tourists of the pick-your-own farms with taking into account of findings in European countries. Finally, by summarising the results of these analyses implications for future policy integration with farming and rural development are suggested.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE ANALYSIS**

### **Policy background**

Green tourism, Japanese rural and farm tourism covering not only agriculture, but also forestry and fisheries, has been promoted by the government of Japan since 1992 to counter to depopulation of rural community and losing competitiveness of agriculture under circumstances of global trade liberalization. Green tourism was given legal framework in 1994. 752 farms registered as of March 2000(for green tourism in Japan, see Yamazaki et al., 1993).

A new policy framework for food, agriculture and rural areas was enacted in 1999, which is named, *the basic law for food, agriculture and rural areas*. Under the administration of The Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, MAFF, Rural policy measures including green tourism are stipulated clearly in this law.

### **EMERGING NEW TREND: RISING NUMBER OF ENTRANTS TO FARMING**

Table 1 illustrates the trend of entrants for agriculture in the latest decade. In 1990 the number of entrants hit the bottom, since then rising up again during 1990s. This is partly because of the prolonged deep recession, the process of restructuring of the economy started, which causes rising unemployment rate remarkably first time since the Second World War as shown in Table 1. This deep recession under globalisation exerts a large

impact on the Japanese employment system as a whole; lifetime employment and seniority wage system which has ensured low unemployment rate in the Japanese economy is now changing rapidly. Therefore entry for farming creates job opportunities for those people who suffered from these changing systems.

The total number of entrants is increasing as a whole and the composition of generations is also changing. Number of entrants over age of 60 has increased 4.6 times from 1991 to 1998, which is more than the average and shares more than the half in 1998. This tendency is attributed to the increase of number of people who chose farming life after retirement. This is a pushing factor creating entrants to farming. This changing system also causes changing view for the rural employment toward more positive way. This is a pulling factor.

**Table 1 Trend of farming entrants in a recent decade in Japan (1,000 people)**

Year	*Jobless Rate (%)	Total	Entrants of newly graduates	Entrants by job transfer	Under 40 age	40-59 age	Over 60 age
		(6)	(5)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)
1991 (A)	2.1	21.1	1.7	19.4	3.1	9.5	6.9
1992	2.2	20.8	1.7	19.1	3.2	8.5	7.5
1993	2.5	31.0	1.8	29.2	4.7	12.5	12.1
1994	2.9	38.8	2.1	36.7	4.2	14.1	18.4
1995	3.2	48.0	1.8	46.2	5.8	15.8	24.6
1996	3.4	50.9	2.0	48.9	6.5	17.8	24.7
1997	3.4	56.7	2.2	54.5	7.5	18.4	28.6
1998 (B)	4.1	64.2	2.2	62.0	8.9	21.7	31.6
(B)/(A) Ratio	1.95	3.04	1.29	3.20	2.87	2.28	4.58

Source: Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

\*Japanese Ministry of Labor,

Notes: (4)=(1)+(2)+(3), (6)=(4)+(5).

**Table 2 Types of farming conducted by entrants (%)**

Types of farming	Total	Under 39 age	40-59 age	Over 60 age
Only rice production	55.5	28.6	56.7	62.1
Crop production other than rice	17.2	31.7	15.7	14.2
Only livestock production	4.3	7.2	3.0	4.3
Mixed farming	23.0	32.5	24.5	19.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Concerning differences among generations, one thing we should keep in mind is that we cannot miss the occurring polarization of these entrants among generations. This difference comes from different purpose existing among entrants. Table 2 clearly shows this point. The younger generation think themselves as a producer/manager of farming business being more involved in other crops rather than only producing rice. However, older generation tend to be involved only in rice production because the operation is the most mechanised, thus it is easy to produce. This means that older generation chose farming as a lifestyle rather than a business. It cannot be denied that these retirees' production capacity and efficiency for farming is inferior to the business oriented younger new comers. However, their contribution to rural community and an impact on life-style of urban people should not be underestimated.

With these facts, we cannot be so much optimistic for rural depopulation or neither can say de-urbanization has begun only with this figure because aging of rural population is rapidly progressing on the other hand; 50% of labour force of agriculture is over 60 years old in 1998. This increase of entrants does not compensate the decrease of farming labour population (decreasing from 3.21 million in 1996 to 3.15million in 1997, 4.8% of total labour population in 1997).

Nevertheless, firstly it should be noted that rural life and rural area as business place creating job opportunities are beginning to be re-evaluated. It is safe to say that at least a complete pessimistic view for the rural future is no more justified. Secondly, this growing interest for these new entrants has also favourable effects by stimulating broader interest for rural areas and rural life-style including rural tourism especially among urban people. The issue of entrants tends to be treated only from the faming perspective. Now it is time to treat them from a broader perspective for promoting rural

diversification.

## DEMAND FOR RURAL TOURISM

Concerning demand characteristics of rural tourism and farm tourism, many studies conducted in Western Europe so far points out that it has up-market characteristics such as higher educational background and social status (Haines and Davis, 1987; Blunden and Curry, 1988; Butler et al., 1998; Sharpley, 1996; Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997) and consequently is being understood as a niche market (OECD, 1995a; OECD, 1995b).

Concerning Japanese leisure behaviour in general, in the period of high-economic growth it was characterised as urban oriented leisure being less time consuming not on weekends, but on weekdays (Ueno, 1974). However, in recent years, Watanabe (1998) points out from the results of questionnaire conducted by Leisure Development Center that those who want to spend their time in the natural environment such as forest, waterfront, and rural areas have one of those features; 1) professionals, students, firm managers, 2) high academic background, 3) dwellers of large cities. Watanabe (1998) also points out that the more they feel mental stress, the more they express desire to visit places abundant with nature. Keeping these findings in mind, demand characteristics of rural tourism in Japan are examined below.

		Male	Female	20s	30s	40s	50-64	>65
Sex/Age strata	Total	Sex		Age				
Total (people)	949	434	515	141	202	204	232	170
Farming experience	20.2	19.4	21.0	11.3	15.8	28.9	21.1	21.2
Visit to tourism farms and ranches	50.6	45.9	54.6	42.6	55.0	55.4	52.2	44.1
Purchase of local Products	54.6	52.3	56.5	44.0	47.0	55.4	61.6	61.8
Use of sports/ recreational facilities	36.5	40.1	33.4	58.2	52.5	43.1	22.0	11.2
Tourism in general	68.4	68.2	68.5	63.8	64.4	69.6	72.8	69.4
Coming home	32.2	32.0	32.4	34.8	29.7	31.4	34.1	31.8
Joining rural events	44.6	40.6	48.0	27.0	36.6	41.2	56.0	57.1

**Table 3** Rural experiences of urban people (%)

Source: Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Concerning demand for rural tourism, we cannot grasp the whole picture since there are not such time-series data to grasp the whole trend of the demand structure. However, we can partly examine this trend by the several data that show us some aspects. Table 3

shows experiences of urban people in connection with rural areas. We can easily find that there are different preferences from one generation to another. The younger the generation, the more they prefer active recreation like sports. In contrast, the higher the generation, the more they prefer simple visit or purchasing local products. However, the data does not tell us any personal profile of them nor types of trip they made for these purposes: daytrip or overnight trip. The author explores this point by focusing on the specific behaviour of rural tourists in the next section.

## **VISITORS' CHARACTERISTICS OF PICK-YOUR-OWN FARMS**

### **Data and Method**

The data are obtained from *16th National Survey on Tourism Behaviour in Japan* conducted by Japan Tourism Association on 1994 randomly sampled throughout the country. In this survey data, trips connected with rural tourism are visiting pick-your-own farms such as apples, pears, strawberry, grapes for agriculture and collecting crabs at the beach for fishing farms. Although these data do not cover all types of rural tourism, as far as author's knowledge, this is the only data that enable us to explore demand characteristics of rural tourism in the context of tourism behaviours as a whole with demographic aspects in the national level.

For the purpose of this section, the data are classified into two whether they made an overnight trip to pick-your-own (pyo) farms or not (hereafter visitors and non-visitors), which is only farm related trip surveyed. The sample size is 2,387; 46 visitors and 2,341 non-visitors, which indicates that visiting pyo-farm is a niche market. Then the characteristics of visitors and households are examined by statistical tests; *t*-test for quantitative variables, chi-square test for qualitative variables.

## **RESULTS OF STATISTICAL TESTS**

The results of statistical tests are shown in Table 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Table 4 shows demographic features of visitors of pyo farms. The age of pyo farm traveller shows significantly higher portion at 40-59 years old strata than the non-pyo-traveller. When the actual age is compared by the average, no significant difference was found between the two groups since the average was mid-40s for both groups. By occupation, significant higher portion of professionals and administrative position of white collar for pyo-traveller was observed. This fact is supported by the higher portion of college and graduate school diploma holders in respect with academic career. These



factors are correlated each other. Thus those who are middle aged with higher educational background and professional career have tendency to visit pyo-farms.

	Variables	Non-visitors	Visitors	Test methods	Test results
Age strata	40-59 age group (%)	41.1	54.4	$\chi^2$	*
Actual age	(Years old)	43.4	44.6	t	ns
Academic background	College graduate or graduate school (%)	19.4	32.6	$\chi^2$	**
Household income	\5million-\9million (%)□	34.6	50.0	$\chi^2$	**
Occupation	Professionals or managerial positions (%)	27.7	39.1	$\chi^2$	*
Size of living town	Metropolitan area (%)	21.7	30.4	$\chi^2$	+
Housing situation	Own house (no loan with yard) (%)	34.2	50.0	$\chi^2$	**
Type of family	Nuclear family (%)	49.0	52.2	$\chi^2$	ns
Attitudes for holidays	Preferring over 11days holiday (%)	3.8	4.4	$\chi^2$	ns
	More flexible extra-curricular activities for easier holiday making (%)	35.2	52.2	$\chi^2$	**
	What do you do when you have long vacation ?				
	Will take More than couple of days of trip (%)	32.2	52.2	$\chi^2$	***

Concerning housing situations, they tend to live in metropolitan areas rather than medium small towns and enjoy favourable living conditions because they tend to have own house with garden without loan. Any significant differences were not found among family size, marital status, sex, and other factors of the family composition.

Concerning attitudes for holidaymaking and holiday system, there was a significant difference of the answer to the question of how to ease crowded tourist destination in the summer; visitors were more positive for changing schedule of extra-curricular activities at school and cram schools than non-visitors. Further, visitors are more positive towards utilizing flexible holiday system by expressing an intention to make trips more than three nights.

**Table 4 Comparison of characteristics between visitors and non-visitors of pyo**

**farms**

Source: 16th National Survey on Tourism Behaviour in Japan conducted by Japan Tourism Association on 1994.

Notes: 1. \*\*\*, \*\*, \*, + correspond to 1%, 5%, 10%, 20% (as reference ) significance level, respectively. No significance is indicated by *ns*.

□□ 2. In case of small sample size for  $\chi^2$  Test, Fisher's Exact Test was applied.

3. In case of *t* Test, *E* = equal variance and *N* = unequal variance.

**Table 5 Comparison of characteristics between visitors and non-visitors of pyo farms**

Variables		Non-Visitors	Visitors	Test methods	Test results	
Recreational activities	Being fond of trips (%)	71.0	91.3	$\chi^2$	***	
	No. of overnight trips (%)	2.2	3.1	t	E***	
	No. of day trips	4.5	5.8	t	E**	
	No. of travel abroad (%)	0.1	0.1	t	ns	
	Travel around the world if possible (%)	2.3	13.0	$\chi^2$	***	
Recreational activities preferred	Sightseeing (%)	Natural scenery	50.8	67.4	$\chi^2$	**
		Enjoying cherry blossom	15.1	28.3	$\chi^2$	**
	Experiencing (%)	Historical sites	36.1	45.7	$\chi^2$	+
		Botanical garden	21.3	45.7	$\chi^2$	***
		Plays	8.4	15.2	$\chi^2$	+
		Hot spring	50.0	65.2	$\chi^2$	**
		Amusement park	11.5	19.6	$\chi^2$	*
		Shopping of local products	22.4	30.4	$\chi^2$	+
		Making folk/art crafts	4.0	8.7	$\chi^2$	+
	Sports (%)	Picnic	6.0	15.2	$\chi^2$	**
		Cycling	4.1	8.7	$\chi^2$	+
		Swimming	5.5	10.9	$\chi^2$	+
		Yachting	3.2	8.7	$\chi^2$	*
Skiing		12.4	23.9	$\chi^2$	**	
	Skating	1.8	8.7	$\chi^2$	**	

Table 5 indicates that other tourism behaviours and tourism activity they want to make. Concerning other tourism behaviours, visitors go out to more often not only as overnight trips but also as day trips. There was no significant difference in the number of travel abroad they went. Higher preference was observed in watching natural scenery, doing craft art, fishing. As for sports they prefer outdoor sports such as picnic, skiing and skating. Further they prefer more individual or family oriented to group-oriented sports such as baseball or soccer, which are the most and second most popular sports in this country.

Table 6 indicates information sources of trips and complaints they felt on the trip. They tended to obtain the touring information from guidebooks and travel related magazines. This indicates that they planned their destination beforehand by collecting information of their destinations positively rather than they happened to visit a pyo-farm by chance. Word of mouth was not significant between the two groups, although it was an important information source because more than the half of respondents in both groups.

Another interesting point should be noted is that visitors express more complaints about the quality of services they received than the non-visitors. Thus visitors in general are more demanding for the quality of services at the tourist sites than non-visitors.

Finally, Table 7 explains the comparison that cumulative number of trips is taken into consideration. Only these data are available about cumulative number of trips. Visitors tend to be going out to trip with family by car. They tend to conduct watching plays, making folk/art crafts, and go fishing besides visiting pyo-farms. They also tend to stay at inn compared with non-pyo-travellers, and this is probably the reason why they spent less money for a trip in terms of lodging and transportation cost. Thus it can be considered that they prefer an economical way of trip.

**Table 6 Comparison of characteristics between visitors and non-visitors of pyo farms**

Variables		Non-Visitors	Visitors	Test method	Test results
Information sources (%)	Guide books	40.2	60.9	$\chi^2$	***
	Travel magazines	23.6	43.5	$\chi^2$	***
	TV, radio commercials	5.3	0.0	$\chi^2$	+
	Word of mouth	47.6	56.5	$\chi^2$	ns
	Travel agencies	21.4	13.0	$\chi^2$	+

Complaints (%)	Tourist information		14.1	23.9	$\chi^2$	*	
	Exhibition of local products		1.7	4.4	$\chi^2$	+	
	Ads. in bus and train		5.3	10.9	$\chi^2$	*	
	Transportations	Heavy traffic		26.7	41.3	$\chi^2$	**
		Quality of services		1.1	4.4	$\chi^2$	*
		Connections		2.2	8.7	$\chi^2$	**
	Lodging facilities	Fares		8.6	17.4	$\chi^2$	*
		Surrounding environment		1.6	6.5	$\chi^2$	**
	Restaurants	Quality of service		4.3	15.2	$\chi^2$	***
		Carelessness of sanitary matters		2.4	8.7	$\chi^2$	**
	Tourist sites	Tastes		9.4	32.6	$\chi^2$	***
		Admission fee		18.8	45.7	$\chi^2$	***
		Dazzling ads.		5.3	13.0	$\chi^2$	**
		Dirty		2.4	8.7	$\chi^2$	**
		Souvenirs		5.9	15.2	$\chi^2$	**

**Table 7 Comparison of characteristics between visitors and non-visitors of pyo farms (in terms of total numbers of visits)**

Variable		Non-Visitors	Visitors	Test methods	Test results
Unit of trip	Family (%)	29.8	51.7	$\chi^2$	***
Transportation	Car (%)	46.8	60.0	$\chi^2$	**
Other activities conducted	Seeing natural scenery (%)	44.4	68.3	$\chi^2$	***
	Driving (%)	23.9	45.0	$\chi^2$	***
	Seeing plays (%)	4.3	16.7	$\chi^2$	***
	Making folk/art crafts (%)	1.3	18.3	$\chi^2$	***
Lodging facilities they used	Fishing (%)	3.1	21.7	$\chi^2$	***
	Hotels (%)	30.4	36.7	$\chi^2$	ns
	Japanese style inns (%)	32.0	28.3	$\chi^2$	ns
Travel expenses	Inns (%)	6.2	21.7	$\chi^2$	***
	Total (thousand yen/person, trip)	44.4	33.6	t	N***
	Lodging expenses (thousand yen/person, trip)	15.8	11.7	t	N***
	Transportations (thousand yen/person, trip)	11.9	8.3	t	N*
	Souvenirs (thousand yen/person, trip)	6.6	7.5	t	ns

In summary, these characteristics are roughly identical with the findings about visitors of rural tourism in Western Europe. Thus the characteristics of being an up-market were confirmed in this Japanese case.

These results show that strong preference for making trips works most positively for this visit to pyo farms. In other words, the results strongly suggest that they satisfy their life and their rural orientation is a part of their life style. On the other hand, they are demanding on the quality of services they receive when they go out. This is because they tend to have higher mental stress in the urban life, therefore they need to ease the stress in the rural open air space than those who have less mental stress. These factors are causing the rural preference.

Consequently, providing information positively in the related magazines and quality control of providing services and local products based on the authenticity is crucial for operators of rural tourism to attract potential visitors. In this sense, how to harmonise the authenticity with preserving the rural environment must be considered. This point also raises an importance of policy integration of farming and rural policy.

□

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The main points mentioned in this paper are as follows;

- 1) The increasing number of entrants farming has been observed in a recent decade due to the prolonged economic recession and the rising interest for rural life-style. Although the half of them is retiree, this trend of rural orientation is exerting a favourable impact on stimulating broader interest for the rural life-style including rural tourism among younger generations.
- 2) The characteristics of the rural tourist in the case of pick-your-own farms can be summarized that they have higher educational background, professional career and favourable housing conditions. However, they do not take luxurious travel form with understanding to traditional art and some orientation for out door. These are characteristics of an up-market and niche market, which is roughly identical with findings reported in Western Europe about tourists of rural tourism. These results tell us that this preference becomes already a part of their life-style and plays an important role determining the demand for rural tourism.
- 3) Concerning policy implications, providing authentic local products, service and

information and preserving the rural environment is important in order to attract potential visitors who have rural preference. In this respect, need for integration of farming and rural policy will increase not at the top down level but at the bottom-up level in the future. Taking the progress of diversification of the rural economy into account, it will become important to set up proper policy framework in which farming policy and rural policy are well integrated at local level.

□

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Dr Ohe is Professor of rural economics, Faculty of Horticulture, Chiba University. The author is especially interested in rural and farm tourism and rural diversification. He is now involved in the national projects of developing rural and farm tourism in Japan and has been conducting research collaboration on this issue between Japan and Italy for international comparison.

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