

Context Evaluation of the Japanese Extension Service

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Abstract

The circumstances surrounding Japanese agriculture have changed rapidly. The style of Japanese agriculture extension services has also changed following the change of circumstances.

The content of extension activities tends to be not only technical guidance for cultivation, but also advice on management guidance including marketing. Targets are also focusing on the newcomers including private companies. The role of public extension advisors has been to become facilitators among the people concerned. Concerning extension methods, information technology is being used as a supplementary measure along with face-to-face contact. Also an increasing number of extension advisors have introduced small group activities.

The tendency above may become more common in the future.

Keywords: extension service, facilitator, information technology, small group activities

1. Introduction

The cooperative extension services have a sixty year history.

In April 2005, the Agricultural Improvement Promotion Law was revised.

According to the law, extension advisors and subject-matter specialists all became extension advisors (7,645 advisors in 2011). The budget of extension systems is operated with funds from the central government (6%) and prefectures (94%). There

Table 1. The Number of Extension Advisors

Fiscal year	1995	2000	2005	2011
Number	11,145	10,267	8,886	7,645
Ratio(%)	100	92	80	69

Source: Data of Extension Activities, MAFF2009 and MAFF homepage

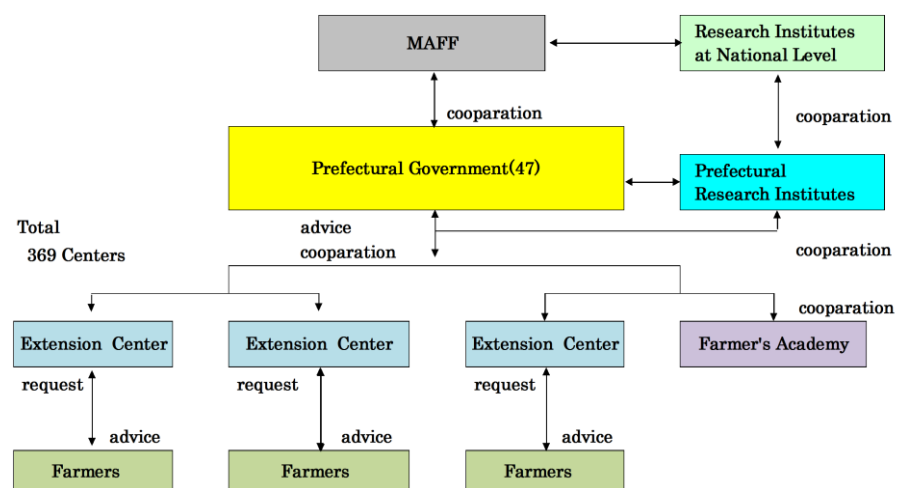


Chart 1. Organization of Extension Services in Japan

Source: Koichi Fukuda

are 7,645 staff members of prefecture government, at 369 extension centers in 2011 (Chart 1). As a result of the decreasing budgets of national and prefectural governments, the number of public advisors has been going down (Table 1). On the other hand, we have the other advisors who are staff of Japan Agriculture Cooperatives (JA) and have been also decreasing.

Since the public extension system has strong links with institutes, extension advisors conduct extension activities by improving technology developed by the institutes.

2. Methods of the study

In this paper, I would like to make clear the current situations of the Japanese public extension service based on the change of circumstances surrounding Japanese agriculture.

In order to reach this objective, two cases of extension activities will be reviewed, and the functions, contents, targets and methods of extension activities will be discussed based on statistics, etc.

3. Cases of Extension Activities

(1) Development of production areas

Potato production at Katori in Chiba has been well developed. Farmers have traditionally grown them. Also, they started to produce a new variety, “Manamusume,” which was introduced in 2001. The number of farmers who produced them, however, remained stagnant from the year 2004 (fukuda, 2008).

In the early stages (before 2004), extension advisors’ support for farmers was centered on problem solving. The advice given by advisors included soil management, pest and disease control, and cultivation management. In this stage, the controlled techniques hadn’t been formed by farmers. Therefore, the importance of group guidance (“top down” approach) hasn’t changed.

In the later stage (since 2004), stress has been focused on innovations, such as, new methods for cultivation. Extension advisors give advice on how to market products. Also they facilitate group activities for farmers and related organizations. Accordingly, it is effective to utilize small group activities for facilitation.

(2) Individual guidance

Strawberry production is important in Nagasaki prefecture, southern Japan. The variety “Sachinoka” is vulnerable to anthracnose. In order to secure high quality products, advisers provide information on the measures against pests and diseases by individual guidance and a mobile phone service. Advisors provide advice to farmers by sending short mail messages (SMS) to their mobile phones, together with face to face contact (fukuda, 2008).

4. Results and Discussion

(1) Contents of extension activities

It is said that “Extension activities should be focused on people (farmers)” in Japan.

Extension activities are conducted based on extension programs (refer to Table 2). The main subjects of extension programs are (a) supporting key farmers and young up-and-coming farmers, (b) development of production areas, (c) promoting environmentally friendly farming, (d) helping produce safe products, and (e) supporting rural communities and lives (MAFF, 2009).

Recently, the price of agricultural products has been falling because of deflation in Japan. However, the price of materials has been going up. In order to improve farm management, not only technical guidance for cultivation, but also advice on management guidance including marketing becomes crucial factors in extension activities.

Since the big earthquake and nuclear accidents happened on March 11th, the advisors have been revitalizing the devastated areas. For example, in Fukushima prefecture, advisors analyze the radiation of soil and provide advice to farmers on how to get rid of contamination from the soil. In Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, advisors advise on measures to reduce salt damage of soil.

(2) Targets and function of extension activities

At present, about 60 percent of farmers in Japan are over 65 years old. In 10 years, the number of farmers will drop sharply. On the other hand, an increasing number of private companies have been entering the agricultural sector after the revision of the Agricultural Land Act (Chart 2).

Newcomers from urban areas are also increasingly engaged in farming.

The government has been preparing for the free trade such as FTA (Free Trade Agreement),

Table 2. The Ratio of hours by kinds of extension Activities

Fiscal year	2000	2006
Planned Activities	86.6	88.1
Requested Activities	13.4	11.9
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Data of Extension Activities, MAFF2009

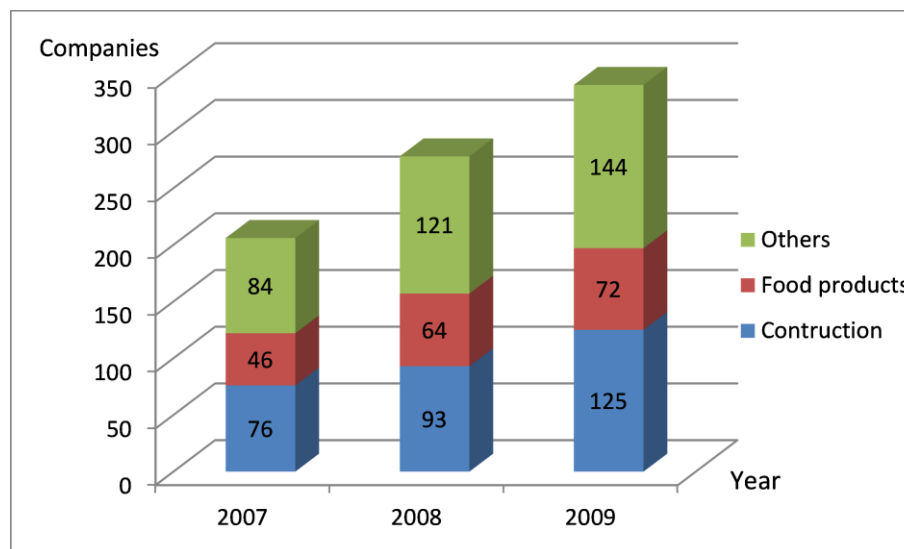


Chart 2. Private companies having entered agricultural sector (By borrowing land)

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement), and TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership). On the contrary, financial difficulties have been making the number of extension advisers smaller (Table 1).

The extension systems of Japan have been strongly influenced by the circumstances. Due to newcomers and free trade, it is difficult to maintain rural communities.

According to the context, the role of public extension advisers who are facilitators has been more important for organizing people concerned, including the staff of Japan Agriculture Cooperative (JA), buyers, retailers of agricultural materials, etc. The consultation with not only farmers but also private companies has also become necessary (Private consultants also may advise them), because of the importance of fostering newcomers to succeed.

(3) Methods of the extension services

Main methods of extension activities in Japan are guidance by visiting farms, consultation & analysis (soil, growth, disease, and management), demonstration farms, training seminars, etc. (MAFF, 2009)

The number of farm households per extension advisor in Japan is 250 to 350. Accordingly, group guidance is still an important method for extension activities.

In order to conduct more effective extension services, the following measures are necessary.

(a) Small group activities

A whole group in a community is divided into some small groups. Each small group has about 10 farmers. An extension advisor provides advice including innovations such as new cultivation methods to the key farmer in each small group (Chart 4).

Firstly innovations extend to the other farmers in each group. Next, innovations spread to the

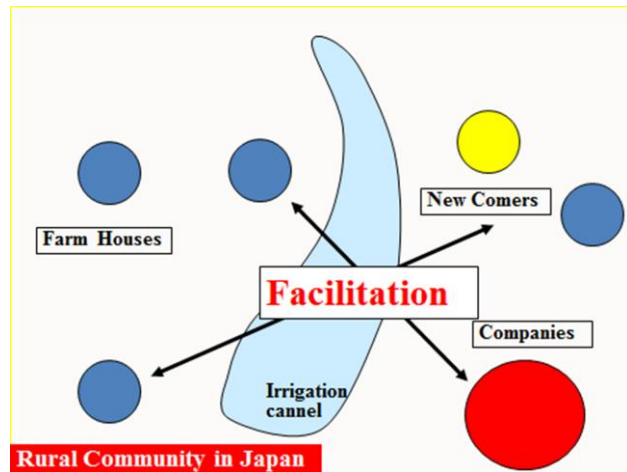


Chart 3. Function of Extension Services in Japan
Source: Koichi Fukuda

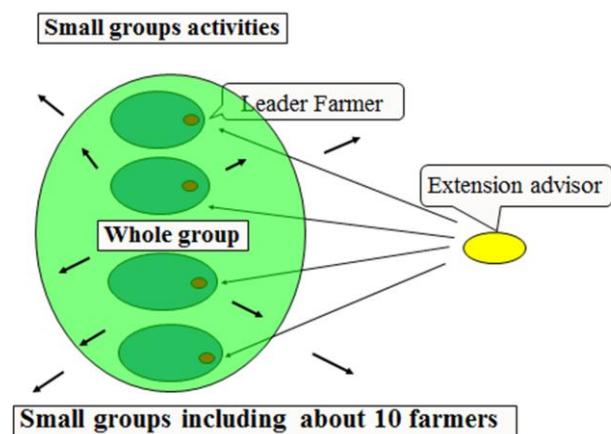


Chart 4. Small group activities in Japan
Source: Koichi Fukuda



Picture 1. Farmers check E-mail sent to mobile phone

whole group, and finally, innovations expand outside the whole group.

(b) Electronic media

In some prefectures, E-mail including pests and diseases control sent by extension advisors to mobile phones is being used as a new extension method, as about 74 % of farmers possessed mobile phones in 2005 (surveyed by MAFF). However, IT has been used as a supplementary measure with face-to-face contact (Fukuda, 2008).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the change of circumstances surrounding Japanese agriculture, the style of Japanese agriculture extension service also has changed as follows.

(1) Contents of extension activities

The price of agricultural products has been falling. On the contrary, the price of materials has been going up. Under the circumstances, marketing has been introduced into the services conducted by advisors to improve farm management.

(2) Targets of extension activities and roles of extension advisors

It is necessary to think about newcomers including private companies. Therefore not only farmers but also the newcomers have become targets of extension activities.

Since it is difficult to maintain rural communities with an increasing number of aging farmers and newcomers, the role of public extension advisors has become facilitators among stakeholders such as buyers, JA, retailers of agricultural materials, etc.

(3) Extension methods of extension activities

As extension methods, information technology is being used as a supplementary measure along with face-to-face contact. On the other hand, an increasing number of extension advisors have been asking key farmers as volunteers to organize and inform the other farmers and introduce small group activities.

On the perspectives of the extension system in Japan, I expect that these tendencies will become more common in the future.

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