

Change and Problems about Women Farmers in Japan

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Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to show outline of the change about women farmers in Japan and to point out problems. The prototype for the rural family image in Japan can be found before rapid economic growth from middle 1950's to early 1970's. The rural family was essentially a patriarchal stem family which is called "Ie". The basic rural community in Japan, a rural hamlet which is called "Mura" was conceived and governed as such traditional household, "Ie" coalitions. Homogeneous rural community is enumerated as the major features. Women were seen solely as unpaid laborers with bearing and rearing children, or "hornless cows." After rapid economic growth, stem family remain a distinguishing characteristic, but the characters of rural family have been greatly altered from the "Ie". About rural community, growing heterogeneity of rural community can be enumerated since rapid economic growth. The way of management of rural community is changing, but women are still excluded by decision making.

In Japanese farming villages, the number of women accounts for approximately 55% of total farming population, making the role of women very important in agricultural production and rural life. Recently leaders of women farmers have overcome difficulties and become the most important key persons to develop agriculture and rural life in Japan, though they still belong to a minority.

It is very useful to promote "Farm Management Agreement" and "Rural Women Entrepreneurial Activities" in the light of both empowerment of women farmers and sustainable development of agriculture. It is necessary to push forward gender equality in all aspects. So governmental supports for women farmers are and should be provided in promoting women farmer's activities based on 2 related basic laws, "Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society" and the "Basic Law on Food, Agriculture, and Farming Village".

1. Image versus reality

What is the common perception of families and women in rural farming villages in Japan?

The prototype for the rural family image can be found before Japan's period of rapid economic growth from middle 1950's to early 1970's. The rural (agricultural) family was essentially a patriarchal stem family which is called "Ie". Because families included unmarried collateral relatives, they tended to be quite large. Live-in workers lived on a large farm with the farm owners. Inheritance of the family business and property was based on an established system. The basic rural community in Japan, a rural hamlet which is called "Mura" was

conceived and governed as Japanese traditional household, “Ie” coalitions. Self-government has been performed led by “Omodachi”, representatives of influential “Ie” who were almost all old and middle men in “Mura” .Homogeneous rural community was enumerated as the major features. This network of geographical and sanguinary relations often interfered with the running of individual households. Women were seen solely as unpaid laborers with bearing and rearing children, or “hornless cows.”

However, the rural family has changed enormously in recent years. The family structure in Japan has changed to include more singles, single-generation, and nuclear families, but in the case of rural family, stem family remain a distinguishing characteristic. Still, the characters of rural family have been greatly altered from the “Ie” (household) system. In other words, diverse management styles and lifestyles have emerged within the stem family. As farming families increasingly supplement their income with side businesses, family members are more and more engaged in different jobs. Even those working in agriculture are subject to greater division of labor. Lifestyle changes have affected life outside of work as well: farming families increasingly separate their family budgets, meals, and living quarters into smaller family units. Living areas are often divided using the married couple as the base unit of ownership, and there are also more cases of commuting to the farm to work. These phenomena do not signal the end of the stem family. If anything, they are the reflection of the rural family’s attempts to adapt to changing social conditions while respecting each family member’s individuality.

About rural community, growing heterogeneity of rural community can be enumerated since rapid economic growth. Recently about 90% of residences of rural hamlet are non-farm households. The way of management of rural community is changing, but women farmers are still excluded by decision making (Kawate (2000)) .

2. The changing lifestyle of the rural family

It goes without saying that Japan’s period of rapid economic growth was a major factor in altering the landscape for agriculture and rural farming villages. During this period, agriculture and farmers’ lifestyles “modernized” in a clearly visible way. A significant shift to urban lifestyles was made. Washing machines, refrigerators, televisions, interior toilets and baths became fixtures of life, and the farm kitchen was also rapidly improved. As a result, the amount of heavy labor families performed decreased markedly. Houses also changed: from multi-generational families living in neighboring rooms separated only by thin walls or sliding doors to homes ensuring a greater measure of privacy for couples. The move of younger sons, women, and finally eldest sons to other industries spurred the addition of supplementary businesses and the move to “rurbanization.” Values also changed. Examples include (1) the emergence of individualism (equality under the law and respect for self-determination of career, living arrangement, and marriage), (2) changing attitudes about nature (from feared to conquerable or developable), (3) a partial shift to economic rationalism. All of these developments led to the spread of economic orientation.

Consequently, the rural family underwent major change. One might call this, “the coupling of the stem family,” meaning the move to married couple level family structure. Patriarchal family relations weakened, and the emotional bonds between couples and their children in particular came to be emphasized. Parent-child agreements provided impetus for the further differentiation of lifestyles for each married couple family unit. Factors in this include, (1) the assignment of management responsibilities to farm heirs and encouragement of participation in farming, (2) the shift away from treating farm heirs as “unpaid labor” and the accompanying

provision of wages and allowances to each family member, and (3) housing improvements.

While the stem family remained the rule, the changing demographics of 1950s Japan meant a precipitous drop in children per couple and loss of collateral family to other enterprises. Overall (with regional variation), the family shrunk. Live-in employees and other labor disappeared. The family business (farming) ceased to be the subject of inheritance, and only family assets continued to be passed down.

Multi-generational cohabitation, which had been the rule for farming families, gave way to an ideal family based on married couple family units. Farm heirs had less disposable income than their white collar peers, and men were at a disadvantage in finding wives because of the heavy labor awaiting women on farms. Some heirs made the effort to carve out their own management divisions to overcome this adversity. This was simultaneous to efforts by many farmers to avoid relying on supplementary (non-agricultural) income by moving away from rice-only farming.

Women, however, were still unpaid labor, with little chance of self-realization. Traditional views of gender roles and “women’s work” remained strong. As agricultural productivity rose, the division between productive labor and housework was drawn with increasing clarity. Because of fixed gender role prejudices, women were increasingly shunted into housework— more and more their labor was “shadow work.” Farming women thus came to be defined as “wife’s help in the background “for their husbands, the “entrepreneurs” of modern farming in Japan (Kawate (2000)) .

3. Individualism within the stem family

Rural families today, particularly those engaged solely in agriculture (but excluding those in depopulated areas and in regions like Kagoshima where the youngest son is traditionally the heir) have evolved from a period of unaltered stem family morphology with the married couple forefronted to one of unaltered stem family morphology with the *individual* forefronted.

In other words, the family structure remains within the parameters of the stem family. Despite increased intergenerational lifestyle differentiation and separate or two-generation living quarters, what is actually occurring is that the three-generation family arrangement is barely holding on or that the families themselves are falling apart; this is not a paradigm shift to a new household model. It is worth noting that individual lifestyle differentiation as mentioned above is predicated on intragenerational and intergenerational lifestyle balance, but because of the general trend to individualization, this balance is not easily attained and maintained. Individualization and heterogenization are affecting even farming families, and that today's farm families tend not to be coherent in this sense. Families are also shrinking. Traditional inheritance systems have mostly faltered. Of these, family asset inheritance has been particularly weakened by rising urban land prices and population loss in rural villages.

These changes can be summarized as: (1) unaltered stem family morphology, (2) increasing emphasis on the emotional bonds between couples and their children, (3) a shift to farm management by individuals, and (4) increasing an increasing level of lifestyle differentiation. (2) has been problematic since Japan’s period of rapid economic growth. It proved an important factor in the progression of (3) and (4) and continues to grow stronger. (3) and (4) are relatively new changes. They share the following characteristics: (a) increasing responsibility and participation in farm management by women, (b) decreased treatment of women as “unpaid labor” sources and the

corresponding personal budgets, and (c) increasing individual human networking outside the family structure. It must be added that (c) represents a shift away from traditional autochthonic and consanguinary bonds to relationships based on choice. This means the creation of new human pipelines in the family and community. In this context, the bases for individual expression are being established at the same time that communities are evolving into new forms. It is worth noting that individual lifestyle and farm management differentiation as mentioned above are predicated on intragenerational and intergenerational lifestyle balance, but because of the general trend to individualization, this balance is not easily attained and maintained. These changes in family relations are of vast importance in considering the changes in rural farming society.

3. The empowerment of women farmers

Contemporary women farmers in Japan are far from “miserable”.

In Japanese farming villages, the number of women accounts for approximately 55% of total farming population, making the role of women very important in agricultural production as they handle their work of housekeeping, child rearing and care taking of the elderly and so on at the same time. Recently the number of women farmers, mainly their leaders, who play an active role in society of farming villages has been increasing.

Table 1 Percentage of Women in Farm Population in Japan

Item	Farm Household Population	Farm Population
	(Unit : 1,000 people)	(Unit : 1,000 people)
Total	9647	3684
Female	4926	2039
Ratio(%)	51.1	55.4

Source : The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, “Agricultural Cesus” 2005

Leaders of women farmers now in their 50s and 60s play key roles in changing the rural family. These women were born in the post-War period, and were among the first generation to receive democratization education throughout their school careers. Many of these women began farming only after marriage, regardless of whether they were born on a farm or not. The majority began to seriously take on leadership roles in their 30s—after the busiest childrearing period had ended. Many were born in cities to white collar families and had no premarital knowledge of or experience with agriculture. Paradoxically, it was this previous ignorance that allowed them to posit themselves as active subjects at the same time agriculture and rural farming villages slipped deeper into trouble. They take on new important roles or businesses in agriculture, (1) as the manager or the management partner, (2) the processing and selling of farm product, agriculture for tourism and so on, giving

women responsibility for initiating a new business as well.

Their sphere of activity has expanded from their own farms and lifestyles to include the community and even the urban side of the equation. Their activities are not limited to empowering rural farming women. They are involved with farmers’ markets, direct sales, processing agricultural products, passing down received traditions and creating new ones, community building, managing local resources, responding to environmental issues, welfare for the elderly, liaising with urbanites and consumers, and more.

Background of new roles or businesses of women farmers, the Japanese consumers are begging to demand fresh, delicious, safe and real farm products. On the other hand, farmers are begging to process and sell their farm products directly to consumers at higher prices in order to increase their income. After rapid economic development in Japan, for the promotion of agriculture and farm villages, a kind of harmonization with urbanization and industrialization has become very important, including intercourse between urbanites and ruralites or consumers and producers (kawate (2000)) (Tsuru (2008)) .

Recently, many women in farm households have been initiating new businesses in rural area. This economic activities includes processing of farm products, direct selling to consumers, delivery of meals to the elderly, running the special restaurant featuring famous foods of the area and green tourism activities. The amount annual sales and profits from these business are generally not so great, but they are stimulating local economies.

Such new businesses are called “Rural Women Entrepreneurial Activities” or “New Work by Rural Women Entrepreneurs”, Which are promoted, getting support of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, local government, Agricultural Cooperatives and so on (Miyaki (1996)) (Miyaki and Iwasaki (2000)) (Morofuji (2007)) .

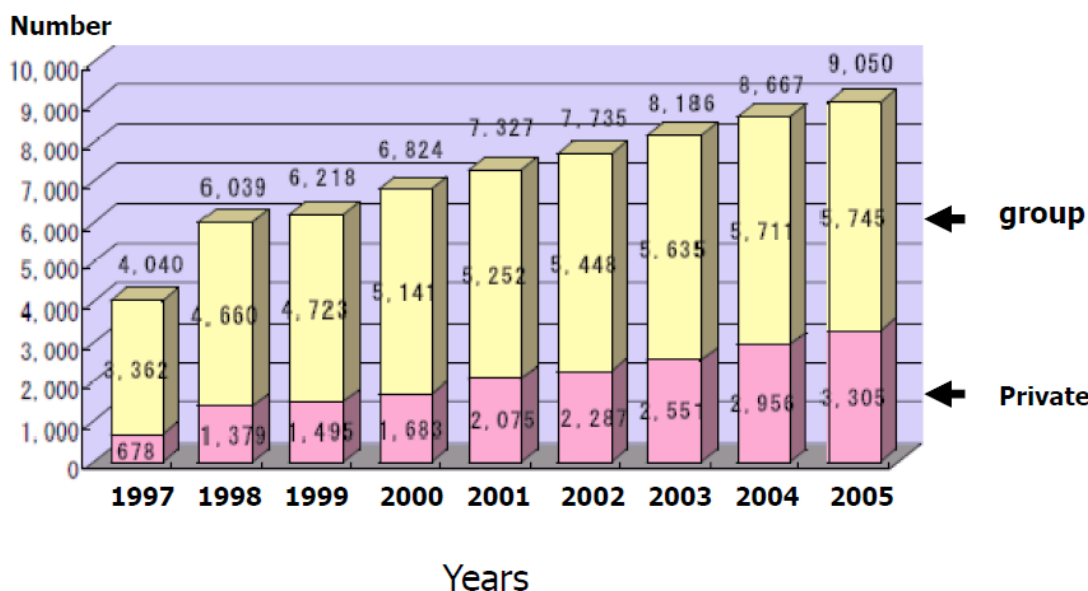


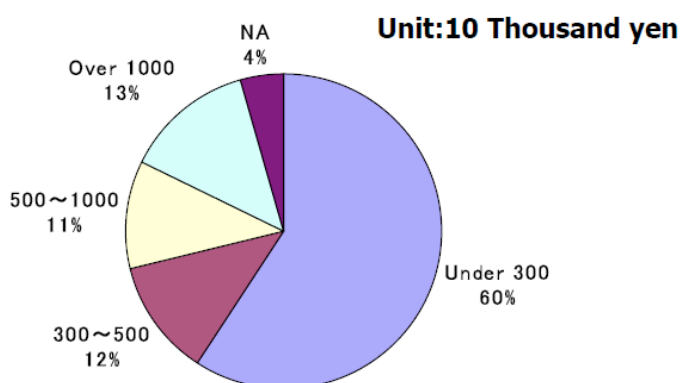
Figure 1 Trends of Rural Women Entrepreneurial Activities in Japan
 Source : The Division of Agricultural Extension and Women, MAFF, 2007

Table 2 Type of Rural Women Entrepreneurial Activities in Japan, 2005

Type	Number	%
Total	9050	100
Agricultural Production	1421	15.2
Food Processing	6816	75.3
Other Processing	343	3.8
Direct Sales, Distribution	3999	44.2
Interchange with City	995	11
Service	55	0.6
Other	42	0.5
NA	7	0.1

Source : The Division of Agricultural Extension and Women, MAFF, 2007

Figure 2 Rural Women Entrepreneurial Activities by Year Proceeds (Gross Sales), 2005



Source : The Division of Agricultural Extension and Women, MAFF, 2007

Leaders of women farmers value couple-based living patterns, but also multigenerational living. They also seek ways of self-realization. Many women farmers try to manage the divergent life vectors of family balance, couple-based living patterns, and individualism in order to live empowered, subjective lives. The rural family has developed into one with unaltered stem family morphology and the individual forefronted. These women emphasize and promote family management agreements along with supporting organizations. “Farm Management Agreements” (Gojyo (2003)) (Kawate (2005)) , now also promoted under support of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and fishery and local governments, seek intragenerational and intergenerational lifestyle balance with the lifestyle of the individual, and simultaneously promote a shift to new farming family relations, equal partnership among family members (Rural life research Institute (1999)) (Kawate (2000)) .

And activities to send representatives of women farmers to agriculture committee and assembly of cities, towns, and villages with the aspect of the empowerment of women farmers begin in each place.

Now leaders of women farmers have overcome much difficulties and become the most important key persons to develop agriculture and rural life in Japan. And their actions change agriculture and rural society gradually but steadily, though they still belong to a minority.

After World War II, various supports, including having seminars and organizing women farmers, have been

performed for improvement of abilities and social position of rural woman, promotion of the activity by Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, local government, Agricultural Cooperatives. Especially Agricultural Improvement Extension Centers located in each prefectural government throughout the nation has played central role.

4. A Case of one of the leaders of women farmers

Mrs.Kanae Uwano, one of the representative leaders of women farmers in Japan, lives in Takizawa, a village adjacent to Morioka, the capital of Iwate Prefecture, and located about 500km north of Tokyo. She runs a farm whose main products are apples. Takizawa is not only a bedroom community of Morioka but also a farming district blessed with abundant land resources. Farmers in the village are mostly engaged in multiple cropping, combining paddy rice cultivation or dairy farming, which are the main industries in the area, with the growing of apples or vegetables. Recently, the production of flowers is increasing, too.

Kanae's family has six members, including her, of four generations: her husband (65), mother-in-law (86), her eldest son (35) and his wife (34) and their daughter (Kanae's granddaughter).

Kanae and her husband are the main workers at the farm. While her husband is responsible for crop management and work plans, Kanae takes charge of customer service, sale of apples and bookkeeping. In April 2004, her eldest son resigned as teacher and began to join his parents as a farmer. The son's wife mainly does housework and childcare, and the mother-in-law (mother of Kanae's husband) manages the family's premises.

The family's farm is composed of 230a of apple orchards and 20a of vegetable fields, which are used partly as a farm for learning by experience for visitors and partly as a farm for growing vegetables for the family's own consumption. A total of 19 apple varieties are planted. The most important is Fuji, which occupies 40 percent of the orchards' total area, followed by Orin, Yoko, Hokuto, Kio and Jona Gold. When apples became the farm's main product, the family began to call their apple orchards "Uwano Apple Orchards." Besides apple production, the family manages tourists' apple orchards and carries out other green tourism activities, such as orchard ownership plans and learning by experience programs in farming. The tourists' orchards have about 2,000 visitors a year. The family owns a direct sale store of farm produce, and its combined sales at the store and of home delivery service account for about 50 percent of the total sales. The owners of the orchards total about 200, and 20 percent of the sales come from these owners. Other business includes sale at the district's joint sale store (10% of the total sales), the tourists' apple orchard (10%), participation in community events (5%) and shipment to the local JA agricultural cooperative (5%).

Kanae, now 60, was born in 1946, just after World War II ended, as the seventh child of eleven brothers and sisters in a farmer family in Kuzumaki, a mountainous area 60km northeast of Takizawa. After graduating from a junior high school, she worked as an employee at the local agricultural cooperative for five years. At 20, she married and moved to Takizawa and joined her husband and his parents as a farmer. In those days, the family's farm consisted of 180a of paddy fields and 100a of apple orchards. Two years after the marriage, Kanae and her husband started pig farming, and they gradually increased the number of pigs. Also, about at same time, the road in front of the house was reconstructed to prepare for the national athletic meet to be held in the prefecture, and taking this occasion, Kanae played the central role in promoting the direct sale of apples to the consumer. The purpose was to increase the value added of their apples as much as possible. At present, the direct sale of apples

is not rarely observed, but at that time, it was regarded as a folly by most farmers in the district. In 1980, Kanae established her own permanent store for direct sale. As a result of these activities, her apple production increased gradually. In those years, she had four children, and while engaged in housework and childcare, she continued pig farming and the cultivation of apples and other crops together with her husband.

When graduated from a university, Kanae's eldest son said to her: "I will join you two as a farmer ten years from now. So please continue to improve and expand the apple orchards." These words were an important turning point to her. The son chose to work as a high school teacher first. Kanae and her husband selected apples as a crop that could be cultivated throughout life without too much labor and could give hope to their son, and discontinued pig farming and paddy rice cultivation to concentrate on the development of their apple orchards. At the same time, they started green tourism activities, including farm ownership plans, in an effort to further enhance the value added of their apples. Kanae took the initiative in planning and establishing an easy-to-use apple warehouse, a warehouse of farm implements, a direct sale store, a room for leaning by experience, a resting place and a multi-purpose hall. According to Kanae, one of the reasons for introducing the farm ownership plans was the fact that a friend, with whom she became familiar through childcare, said to her that the apple orchards were wonderful and envied her. Kanae says: "Whenever I have applicants for owners, I always ask them to come to the orchards and to walk in them. While showing them around the orchards, I talk with them about everything. I encourage them to feel like they became the owners of the orchards. If they became the owners, I hope they understand the feelings of apples growing here and the process of their ripening. I tell them I hope those who sympathize with my wishes become the owners. This may be a little selfish, but I think I can get along well with them in the apple orchards if what I can offer them and their wishes agree with each other. We will try to treat the owners of the apple orchards just as our family members, calling them 'apple family members'." In fact, the owners can enter and visit their orchards any time of the year, and can take a rest at the owners' resting place "Gororian," helping themselves to a cup of tea or coffee. Kanae is also committed to the provision of barrier-free facilities, and constructed a toilet and paths in the orchards for wheel-chair users.

In doing these activities, Kanae signed a "family management agreement" with her husband. This agreement lays down the agreed matters about farm work and life in the family as regards role sharing, decision making, remuneration and holidays, working hours and other working and daily life conditions. "Though I have not dared to tell this to even my husband, I have strongly felt women married with farmers are disadvantaged and have many problems. I cooperated with my husband, who said to me his dream was to work as a full-time farmer, and worked hard as a wife and a daughter-in-law to help the family "Uwano" out of difficulty, but the life of my own as an individual and my efforts were never officially recognized. So, when I decided to start new forms of agriculture, I thought I would sign a family management agreement with my husband so that I may work harder and become a model as a community leader," said Kanae. After the agreement was concluded, she first came to know the amount of her remuneration. Loans of funds and their repayment plans were also made clear as a result of the bookkeeping started under the agreement, and the share of farm and other work was clearly defined.

After Kanae introduced green tourism plans, other farmers in the area began to work on a variety of activities for the same purpose, too. About three years ago, the "Flower Festival" was started in Uwano Apple Orchards. In this event, the "Network of All Good Products from Yanagisawa hamlet," the group created by Kanae and her

friends, established a section for selling farm products and has continued interchanges with many people. In addition, on the basis of this network, the "Group of the Foot of Mt. Iwate" was also formed. To offer young people opportunities for study on many subjects, Kanae is positively providing them with part of her farm, meeting places and tools. Her dream is endless; she cultivates and harvests buckwheat, the traditional food in the area, and studies new cooking methods of this crop. She also plans to establish a rural restaurant and a confectionary factory as well as to expand the direct sale store. According to Kanae, "The Group is mainly composed of relatively young people, and I hope its members will become leaders in the community in the future."

As a representative of rural women groups and as a leader farmer approved by the Governor of Iwate Prefecture, Kanae is also making many contributions to the promotion of gender equality and to the revitalization of rural agriculture, including making a lecture about her experiences to farmers (kawate (2004)) .

4. Problems for women farmers

Whether new forms of social cohesion based on families respecting individuals and the independence of local communities is possible or not will greatly affect the future lifestyles of Japan's farming communities. If this proves impossible, the crises facing agriculture and rural farming villages will only deepen. In either case, new form of cohesion will be possible and diversified farming orientated to consumers will also possible. And then the role to be played by rural farming women is critically important, just like Mrs. Kanae Uwano.

Recently, especially since the 1990s, women's role in agriculture has finally begun to be recognized gradually. In order for the farm management to improve and develop, the positions and roles of both heirs and women must be clarified, efforts must be made to improve productivity, and family members must respect each other's individuality and learn to see each other as partners. The stem family is capable of flexibly responding to these new management and lifestyle changes to support contemporary society's diverse family structures and lifestyles. The further development of agriculture and farming lifestyles will depend on the creation of new relationships within the rural family.

The rural family will likely remain centered on the stem family structure. As agriculture itself has become a matter of choice, so has the stem family—still systems open to the community are indispensable. Moreover, systems of farmland inheritance must be developed that simultaneously respect individual rights and ensure secure, stable transitions. The "modernization of family relationships" is proposed in agricultural administration without any discussion of appropriate management transfer/inheritance. What must be problematized now is that despite advocating the establishment of modern family management practices, nothing has been done to change the pre-modern patriarchal stem family practices of management transfer and inheritance. This exceptionally difficult issue is, in fact, already being addressed in communities around Japan. Systematic support is needed to solve the bevy of problems this implies.

Recently the number of rural family who try to clarify the positions and roles of each others and respect each other as partners is increasing and the contemporary stem family is capable of flexibly responding to these new management and lifestyle changes.

But there are still many problems about women farmers in Japan. The level of gender equality is not enough. For example, in a survey about 90% of women farmers take part in farm management in some manner, about 70%

receive compensation in some way, but only 40% receive on a monthly basis. Ratio of Possession of farmland by women farmers is very low. Even leaders of women farmers are still excluded by decision making of regional agriculture and revitalization. The daily work hours of women farmers are longer compared to those of men.

Table 3 Participation in the Agricultural Committee and Agricultural Cooperatives

Year	1985	1995	2005
Number of Members in Agricultural Committee	64080	60529	45379
Number of Female Members	40	203	1869
Ratio of Women (%)	0.15	0.66	4.1
Number of Managers in Agricultural Cooperative	77490	68611	22797
Number of Female Managers	39	70	438
Ratio of Women (%)	0.1	0.2	1.9

Source : The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, “2007 White Paper On Agriculture” 2008

Table4 Average Daily Hours Spent on Work and Housekeeping in Farming and Fishing Village

	Work	House-keeping, Nursing, Child care				Total
		House-keeping	Nursing	Child care	Sub total	
Males	6.04	0.13	0.02	0.02	0.17	6.21
Females	4.45	2.54	0.09	0.09	3.08	7.53
Female Ratio vs. Male	78%					124%

Source : Management and Coordination Agency “Basic Study Report on Social Life” (Year 1996)

(Note) The ratio has been calculated by percentage

It is very useful to promote “Farm Management Agreement” and “Rural Women Entrepreneurial Activities” in the light of not only empowerment of women farmers but also development of farm management and regional agriculture.

As a premise, in rural families and farm village communities, it goes without saying that it is necessary to push forward gender equality in all aspects.

The “Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society” was publicized and enforced in June 1999 in Japan, so as to ‘maintain equal opportunities for both men and women to participate in various activities in all social fields according to the intensions of each individual as equal constituent members of the society’. In addition, the “Basic Law on Food, Agriculture, and Farming Village” has been established in 1999, stipulating that ‘maintenance of an environment shall be promoted so as to provide fair evaluation on the role maintain opportunities for women to take part in the management of farming , as well as to maintain opportunities for women farmers to take part in the management of farming according to their own intentions as well as to take part in related activities.

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in Japan presented “the Vision” in order to create and systematize new agricultural policy for women farmers before 2 basic laws in 1991. It is first time for women farmers to be recognized as important key persons in farming officially. The goals for women farmers were described clearly. Agricultural policy for women farmers has been promoted based on “the Vision”. Promotion of Family Management Agreement and Rural Enterprise were held very important positions (Yagi (1999)) (Tutsumi ed. (2000)) .

At any rate governmental and social supports for women farmers should be strongly provided in promoting women farmers’ activities based on “the Vision” and 2 basic laws.

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