

Food Security Politics and Alternative Agri-food Initiatives in Japan*

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1. Introduction

In the face of frequent world food price crises in recent years, food security has received much attention in the international community as well as in academia. We have seen various but overlapping special issues on food security in academic journals and publications in the discipline of agricultural and food related social sciences,¹ while new journals on food security have also been launched over the past several years.² However, these are largely focused either on food insecurity in Africa and other least developed regions/countries and international responses to their problems of poverty and hunger, or on food insecurity in the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Australia and their national and local responses to the problem of community- and household-level food security, nutrition security, and food safety concerns. There is also growing attention on the potential for alternative concepts, policies and social movements, such as “food sovereignty” (Wittman et al. 2010; Holt-Gimenez 2011; Edelman et al. 2014) and “the right to food” (Ziegler et al. 2011; De Schutter & Cordes 2011; Monsalve Suarez 2013), to challenge and replace the conventional idea

¹ For example, special issues on food security and/or food sovereignty in *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*: “The Question of Food Security” edited by Lawrence and McMichael [Volume 19, Issue 2, 2012], *Agriculture and Human Values*: “Symposium on Food Sovereignty: Expanding the analysis and application” edited by Anderson and Bellows [Volume 29, Issue 2, 2012], *Journal of Rural Studies*: “Food Security: A fractured consensus” edited by Maye and Kirwan [Volume 29, 2013], *The Journal of Peasant Studies*: “Critical Perspectives on Food Sovereignty” edited by Elelman et al. [Volume 41, Number 6, 2014], among others.

² For example, *Food Security* (Springer) was launched in 2009, *Global Food Security* (Elsevier) in 2012, *Agriculture & Food Security* (BioMed) in 2012, *Food and Energy Security* (Wiley) in 2012, *Journal of Food Security* (Science and Education Publishing) in 2013, and *African Journal of Agriculture and Food Security* (International Scholars Journals Publishing) in 2013.

of “food security”.

With its rapid economic growth, first in Japan then followed by South Korea, Taiwan and China, East Asia is widely recognised as one of the most important regions in the world economy. This is also true for its agricultural and food sector. Japan and China are two of the world’s largest net food importers. Japan has experienced and to some extent pioneered various types of alternative food network movements (such as the *Teikei* system: [Jordan 2010](#)) since the 1960’s, while South Korea also shows many interesting and intriguing examples of alternative agri-food initiatives ([Kim 2014](#)). Nowadays, China and South Korea are quite often named in the context of “land grabbing” debates, though negatively. Despite East Asia’s significance in the globalised agrifood system, however, very little has been discussed in the international academic community about the historical-structural realities and transformations of the agricultural sector, food systems, and rural societies in the region; one of the few exceptions is Philip McMichael’s ([2000](#)) analysis of the rise of the East Asian food import complex.

While public as well as academic debates over the food security situation in China have multiplied since Lester Brown’s *Who Will Feed China?* ([1995](#)) was published, Japan seems to keep a low profile in food security and agrarian change studies. If Japan is referred to and discussed at all, it is probably in the context of GATT and WTO negotiations. Japan is one of the countries, along with the European Union and the United States, that has promoted free trade through these forums while at the same time practicing protectionism and subsidies for the domestic agricultural sector (see [Otero et al. 2013](#)). Needless to say, however, more than 60% of food calories consumed by the Japanese people come from abroad, and its agricultural sector, with its reliance on small-scale, declining and aging producers, has always been damaged by the external (the U.S. and WTO) and internal (mainstream business sector, or exporting manufacturing industries) pressures to open the already less-protected market and reduce the already low-level farm support measures. Differently from the “grain belts” in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Brazil, or some part of the E.U., and also differently from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) expanding in these countries, the agricultural sector in Japan is largely marginalised but still expected to contribute to conserving and enhancing economic, social, cultural and environmental values, or so-called multi-functionalities. Therefore, while it is true that there have been many conflicts of interest between the “North” and the “South” concerning protectionist agricultural policies in the former that have been practiced at the expense of the market access for agricultural products from the latter, it is also important to recognize the major structural differences, even among the “North”, between protectionism and farm subsidies in the U.S. and other food exporting countries and those in Japan and other food importing countries. Indeed, East Asia, notably Japan, is not free from food security concerns in the conventional sense, i.e. food availability, at the national level.

In Japan we have several major weekly business journals, such as *Toyokeizai Weekly*, *Nikkei Business*, *Diamond Weekly*, and *Weekly Economist*. Normally, it is quite rare for them to publish special issues on agriculture and food, and actually they largely ignored or downplayed the agriculture and food sector in the past. Since the food price crisis in 2007-2008, however, we have seen an increasing number of interesting but sensational and controversial special issues on food security concerns and agrarian

problems featured by these mainstream journals. These issues are arguably stimulated by the food price crises: Japan has long been faced with excessive food import dependency, and is now under strong pressure to completely open its agricultural market and deregulate agricultural policy through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and other FTA/EPA negotiations ([Hisano 2013](#)). It is feared that these moves will further aggravate Japan's deteriorating agricultural and rural economies and threaten its food security. At the same time, we have recently experienced several food safety scandals concerning imported foods, while the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster has become another catalyst to awaken the interest of mainstream journals and the general public in food security and safety.

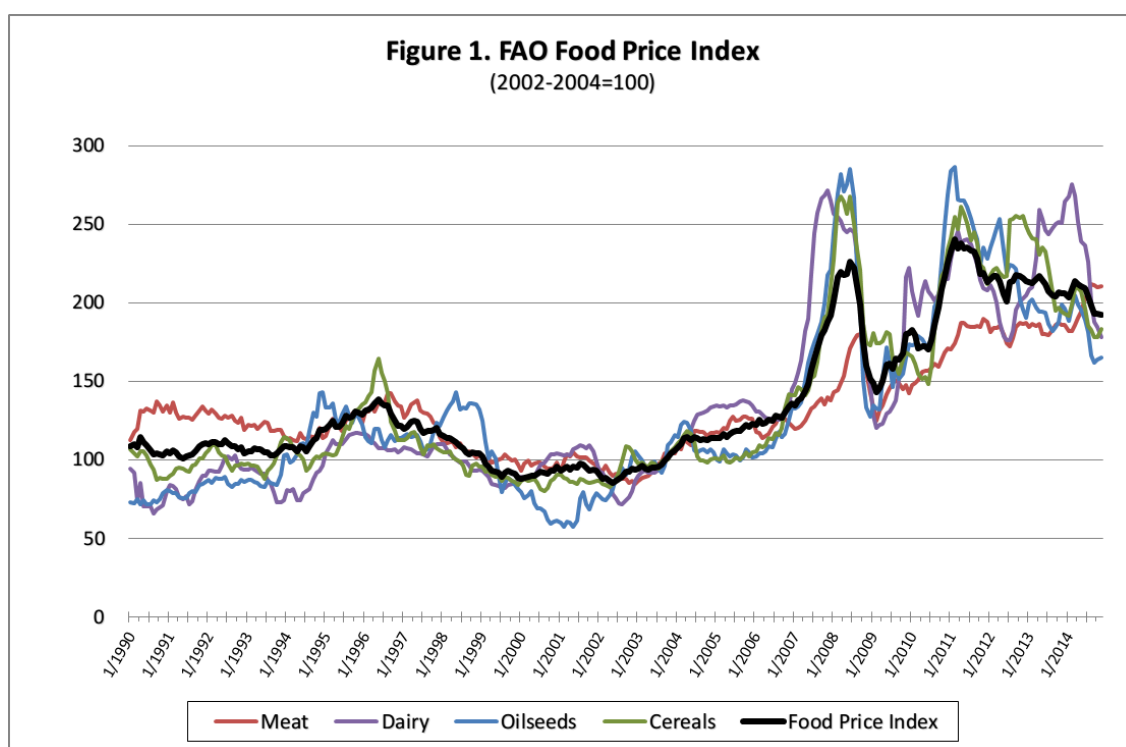
In summary, there interest and concern over food security and agrarian problems in Japan have been increasing rapidly, but in varying and sometimes contradictory ways among the stakeholders. As already discussed intensively by several scholars, the concept of food security, as a political discourse, has been evolving and expanding since its introduction in the early 1970's ([Maxwell 1996](#); [Sage 2000](#); [Clay 2003](#)) and subjected to manipulations to include conflicting ideas to justify a certain model of agrifood system ([McMichael 2009](#); [Schanbacher 2010](#); [Jarosz 2011](#); [McMichael & Schneider 2011](#); [Lee 2013](#)). Therefore, this "everybody is talking about food security" situation needs to be historicised and politicised so that we can have a critical and long-term perspective to ensure our food security and food sovereignty at the international, national, and local levels.

This paper starts by providing an overview of what are called "food price crises" as a background to the growing food security concerns in Japan, and examining how the international community has responded to the problem. In the following two sections the paper refers to several public opinion surveys to show how Japanese people view the situation, in terms of both food security and food safety problems. It could be concluded from the public opinion surveys that Japanese people largely agree that it is crucial to improve and revive the agricultural sector in order to address concerns over both food security and food safety concerns. However, it seems difficult or almost hopeless to do so, given the current declining state of the Japanese agricultural sector as briefly described in the fifth section of this paper. After critically analysing the Japanese government responses to the situation both internationally and domestically in the sixth section, various alternative initiatives and their lessons and perspectives are summarised in the seventh section, and some concluding comments are given in the last section.

2. Food Security Crises and International Responses

1) Recent Trends in World Food Prices and their Underlying Causes

The FAO Food Price Index is the measure most commonly employed to show the trend in food commodity prices. **Figure 1** shows the trend of nominal food price index from January 1990 until November 2014. This index is based on the trade weighted average of 23 commodities across 5 groups (cereals, oils, meat, sugar, and dairy) using 73 price series.³ Because the price index of sugar shows a similar trend but at a very different scale, it is excluded from this graph. The average price between 2002 and 2004 is used as the base of the index. The figure clearly shows how significantly and rapidly food prices increased in 2007-2008. Even the financial crisis of the latter half of 2008 and the economic recession afterwards, the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930's, could not bring the prices back to the level of pre-crisis years. The second wave of food price hikes came in the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, when the Food Price Index averaged the record high of 240 points in February 2011. Although the index has been gradually falling since then and remained stable at around 192-193 points over the past several months, this is much higher than the pre-crisis level. When it comes to the Cereal Price Index, a record high of 268 points was reached in June 2008, followed by the second wave in June 2011 (261 points) and the third wave in the summer of 2012 (254 points in August). Since then, however, the index has gradually declined to the level of 180 points or below.



The current situation is sometimes compared with and found similar to that in the early 1970's. But there are several aspects that are new to the food price crises since 2007. The food price crises this time are not

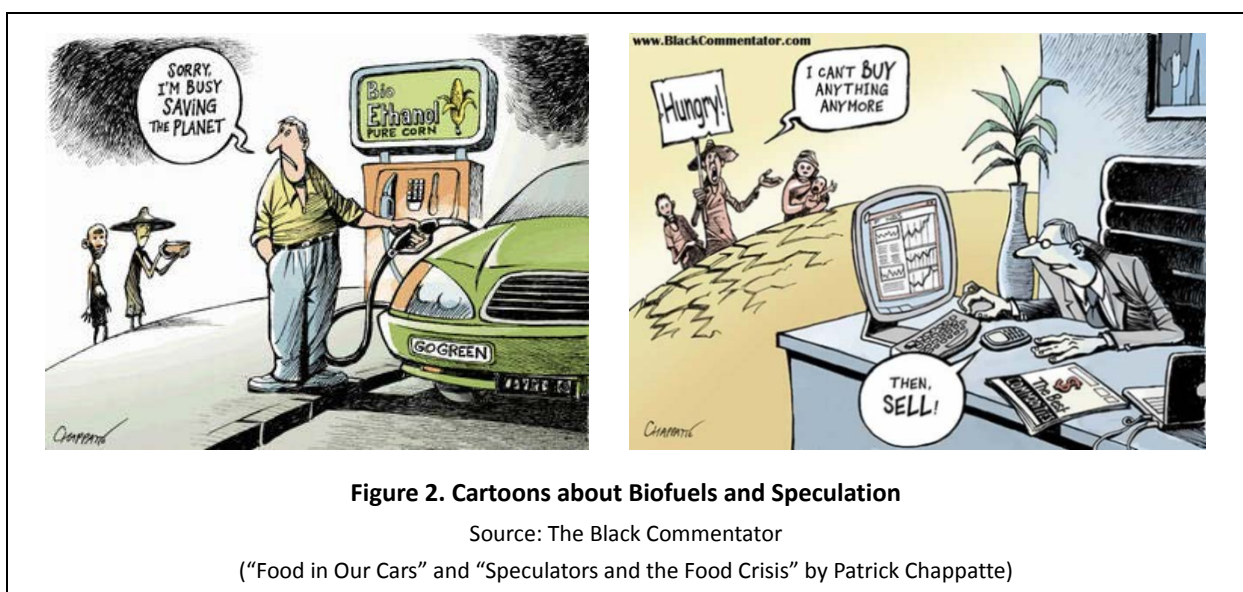
³ These commodity coverage and calculation measures were newly introduced in November 2013. Before that the index included 55 commodities. According to FAO, the changes introduced did not significantly alter the values of the series.

just price hikes, but rather they have been caused in the midst of persistent upward pressures with higher volatility. As mentioned above, even one of the worst economic depressions did not bring food prices down to their pre-hike levels. What then, is behind the current food price crises?

First of all, the price hikes this time were triggered directly by food export bans in some exporting countries. But this is just a trigger. Secondly, the demand for food and animal feed has been increasing in populous emerging economies such as China and India, while at the same time we have seen increasing volatility of food supply due to climate change. Third, national and regional grain reserves as a safety-net measure are diminishing due to neo-liberal deregulation, privatisation and budget cuts in many countries.

Fourth, what is more important and unique to the ongoing food price crises is the impact of increasing demand for food and feed crops as biofuel sources in the midst of biofuel promotion policies in the U.S. and the E.U. These policies have diverted land and other resources from food to biofuel production and therefore endangered access to food. It is estimated that from 2001 to 2011, biofuel sources accounted for about 70% of the incremental demand for maize, 13% for wheat, 90% for rapeseed, 47% for soybean, and 22% for oil palm. In the U.S., the biggest producer and exporter of maize, 40% of maize was used for biofuel in 2010-2011.

Finally, another important and unique cause of the ongoing food price crises is the proliferating speculation in commodity futures markets in the midst of excessive liquidity. This speculation is a necessary consequence of the financialisation of the economy (the easing of monetary conditions and the deregulation of financial market), especially when the *Commodities Futures Modernisation Act* was adopted in the U.S. in 2000, attracting institutional investors such as pension funds or hedge funds towards the agricultural commodity markets to invest and seek solely to profit from changes in food prices without any interest in actually buying food. In the Chicago wheat futures market, for example, in the mid-1990s financial speculators held just 12% of the market, with the rest held by commercial hedgers (i.e. traditional speculation by grain traders to reduce price volatility). In 2011, it turned out that 61% of the market was held by purely financial speculators ([World Development Movement 2011](#)).



The cartoon on the left-hand side in [Figure 2](#) is about the biofuel boom and its negative impact on food security for the resource poor. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, rich consumers in rich countries are self-satisfied with “going green” and feeding a car with bioethanol made of corn. The man in the cartoon is saying “sorry, I’m busy saving the planet”. The right-hand cartoon is about the negative impact of speculation. Resource poor farmers are claiming that they cannot buy anything anymore, but a financial trader sitting in a luxurious chair replies, “then sell”. This means that for speculators in the futures market, it is either sell or buy in their mind, and such futures trading is just meant for making profit.

All of these developments have happened at once, and therefore the situation is sometimes described as a “perfect storm” ([National Geographic News, 28 May 2008](#)). In *The State of Agricultural Commodity Markets 2009*, FAO mentioned that: “The sharp increase in food prices on world markets cannot be attributed to any one single factor. Each one of those causes commonly cited cannot of itself explain the pattern and extent of recent price movements. It is their coincidence and combination that accounts for the dramatic changes” ([FAO 2009: 22](#)).

2) What has the International Community Pledged?

Since 2008, there have been many international meetings to discuss what the international community can and should do to solve the crises. These meetings include, among others, the FAO High-level Conference on World Food Security in June 2008, the FAO World Summit on Food Security in November 2009, and the G20 Agriculture Ministers’ Meeting in June 2011. The food security issue is also regularly raised on the agenda of the annual meetings of G20 and G8. So, what has been pledged and actually implemented?



Figure 3. Cartoons about the International Community’s Responses to Food Insecurity

Source: Cartoon Movement

(“Promises” and “G20” by Giacomo Cardelli)

The two cartoons in [Figure 3](#) illustrate well the reality of the international community’s responses to the crisis. The cartoon on the left is meant to criticise the empty promise of wealthy countries, while the right hand cartoon implies that the political decision-making process has been hindered by the conflicts of interests among member countries.

First, all countries have pledged to keep the promise on the Millennium Development Goal No.1, i.e. to eradicate or at least halve extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. For this to be fulfilled, it is said that more agricultural investment is needed to produce more food in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, but by whom and in what way are still at issue (HLPE 2013). Actually, the mainstream idea is still based on the conventional development model of agriculture, i.e. the modernisation and industrialisation of agriculture such as a Green Revolution scheme. This “solution” is typically advocated by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), which was founded in 2006 through a partnership between the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Second, a huge amount of emergency aid has been pledged, but only partially delivered in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. At the High-Level Conference on World Food Security in June 2008, the former Director-General of FAO, Jacques Diouf, lamented in his speech that:

“The OECD countries have created a distortion of world markets with the 372 billion dollars spent in 2006 on supporting their agriculture; next, that in a single country food wastage can amount to 100 billion dollars annually; that the excess consumption by the world’s obese costs 20 billion dollars annually, to which must be added indirect costs of 100 billion dollars resulting from premature death and related diseases; and finally that in 2006 the world spent 1,200 billion dollars on the purchase of arms. Against that backdrop, how can we explain to people of good sense and good faith that it is not possible to find 30 billion dollars a year to enable 862 million hungry people to enjoy the most fundamental of human rights: the right to food, and thus the right to life?”

Thanks to the renewed pledges made by the international community, notably the World Bank and OECD countries, the downward trend of international agricultural development aid during the past few decades has finally been turned around. But this is still not enough in terms of the amount called for by Mr Diouf, it is also not without reservation in terms of the content and direction of development projects pursued as mentioned above.

Third, the adverse impacts of biofuel policy and speculation have been discussed, but no agreement has been reached and no concrete measures have been taken. The U.S. government (EPA) and the European Commission have only recently proposed to lower the target of the use of biofuels made of edible crops, in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Also regarding speculation, the Obama administration introduced regulation of commodity trading as part of the *Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010*, but it has not yet come into force due to legal challenges by Wall Street and the financial industry. The European Commission also proposed the *Council Directive Implementing Enhanced Cooperation in the Area of Financial Transaction Tax* (COM(2013)71final), which would be effective as of January 1, 2014, with the seal of approval by the European Parliament, whereas the U.K. government filed a legal challenge (in vain) and the financial industry has lobbied heavily against the proposed financial transaction tax. Such changes, therefore, come with many difficulties. It is also reported that in the course of the G20 Agriculture Ministers Paris Meeting in June 2011, the French presidency appeared determined to act decisively on the issue of speculation on the agricultural commodities markets, but the G20 members remained deeply divided over how exactly and seriously to tackle and regulate the markets.

Fourth, the WTO and other bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements, such as the TPP, are still regarded as a must-be-promoted agenda, notably as a solution to national and international food insecurity. For example, the 2011 G20 Agriculture Ministers' Paris Meeting agreed upon the "Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture" that was submitted to the G20 Cannes Summit in the same year, stating that: "A stable, predictable, distortion free and transparent system for trade allows the unrestricted flow of food and agricultural commodities, contributing to food security. This requires further cooperation in strengthening international governance of agricultural trade in favour of open, rules-based and well-functioning global markets for agricultural products, through the WTO and its agreements".

Given these international political situations, the ongoing conventional approach toward food security can be called "neo-liberal food security".

3) Two Different Paths for Food Security

The definition of food security has evolved and changed since the early 1970's (Maxwell 1996; Clay 2003; Jarosz 2011). When the World Food Conference was convened in November 1974 under the joint auspices of the FAO and the UN in the face of the world food crisis at the time, the international community agreed to the idea of food security as a policy goal of all countries to take measures to increase food production and productivity and stabilise food prices in the domestic market. At the international level, it was also agreed that internationally adjusted policies and programmes to intervene in the market were needed to stabilise the supply and food prices, including an early warning system, adequate food reserves, emergency food relief, and international commodity agreements.

However, the 1970's and 80's was also a period of the transition from welfare-state capitalism to neo-liberal global capitalism, in which, first, trade liberalisation was forcefully promoted at the expense of domestic food production, based on the false assumption that free market and comparative advantage theory works better than state interventions (Lee 2013). In the meanwhile, attempts to extend interventions in domestic agricultural markets into international trade through a series of international commodity agreements covering grains, oilseeds, dairy products and meat failed to materialize. Second, the sovereign power of nation-states to intervene in the market has decreased and they cannot take food security measures domestically and internationally. Rather, national self-sufficiency in food is rejected as a defining feature of food security, which instead has become a matter of increasing the purchasing power of households and individuals (Jarosz 2011). Third, on the other hand, there has been increasing influence from international organisations as well as transnational agribusiness corporations. Transnational agribusinesses in particular use their influence not just as economic actors in the market, but also as political actors in the process of policy making (Fuchs 2007). As a whole, food security policies have been manipulated and re-designed for the benefit of corporations and exporting countries.

For example, the U.S. insists that it can feed Japan by exporting its surplus foods at lower prices than produced domestically in Japan. The U.S. also insists that its foods are safe and that there is no need for the Japanese government to regulate them through systems such as genetically modified crop labelling and BSE inspections. This "American way" of food security could be based on the historically and structurally

embedded special relationship between the U.S. and Japan. However, the following examples explicitly show how commonly the discourse of trade-oriented food security is used. In a speech to the World Food Summit in 2002, Miguel Rodriguez Mendoza, then Deputy Director-General of the WTO, mentioned that: “History has shown that food security does not equal self-sufficiency of a country... Food security nowadays lies not only in the local production of food, but in a country’s ability to finance imports of food through exports of other goods” (cited in Lee 2013). In a speech to the European Association of Agricultural Economics in 2011, Pascal Lamy, Director-General of WTO, openly stated that: “Clearly, international trade was not the source of the food crises. If anything, international trade has reduced the price of food over the years through greater competition, and enhanced consumer purchasing power. International trade has also brought about undisputable efficiency gains in agricultural production” (cited in Lee 2013).

This is what the concept of “Neo-liberal food security” is meant for. However, there has been no critical analysis of what has caused food crises with what consequences; there has been no legal and normative framework to regulate state and non-state actors who are responsible for food insecurity situations; and there has been no serious reference to alternative approaches toward food security for all at the international, national, local and household levels in an equitable and sustainable way. For example, the epoch-making report of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD 2008) is completely missing in the mainstream discourse on food security.

At the same time, however, resource poor peoples and civil society actors have voiced growing challenges to the hegemony, demanding “food sovereignty” instead of “corporate and neo-liberal food security” (McMichael 2014). According to food sovereignty movements such as La Via Campesina, the mainstream discourse of “food security” just emphasises maximising food production and enhancing food availability and access opportunities in the market, but without particular attention to how, where, and by whom food can and should be produced and distributed (Wittman et al. 2010). The food sovereignty movement is also endorsed at some bodies of the United Nations, including the Human Rights Council, where a legal and normative framework (i.e. the right to food for all) to embody the idea of food sovereignty has long been discussed (Ziegler et al. 2011; De Schutter 2014). The FAO’s Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was reformed in 2009, giving social movements and civil society organisations an institutionalised voice to influence agriculture, food security and nutrition policies and actions (Duncan & Barling 2012; McKeon 2015). Last but not least, the year of 2014 was proclaimed the International Year of Family Farming to raise the profile of family farming and smallholder farming by focusing world attention on its significant role in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and achieving sustainable development (FAO 2014). In short, these political, legal and institutional approaches and frameworks have gained momentum and presented an alternative to “neo-liberal food security”. What demands consideration now are the implications of these conflicting food security initiatives for Japan.

3. Food Security Concerns in Japan

It is more or less widely recognised how serious the food import dependency of Japan is. Table 1 shows that the Japanese food self-sufficiency on a calorie basis is extremely low compared to other major countries, now at around 40% or less, and also exceptional in terms of its trend during the past 50 years as compared with the U.K. and Germany. It is only Norway, Switzerland, South Korea and Taiwan that are comparable to Japan, but as a country with a population of 120 million and given its buying power in the global market, Japan's food insecurity does not just matter to its own people but also to the international community. Table 2 shows the extremely low level of Japanese food self-sufficiency in grains on a weight basis, at around 27% in recent years. The Netherlands is almost the same level as Japan, but this self-sufficiency ratio is only for grains, and in terms of value the Netherlands is the second or third biggest exporter in the world. Also the Netherlands is a core member of the European Union, surrounded by major exporting countries. When it comes to Japan, however, neighbouring countries are all major importing countries, and the absence of mutually-trusted political and economic relations makes the food insecurity situation in the region very serious and worrying.

Table 1. Trend in Food Self-Sufficiency Ratios of Major Countries (on a calorie basis)

	1961	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012
USA	119	117	112	146	151	142	129	129	125	123	135	127	—
Canada	102	152	109	143	156	176	187	163	161	173	225	258	—
Australia	204	199	206	230	212	242	233	261	280	245	182	205	—
Germany	67	66	68	73	76	85	93	88	96	85	93	92	—
France	99	109	104	117	131	135	142	131	132	129	130	129	—
Italy	90	88	79	83	80	77	72	77	73	70	62	61	—
Netherlands	67	69	65	72	72	73	78	72	70	62	68	66	—
UK	42	45	46	48	65	72	75	76	74	69	69	72	—
Switzerland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	59	57	53	57	—
Norway	—	—	48	—	50	—	52	53	50	52	46	48	48
Japan	78	73	60	54	53	53	48	43	40	40	39	39	39
S Korea	—	—	80	—	70	—	63	51	51	45	49	41	41
Taiwan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	38	36	30	32	34	33

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF)

Table 2. Trend in Food Self-Sufficiency Ratios in Grain of Major Countries (on a weight basis)

	1961	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2011
U.S.A.	115	122	114	160	157	173	142	129	133	130	120	118
Canada	126	179	126	163	176	186	223	171	164	164	168	202
Australia	299	250	231	356	275	368	310	284	280	279	230	291
Germany	63	66	70	77	81	95	113	111	126	110	112	103
France	116	136	139	150	177	192	209	180	191	177	185	176
Italy	81	72	72	74	76	83	83	84	84	81	75	76
Netherlands	35	37	31	24	26	22	32	29	29	22	16	14
Sweden	112	116	121	114	113	126	146	106	120	126	113	110
U.K.	53	62	59	65	98	111	116	113	112	98	95	101
Switzerland	34	32	29	32	35	47	64	66	61	61	47	45
Japan	75	62	46	40	33	31	30	30	28	28	27	28

Source: MAFF

According to FAOSTAT, in 2011, Japan was the largest importer of maize/corn, accounting for 14% of imports worldwide, and also the largest importer of pork meat, 15% in terms of quantity, and 29% in terms of values. Now China accounts for 58% of the world soybean import, but Japan has long been a major importer. What is more remarkable is how few countries Japan depends on for its major food commodities, as shown in **Figure 4**. In 2013, Japan imports 92.4% of soybeans to be consumed domestically, despite the fact that soybeans are one of the core ingredients of its traditional diet. 61.1% of imported soybeans come from the U.S., about 22.8% from Brazil and 13.5% from Canada. Almost 100% of corn/maize is imported from abroad; out of which 50.2% is from the U.S. (amazingly it was more than 90% until 2011) and 33.9% from Brazil and Argentina combined. The import dependency of wheat is about 88% (including previous years' stocks); the U.S. accounts for 50.1%, followed by Canada (28.9%) and Australia (15.1%). In beef and pork products, Japan maintains self-sufficiency of 40-50%, but it should be noted that animal feeds are completely dependent on imports.

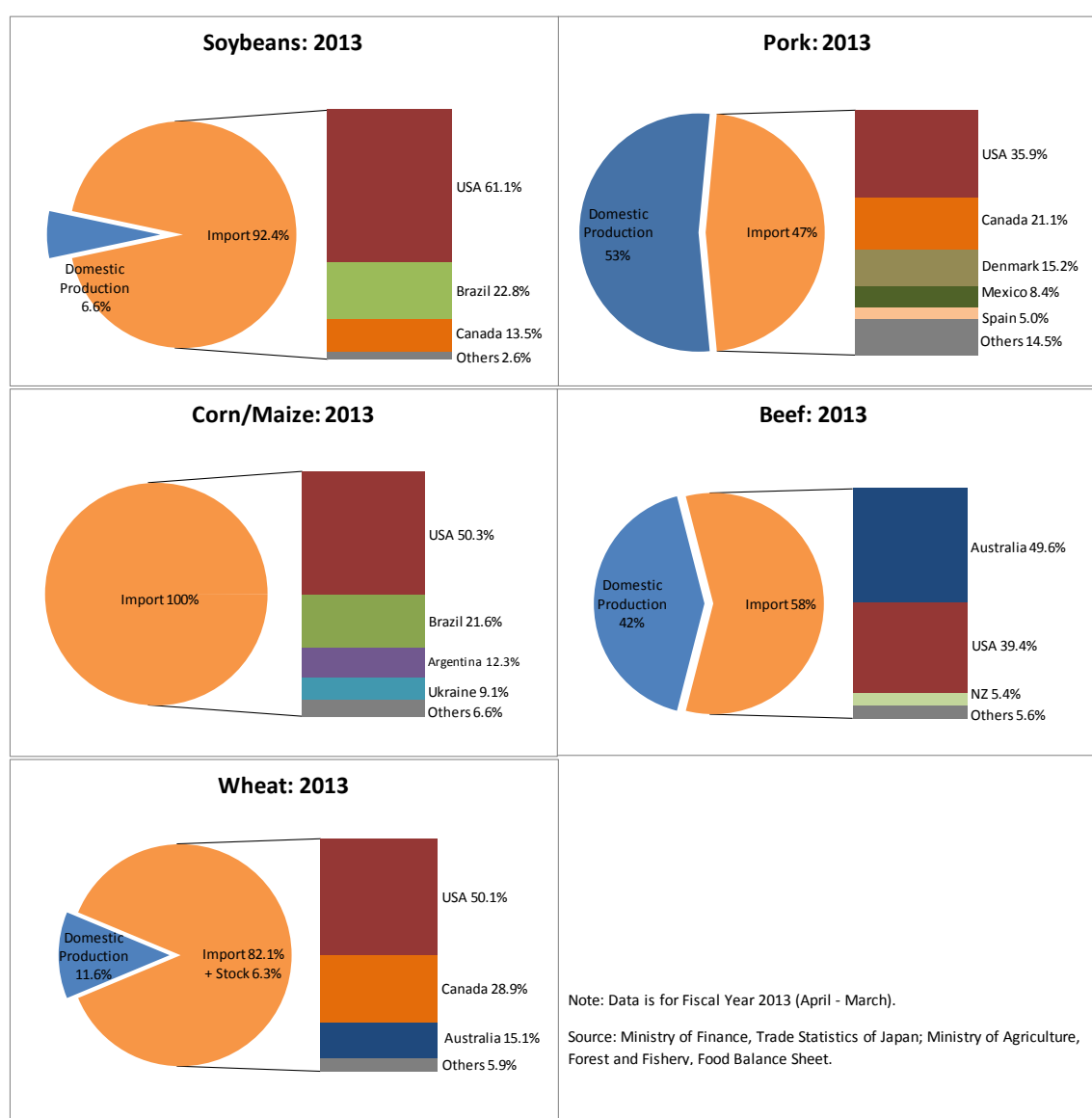
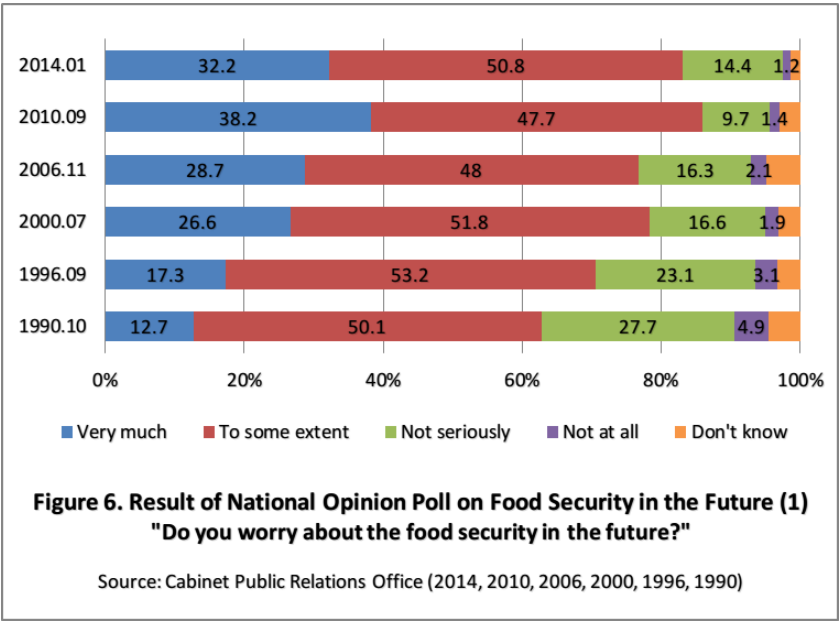
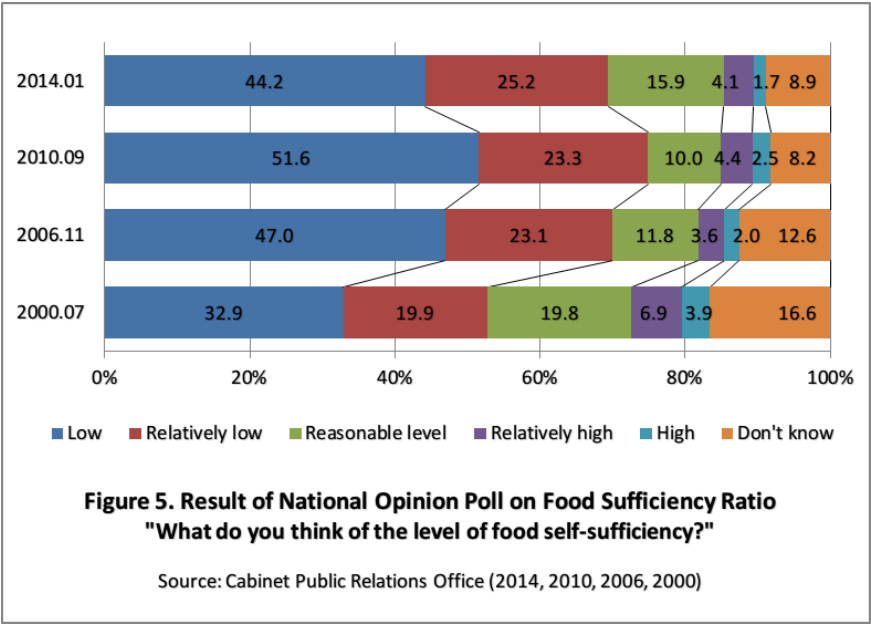
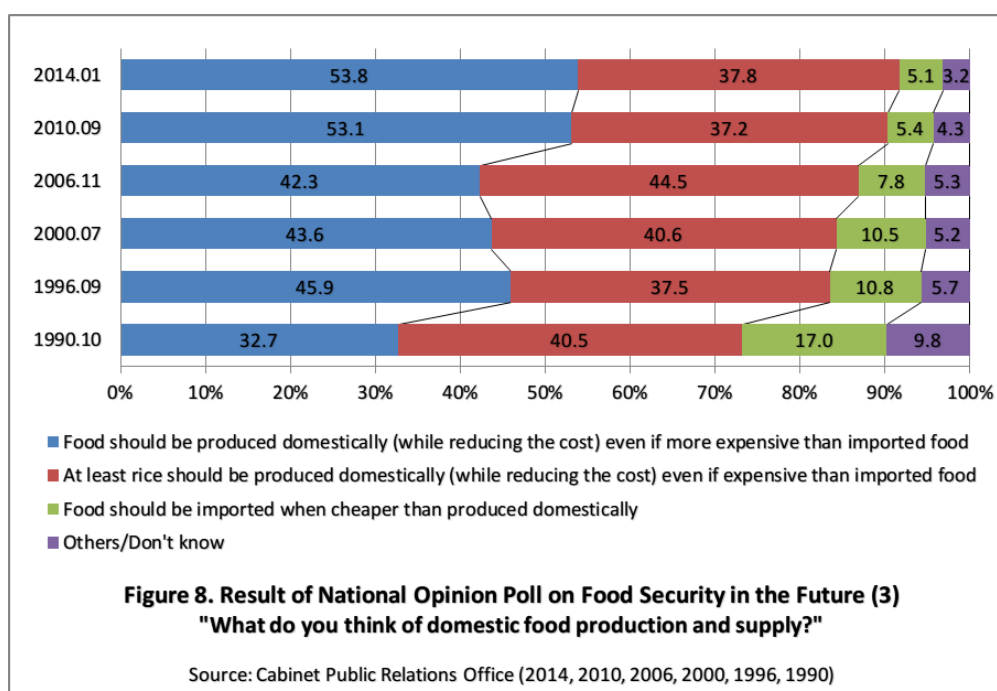
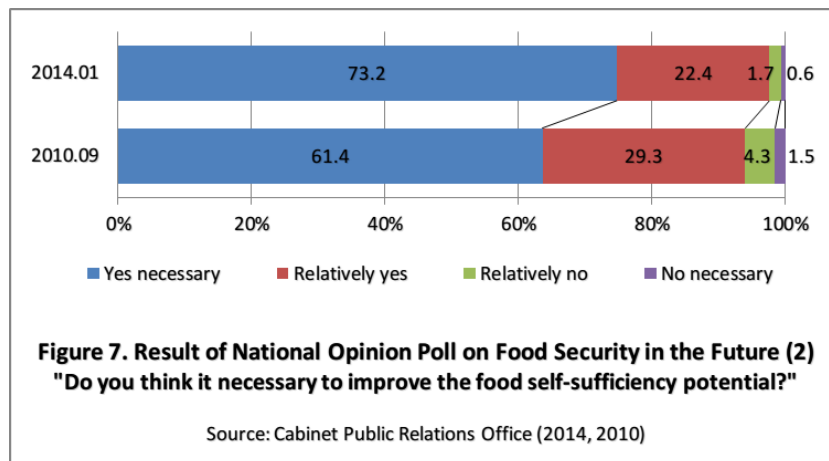


Figure 4. Food Import Dependency of Japan: Major Sources of Imports by Commodity

Every several years, the Japanese Government’s Cabinet Office conducts public opinion surveys on food security. When ask the question “what do you think of the level of food self-sufficiency?” (Figure 5), 44.2% of the respondents to the latest survey answered “low” and 25.2% answered “relatively low”, meaning that in total 69.4% think that food self-sufficiency is less than satisfactory. The proportion has dropped slightly from the peak of 2010, when the second wave of the food price hikes hit Japan, but still the proportion of the people who think that the food self-sufficiency of Japan is low remains very high.

Regarding the question “do you worry about the food security in the future” (Figure 6), 83.0% of the respondents are “worrying very much” or “to some extent”. During the past 24 years, this proportion has been steadily increasing. Almost of all respondents think it necessary to “improve the food self-sufficiency potential” as shown in Figure 7.





When it comes to the necessity of domestic food production and supply (Figure 8), 91.6% of respondents support domestic production, while only 5.1% think that food should be imported when cheaper than produced domestically.

In short, most Japanese people are worried about their country's food security, and quite positive about food security improvement and especially domestic food production as a measure to address food insecurity in the foreseeable future.

However, Japanese people seem to be confused about the Japanese government's decision to join the TPP negotiations. Table 3 summarises several opinion polls conducted by major national newspapers concerning the government's policy on TPP. According to this table, 60 to 70% of the respondents are positive about the government decision to join the TPP, while at the same time 80% are not satisfied with the transparency and information on merits and demerits of the TPP agreement, and 70% are worrying

about the probable increase of food imports as a result of joining the TPP agreement. Also, 62% agree that some sensitive agricultural products such as rice, wheat, beef and pork, dairy products and sugar should be regarded as an exception in the negotiations. Finally, 71% of respondents are worried about the probable lowering of food safety standards under the TPP agreement, such as the mandatory labelling scheme on GMOs, the acceptable level of pesticide residues, and so on.

Table 3. Results of Major Newspapers' Opinion Polls on Government Decision to Join the TPP Negotiations			
<i>Do you support the government's decision?</i>	Support	Not-support	Others
<i>Asahi</i> (2013.3.16-17, n=1553, rr=58%)	71	18	11
<i>Mainichi</i> (2013.3.16-17, n=954, rr=63%)	60	24	16
<i>Yomiuri</i> (2013.3.15-17, n=1053, rr=62%)	63	27	10
<i>Sankei</i> (2013.3.16-17, n=1000)	63.8	28.3	7.9
<i>Has the government provided the public with sufficient information on the merits/demerits of joining the TPP negotiation? (Sankei)</i>	Yes	No	Others
	14.4	79.9	5.7
<i>Do you worry about the probable increase of food imports as a result of joining the TPP? (Sankei)</i>	Yes	No	Others
	66.9	29.8	3.3
<i>Do you think some sensitive agricultural products should be regarded as an exception in the TPP negotiations? (Yomiuri)</i>	Yes	No	Others
	62	26	13
<i>Do you worry about the probable lowering of food safety standards as a result of joining the TPP? (Asahi)</i>	Yes	No	Others
	71	22	7
<i>Do you think there would be adverse effects on the universal health insurance system as a result of joining the TPP? (Sankei)</i>	Yes	No	Others
	42.5	28.9	28.6

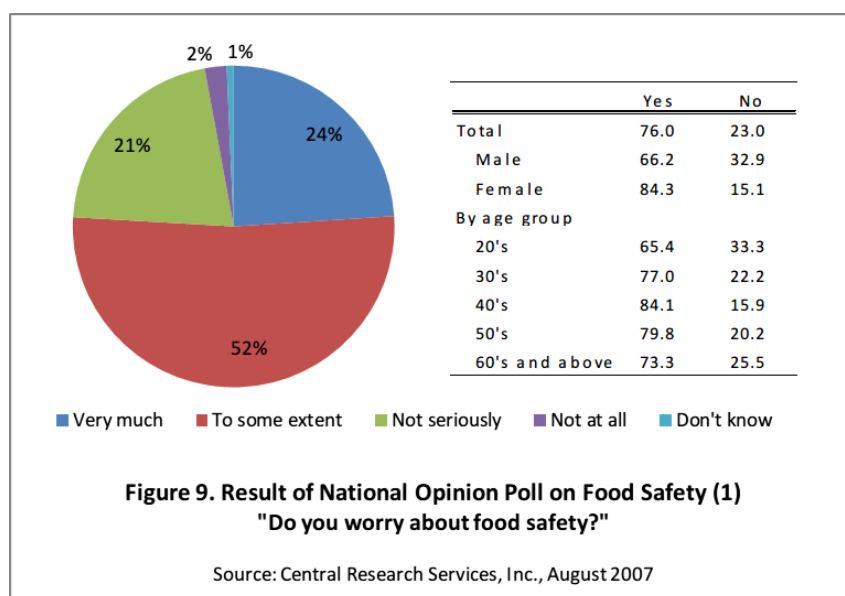
4. Food Safety Concerns in Japan

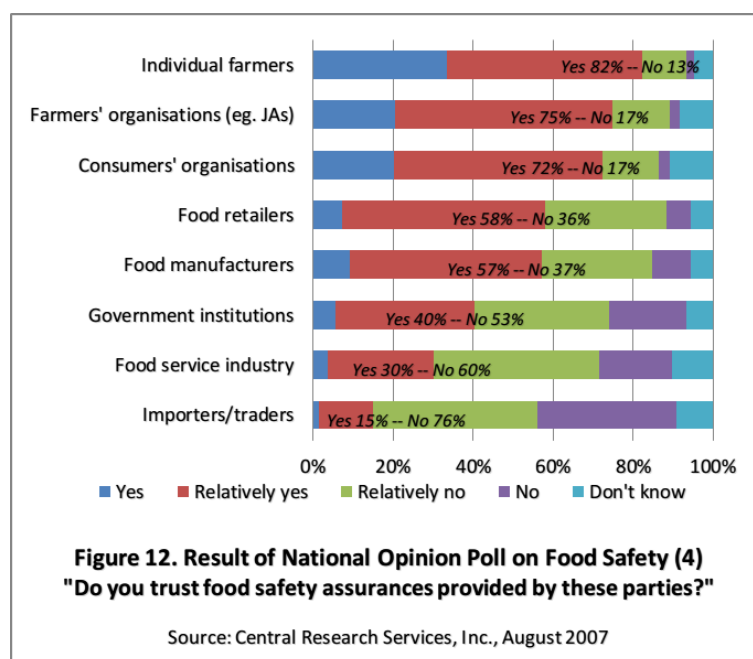
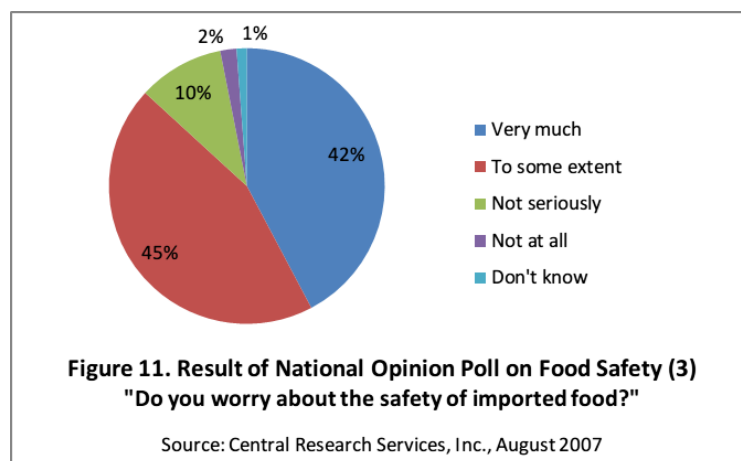
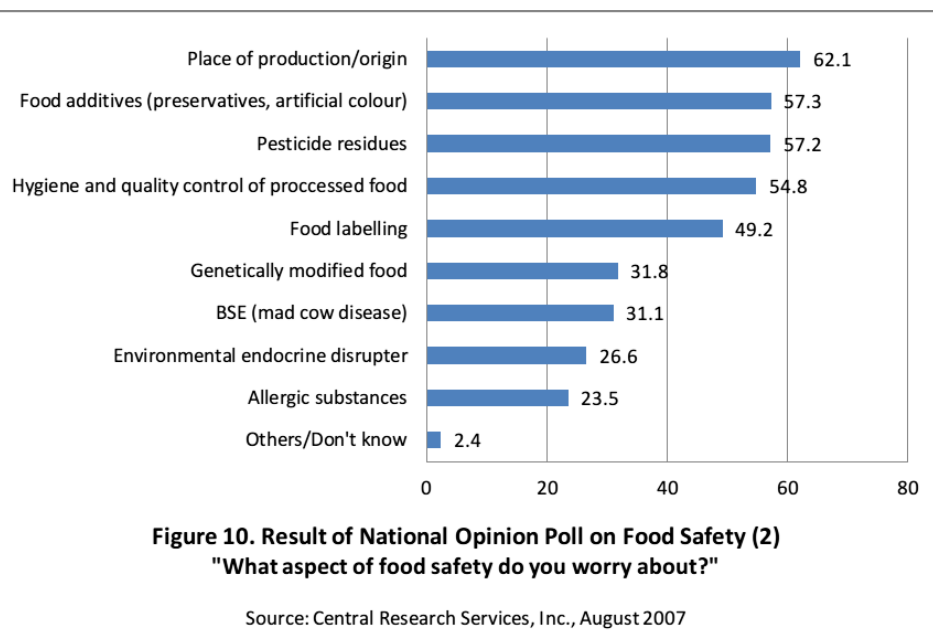
It is generally said that Japanese people are very sensitive to food safety and quality. Whether or not this is intrinsically and historically rooted in its culture, what is arguably clear is that Japanese people have experienced various incidents of pollution and food contamination in 1950's and 60's, risk of post-harvest chemicals and food additives mainly in imported food in 1980's, and unknown risks of GMOs and BSE as well as several food scandals partly induced by rapidly distanced and complicated food supply chains, such as frozen vegetables and processed foods imported from abroad (Jussaume et al. 2000). It is therefore possible to say that food safety concerns among Japanese consumers are more or less linked to food security concerns. But safety concerns are also growing over domestic foods, especially due to radioactive contamination after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in March 2011 (Bachev & Ito 2014; Kimura & Katano 2014; Kondoh 2014).

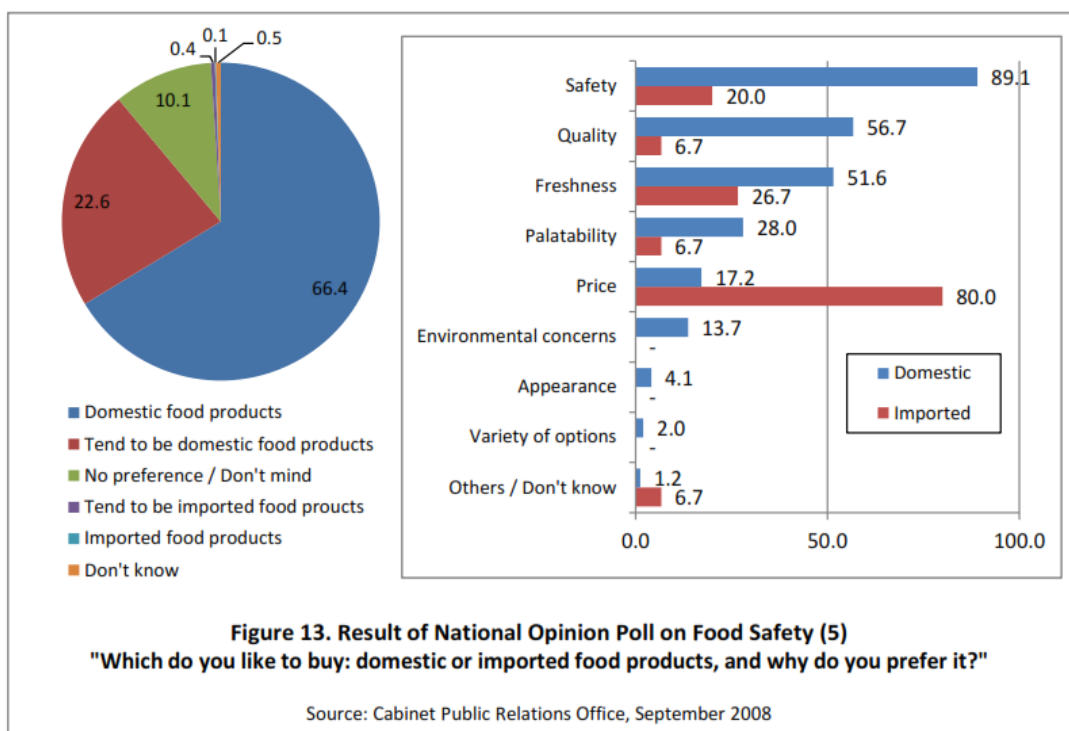
According to Figure 9, 76% of respondents are worried about food safety on average, but more female than male, and more in their 40's and 50's than in other age groups.

As to the question "what aspect of food safety do you worry about?" (Figure 10), more than 60% of respondents point out that they pay attention to "place of production and origin" of food they would purchase. More directly, Figure 11 shows that 87% are worried about the safety of imported food. When they say that they trust individual farmers and/or farmers' organisations for their food safety assurance, it actually means domestic or more local farmers and farmers' organisations. In contrast, a majority of people don't trust food traders and the food service industry in terms of food safety assurance, since these actors are presumed to use imported food to lower their production costs (Figure 12).

Finally, 89% of respondents in a national opinion poll conducted in 2008 (Figure 13) stated that they prefer domestic food products even if imported foods are cheaper. This is because Japanese people evaluate "safety", "quality" and "freshness" when buying domestic food, rather than "price" that is surely advantageous to imported food.







5. The Decline of the Japanese Agricultural Sector

1) The State of the Japanese Agricultural Sector

Given the public opinion surveys briefly analysed in the previous two sections, it is reasonable and proper to conclude that it is crucial for Japanese people to improve and revive the agricultural sector in Japan in order to address food security concerns as well as food safety concerns. However, it seems hopelessly difficult to improve and revive the Japanese agricultural sector in the light of its current situation as summarised below.

Between 1965 and 2013, arable land in Japan has decreased by 24%. The current generation of core farmers (those who are dedicated to farming as an occupation) is also rapidly aging, with the share of those aged 65 or over climbing to more than 60%.

Since the late 1980's, Japanese agriculture has been shrinking year by year. Japanese agriculture is characterised by (i) a scarcity of arable land, the amount of which is undergoing long-term decline: arable land in 2013 was 4.54 million hectares, a decrease of 24.3% since 1965, and the utilization rate of cultivated land is 91.8% in 2013, also down from 105% in 1985 and 138% in the peak of 1956; (ii) an increase of abandoned cultivable land areas: 400 thousand hectares in 2010, with nearly a threefold increase since 1975; (iii) small farm sizes: the average size of commercial farm households in 2013 is 1.5 hectares, excluding the Hokkaido region where the average size is 23.2 hectares, and 2.1 hectares including Hokkaido; (iv) low wages and falling agricultural incomes: the average wage in agriculture for males in 2005 was 62% of the average national wage across all industries, and earnings from agriculture provided only 28.4% of total commercial farm household income in 2012; (v) a sharp increase in part-time and aging farmers: while the number of farm households has decreased by 74.2% and the number of farmers who are engaged mainly and actively in farming has decreased by 79.2% between 1965 and 2013, the proportion of commercial farm households with full-time farmers under 65 years of age is only 22%, and the proportion of commercial farmers aged 65 years or over is 61.2%, making the average age of even core farmers around 66.5 in 2013; and (vi) a lack of agricultural successors: the proportion of commercial farm households with successors engaged fully or mainly in farming was 6.8% in 2005. This downward trend has been exacerbated by government policies under external and internal pressures as explained below. Thus it is not an exaggeration to say that the Japanese agricultural sector has been shrinking to such an extent that it seems difficult to reverse the downward trend.

2) Historical and Political Background of Japanese Food Dependency

Although it is true that ecological and topological limits as well as exploding affluence throughout the last century made it almost impossible for Japan to be self-sufficient,⁴ it should be noted that Japanese food import dependency has been historically and structurally constructed. This construction has taken place especially through the external relationship with the U.S. under the so-called “second food regime” (Friedmann & McMichael 1989), whereby Japanese food security policy has been built into the U.S. hegemony,

⁴ We should be reminded that this long-standing quest for external foodstuff as well as energy sources caused Japan's aggressive invasion into Asian countries, notably in Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria, prior to and during World War II.

and under the ongoing “neo-liberal food regime” (Pechlaner & Otero 2008) and/or “corporate food regime” (McMichael 2009), whereby a free trade agenda has been advanced and domestic support and protection policies have been undermined. The Japanese agricultural sector has also been faced with pressures in the internal relationship with mainstream export-oriented business circles, who are continuously seeking huge profits from selling goods overseas by offering agriculture as a “sacrifice” and instead buying cheap agricultural products from abroad (Ino 1996; Teruoka 2003). Even under the “neo-liberal” or “corporate” food regime, states have still structured this ongoing regime, as typified in the case of a series of political settlements of trade and fiscal frictions between Japan and the U.S. through bilateral negotiations in the 1980’s and through WTO and other related free trade negotiations since the middle of 1990’s. In recent years, Japanese government agricultural and food security policy has been further and drastically driven by a neo-liberal globalism and mainstream business interests under the free trade and investment regime, including Japan’s decision to join negotiations for the TPP Agreement in 2010 and afterwards (Tashiro 2012).

As a result, unsurprisingly, even protectionist agricultural policies have not been able to lead to the rational and sustainable development of Japanese agriculture. Adequate balance and linkages between crop farming and livestock farming (domestic feed grain production was replaced by import mainly from the U.S.), between rice farming and other grain farming (the rice-focused policy was effective in terms of increasing production and productivity, but over-dependency on rice farming without organic linkages with other grain farming, coupled with the “westernisation” of Japanese diet, have resulted in a surplus and lower rice prices, making it difficult to halt the deregulation of the rice market and tariffication of rice imports), and between the farming sector and non-farming sector, have been disturbed or even destroyed during the past several decades. It is feared that if the TPP Agreement is reached as originally designed and Japan ratifies it, the existing protective tariffs in the so-called sensitive “five priority items” of agricultural products, i.e. rice, wheat and barley, beef and pork, dairy products, and sugar and starch crops, would have to be eliminated, with massive devastating consequences to the agricultural sector as a whole, but specifically to the local and regional economies in main producing regions (e.g. Hokkaido for wheat, dairy products and sugar beet, Kyushu for wheat/barley and beef/pork, and Okinawa for sugar cane, among others).

6. Responses to Food Insecurities in Japan

Interestingly enough, for the Japanese government, food import dependency does not necessarily work against food security. The conceptual diagram in [Figure 14](#) shows what the government thinks about food security for Japan. For the government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), “food security” is equal to “food supply potential”, which includes not only “domestic production potential” and “domestic food reserve for emergencies”, but also “food import potential” and “international virtual food reserve system on the market”.

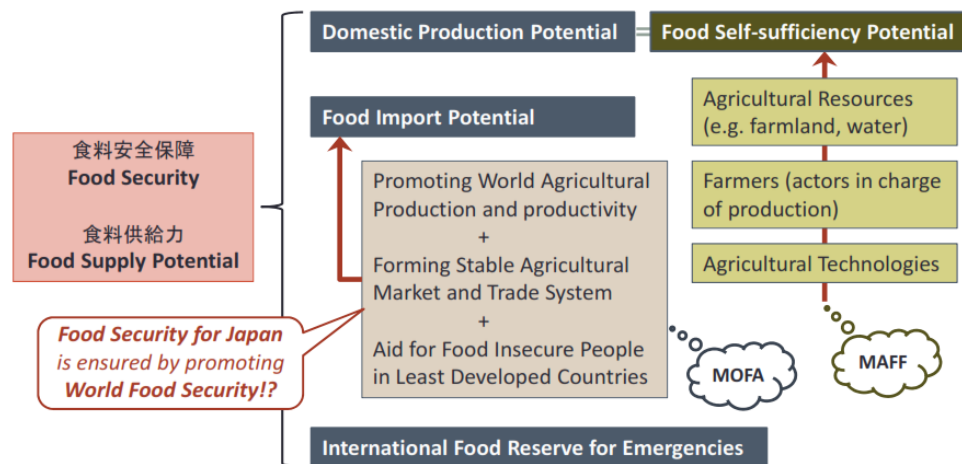


Figure 14. Japanese Government Policy on Food Security

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

1) Food Import Potential

First, in order to improve “food import potential”, the government thinks it important to promote world agricultural production and productivity, by supporting large-scale foreign agricultural investment, agricultural R&D and rural infrastructure development in developing countries. This approach is quite likely leading to the so-called “land grabbing”, and indeed the Japanese government and private companies’ involvement in ProSAVANA project in Mozambique is being criticised by international civil society as well as local peasant organisations ([Funada-Classen 2013](#); [Ikegami 2014](#)).

Also, the government believes that in order to address food insecurity, it is crucial to stabilise the agricultural market and stimulate agricultural trade. Arguably, a stabilised and well-functioning market and trade system is indispensable, but without critical evaluation of the current food price crises caused by excessively market-dependent policies, and without sufficient regulatory measures to address the market failures, it is quite likely that the “stable” market and trade system will become unstable, exacerbating food insecurity further.

Indeed, the government has been strongly motivated to encourage the Japanese food industry to expand beyond national borders and secure sources of food abroad, as happened in agro-food export zones of Southeast Asian countries in the 1960’s and 1970’s ([Hisano 2014](#)). At that time, Japan was faced with

growing dependence on imported food and feedstuffs under the post-war second food regime led by the U.S. as mentioned before. The Japanese government therefore tried to diversify the source of imports, especially in Asia and later in Brazil. Not only official development assistance (ODA)-led public projects, but also several private projects (mainly but not exclusively led by the so-called *Sogo-shosha*, or general trading companies, such as Mitsui, Mitsubishi, and Itochu) were implemented to produce maize and other feed and industrial crops to export back to Japan. Through this kind of “development and import” scheme, Southeast Asian countries were transformed into a “resource hinterland” for Japan, and at the same time they were groomed as a potential market for Japanese industrial products, or an “economic hinterland” for Japan. In the 1980’s and 1990’s, the region (now ASEAN) continued to be a “resource hinterland” for Japanese market, but through agro-industrialisation promoted by Japanese ODA and foreign direct investment (FDI). The region’s main products and exports shifted from traditional bulk commodities such as feed crops and sugar, toward higher-value-added products such as farmed shrimp, frozen vegetables, processed foods, chicken meat, and so on. Although ASEAN as an “economic hinterland” for Japan was replaced by China in the late 1990’s and 2000’s, in the past several years ASEAN has again become a focus of attention as a huge growing market and alternative source of imports. Nowadays Japanese companies are not only returning to their pre-existing markets in Thailand and Indonesia, but also targeting less-developed ASEAN countries, such as Vietnam and Myanmar, as a new and final frontier in the region. Whether initiated by ODA or directly through FDI, however, the purpose of private companies investing abroad is not to feed Japanese population but to make profits.

In addition, the government is now negotiating with the U.S., Australia and other exporting countries regarding bilateral trade rules for agricultural products. It is quite clear that if Japan reduces or abandons tariffs and deregulates non-tariff measures, our agricultural sector and local economies would be completely destroyed, and our food security will be threatened further.

2) Domestic Production Potential

Second, there is the issue of “domestic production potential”, which, needless to say, equates to “food self-sufficiency potential” and consists of agricultural resources, farmers, and agricultural technologies. The problem is how and which of these factors can and should be organised to improve food production potential. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), it is possible for the Japanese agricultural sector to survive in the midst of severe competition with major exporting countries “if” the sector could be reformed and revived successfully enough to develop and receive large-scale and efficient business-minded farmers and farming corporations.

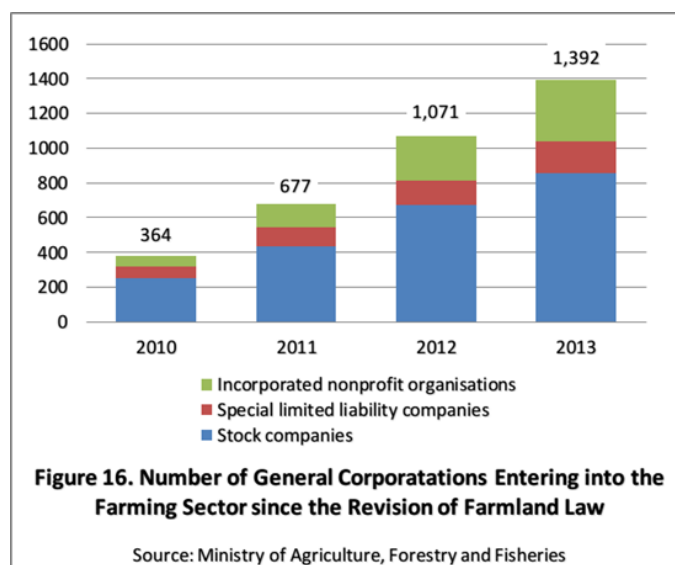
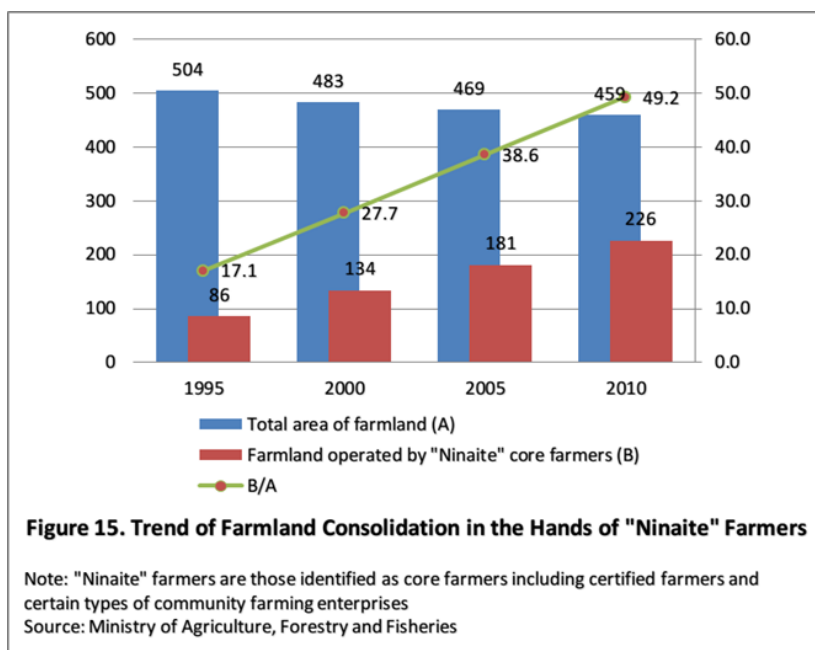


Table 4. Major Retailers' and Food Companies' Entry into Farming

Company	Business Category	Subsidiary/Farm	Set-up Year	No. of Farms	Total Area of Farmland (ha)	Main Agricultural Products
AEON	Supermarket chain	AEON Agri Create	2009	12	137	cabbage, lettuce, broccoli, radish, spinach, leek, potato
Seven & i	Supermarket chain	"Seven Farm"	2010	4	13	cabbage, broccoli, radish, pumpkin, potato, mizuna
Lawson	CVS	"Lawson Farm"	2010	20	180	wheat, potato, onion, radish, cabbage, yam, tomato, spinach, carrot, burdock, orange
Watami	Restaurant chain / Japanese-style pub	"Watami Farm"	2002	11	647	lettuce, cabbage, carrot, radish, mizuna, sweet potato, yam, beef, eggs, dairy
MOS Food	Fast-food chain	"MOS Farm"	2006	5	5	lettuce, tomato
Dole Japan (Itochu)	FFV Trading	"I Love Farm"	2002	5	600	broccoli, paprika, pumpkin, sweet corn, sweet potato

Note: Contract farming schemes are not included. Farmland areas are approximate figures.

Source: Each company's website; Business news

As shown in [Figure 15](#) and [Figure 16](#), there are increasing numbers of such targeted farmers and farming corporations. As a matter of fact, in recent years, agriculture and food related companies, including supermarket or convenience store chains like Aeon, Seven & I, and Lawson, as well as restaurant chains like Watami and MOS Food, are actively investing in and organising agricultural production either directly or through contract farming schemes ([Table 4](#)).

However, these developments are not yet convincing enough, because even if there is a certain number of large-scale, corporate-like farmers, it does not necessarily mean that the agricultural sector, farmers' livelihoods, rural communities and economies as a whole are protected, or that food security as a whole is ensured. It is generally said that these companies just come to regions or farming communities that have good conditions (e.g. non-mountainous, well-maintained, accessible to major distribution channels and markets), and produce high-quality but limited volumes and varieties of vegetables or rice; therefore they are sometimes criticised for just corraling or tapping into agricultural resources for their own corporate benefit or public relations, rather than in order to revive rural economies and communities.

7. Alternative Agri-food Initiatives in Japan

1) Policy-based and Institutional Initiatives

Some ideas put forward by the government, such as the “sixth-order industrialisation” (六次産業化) policy, are worthy of attention. We have seen an increasing number of positive and encouraging examples of farmers who try to add or alter the value of their farm products not just by producing (primary industry), but also through processing (secondary industry), and marketing and linking their resources with various services (tertiary industry), such as farmers’ restaurant and agri-tourism. Farmers achieve these changes by organising themselves as groups or by collaborating with local stakeholders, including local small and medium-sized agri-food businesses. Although there have long been various local activities that can now be identified as “sixth-order industrialisation” and/or “collaboration between agriculture, commerce and industry” (農商工連携), the latter concept was formally institutionalised in 2007 by METI and MAFF and a national law to promote the “six-order industrialisation” was enacted in 2010 by MAFF.

Mention should also be made of the platform called “village farming collectives” or “community farming enterprises” (集落営農) that has been promoted by the government over the past decade. The basic idea here is to organise diverse local actors including both farmers (not only certified core farmers, but also part-time farmers, hobby farmers, and elderly farmers) and non-farmer rural residents as well as voluntary supporters from urban areas with diverse and multi-layered commitment into a group (Tashiro 2006; 2008). This type of platform is a basis of various alternative initiatives as described below.

2) Quality-focused Initiatives: Organic Farming

The first type of emerging alternative initiative is quality-focused, aimed to address food safety concerns or ethical and environmental concerns, such as organic farming.

Organic farming in Japan mainly originated in the *sansho-teikei* (産消提携) system, or producer-consumer partnership movements that started in the 1960’s and 70’s. As an umbrella organisation for these *teikei* organic movements, the Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA) was founded in 1971. After peaking in terms of membership in 1983, *teikei*-style organic movements have been gradually replaced by the so-called third-party distributors (e.g. Daichi wo Mamoru Kai (1975), Bio Marche (1983), Radishbo-ya (1988)), which have been contributing to the development of organic market, but at the expense of direct links between producers and consumers and their mutual commitments that have been practiced through the *teikei* system (Jordan 2010). Echoing the extensive discussion among scholars in North America, Australia and European countries (Constance et al. 2014), there are fears in Japan that the institutionalisation of organics and other alternative agri-food initiatives could lead to “conventionalisation”, whereby the initiatives’ transformative potential to challenge the mainstream agri-food system tends to be manipulated into “alternative products and substitutable inputs” instead of “alternative practices and commitments”. This leads to bifurcation of the organic and other “quality food” sectors between farmers involved in small-scale production under *teikei* arrangements on the one hand, and specialised large production for mainstream marketing outlets on the other (Jordan 2010).

In 2001, the government introduced an organic standard and certification scheme called Organic JAS Standard. This has enabled agri-food companies to tap into the growing organic market, whereas, due to its strict certification criteria, many organic farmers cannot afford to get certified; the certified area is still limited to 0.22% (2013) of total cultivated area. Furthermore, because the Organic JAS Standard is not exclusively applied to domestic organic products, substantial amounts of certified organic products are imported from abroad. In 2012, for example, certified domestic organic production was 61,291t or 0.24% of total domestic output, whereas 939,351t of products were certified abroad, out of which 48,640t were actually imported.

Japan now has an Organic Agriculture Promotion Law, enacted in 2006, and therefore national as well as prefectural governments and their agricultural experiment stations are obliged to research and promote organic farming, but there is still very far to go.

3) Quality-focused Initiatives: Ethical and Environmental Sourcing

Tangentially related to organic farming initiatives are some interesting and encouraging initiatives focused on biodiversity and multi-functionality of region- or community-wide farming, through which branding of local agricultural products and rural-urban exchange activities are promoted. One typical example is *Konotori Mai* (rice) project in Toyooka City, Tajima region of Hyogo Prefecture, where the revival of the *Konotori*, or Oriental White Stork, is taken as a symbol of the restoration of biodiversity and sustainability. The project started in 2003 on a pilot basis involving only 5 farmers on 2.5 hectares (7t), but has now expanded to 284 farmers on 269 hectares (1,065t). Two types of ethically and environmentally-friendly produced *Konotori Mai* (chemical-free and low-chemical) are traded at prices 1.4 to 1.7 times higher than the standard *Koshihikari* (one of the most popular high-quality rice varieties).

Another example is Soybean Trust Movement, launched in 1988 by the Japan Consumers Federation and its division of No! GMO Campaign. At its peak in 2000, there were 57 farmers groups and 6,000 consumers involved in the movement. This is also related to *teikei*-style producer-consumer partnership movements. What is unique to this movement, however, is its focus on soybeans. Despite the fact that soybeans are a key ingredient of the Japanese 'healthy' diet, its self-sufficiency ratio hit a low of 2-3% in the middle to late 1990's, when GM soybeans started to be imported from the U.S. Consumers' concerns about the safety of GMOs rapidly increased, along with concerns about the loss of diversity of soybean varieties and soy foods. Then, some farmers' groups and consumers' groups came up with the idea of using the increasing number of set-aside paddy fields and abandoned farmlands to produce soybeans together on a *teikei* basis. As a result of the development of this idea and related advocacy effects, and due to the MAFF's promotion of domestic soybeans in collaboration with the JA Zennoh (National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations), the use of domestically produced non-GM soybeans is becoming popular among consumers as well as food companies.

4) Teikei-style Initiatives

Turning to locality-based alternative initiatives, the *sansho-teikei* system is a common platform for a variety of local agri-food networks as well as quality-focused initiatives. It is often referred to as an origin

of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model that is now popular in the North America. However, as mentioned above, *teikei*-style activities have been replaced by third-party distributors and mainstream retailers who provide consumers with agricultural products that are organic or sourced in other kinds of ethical and environmentally-friendly ways.

The *sanchoku* (産直) movement is a part of *sansho-teikei*, but is a more or less organisation-based initiative. Although it actually goes beyond the local vicinity, it is certainly a long-standing alternative initiative, started in the 1960's and 70's and initially led by consumers' cooperatives and agricultural cooperatives in collaboration. One of the famous examples is between Kyoto Consumers Cooperatives (Coops) at one end of the collaboration, and Agriculture and Fisheries Coops in northern Kyoto and Daisen Dairy Coop in Tottori Prefecture at the other end. In the Metropolitan area, Tohto Consumers Coop is well known for its long-standing dedication to *sanchoku* initiatives. Another good example is Seikatsu Club Consumers Coop Union and its relationship with JA Shonai Midori and Yuza Town in Yamagata Prefecture.⁵

Apart from these *sanchoku* initiatives that are mainly organised by consumers and farmers cooperatives, there are many other local initiatives organised by farmers' unions under the umbrella of the Japan Family Farmers Movement, or *Nouminren* (農民連),⁶ now a member of La Via Campesina. Individual consumers can access their *sanchoku* products, but in many cases local branches of the New Japan Women's Association, or *Shinfujin* (新婦人), are involved. Those organisations are politically motivated and therefore their *sanchoku* initiatives are intended not just to improve farmers' income or to address consumers' concerns, but rather meant to address social justice and political issues that could affect agriculture, food, rural community, local economy, social welfare, and national and global food security.

5) Locality-focused Initiatives

The *chisan chisho* (地産地消) movement is also important. Literally meaning "locally produced and locally consumed food system or network", this movement emerged in the late 1990's. It is partially influenced by a Buddhist philosophy about the inseparability of the human body and the environment (身土不二). Although it started as a grassroots movement, many *chisan chisho* initiatives have been quickly taken up and organised by local governments and agricultural cooperatives as "the solution" to the decline of local agriculture and rural communities (Kimura & Nishiyama 2008).⁷ The national government has also shown interest in the concept of *chisan chisho*, and now supports the National *Chisan Chisho* Promotion Council and its annual forum since 2006.

The most typical style of *chisan chisho* initiatives is through farmers' markets and direct sales outlets (more than 16,800 in 2009, according to MAFF), some of which are established and managed by local agricultural cooperatives, but individual local farmers' groups also take initiative with support from local governments.

⁵ For details of the Seikatsu Club Coops, please refer to the following website: <http://seikatsuclub.coop/about/english.html>

⁶ For details of the Nouminren, please refer to the following website: <http://www.nouminren.ne.jp/en/>

⁷ Constance et al. (2014) summarise critical evaluations of localism, saying that: "while local could indeed be a useful strategy to regain some control over the food system, that glorification of 'unreflexive localism' overlooks the sexism, classism, racism, and other historical forms of structural inequality embedded in locales.... Furthermore, the focus on local scale and individual action does little to challenge the dominant food system and instead fits well within the neoliberal agenda of the globalization of the agrifood system based on individual choices rather than collective action" (20). We should be aware of the limitations of "unreflexive" localism.

Chisan chisho is often promoted through school lunch schemes and food education programmes.

The Green Lantern (緑提灯) scheme was voluntarily introduced in Hokkaido in 2005, and is now spreading across the country, organising more than 3,000 restaurants and Japanese-style pubs that use domestically or locally produced foodstuffs at a ratio of more than 50% on a calorie basis, while five stars are given to those that use more than 90%.

There is a growing number of initiatives that promote local brand marketing by use of the old practices of trademarks, certification and labelling schemes (e.g. Geographic Indications), but what is unique to them is that they are based on locally diverse varieties of traditional vegetables (地方伝統野菜) (Ikejima & Hisano 2012). These local traditional vegetables have been grown for quite a long time and are historically and culturally embedded in local traditional cuisines, but temporarily disappeared in the course of the industrialisation of agriculture (i.e. mass-production and mass-distribution) and the westernisation of diet. Now, local traditional varieties are regarded, or expected, to be tools to revitalise local agriculture and rural economies, especially from the point of view of local governments and rural communities. Kyoto, an old capital of Japan, is especially famous for its local traditional vegetables with unique forms, colours and tastes, called *Kyo-yasai* (京野菜), while neighbouring Nara Prefecture, another ancient capital, has its own *Yamato-yasai* (大和野菜) (Imaizumi & Hisano 2013).

The final example is a “traditional food awareness” campaign operated by the organisation *Dentoushoku wo Kangaeru Kai*, which was established with 22 members in Osaka in 1981. The organisation initially aimed to re-discover and re-evaluate the healthy and balanced diet of local traditional foods across Japan. There was a turning point, however, when the organisation launched the *Dentoushoku Ressha* (伝統食列車) or “traditional diet train campaign” in 1992 in order to travel to a particular region of Japan every year to promote Japanese local traditional diets. This was actually meant as a countermeasure against the “American Train Campaign” of 1989 sponsored by the U.S. government and agri-food businesses, which was aimed at promoting American food exports to Japan. This organisation is also organising forums and symposiums on various topics such as WTO, food safety, school lunches, food and poverty, and social justice issues, and therefore sometimes collaborating with *Nouminren*.

6) Social Service Initiatives

Lastly, there are various social service initiatives, such as those that are promoting small and local scale renewable energy generation by use of (i) woody biomass (forest resources) to generate heat and power, (ii) farm residue and food waste to generate bioethanol, (iii) tiny but affluent streams to generate micro hydro power, and (iv) rapeseed (*Nanohana*) to enjoy the flowers and produce home-use vegetable oils to be recycled in soap making or as biodiesel fuel. *Shokuiku* (食育: “food and nutrition education”) or *Shoku-Nou-kyouiku* (食農教育: “farming for education” programme) is promoted by the national and local governments under a law enacted in 2005. The second Five-year Plan for Food Education Promotion is now in progress (2011-2015).⁸ The concept of *Fukushi Nougyou* (福祉農業), or “Farming for Welfare

⁸ The Government Cabinet Office published an English brochure “What We Know from Shokuiku: The Japanese Spirit – Food and Nutrition Education in Japan” in 2010.

Services”, especially for elderly people and disabled people, is also drawing attention in recent years ([Ikegami 2013](#)). These social service initiatives are largely based on the so-called multi-functionality of agriculture, and therefore they could be a very powerful alternative to mainstream, market-based and production-oriented, neoliberal food security policies.

8. Conclusion

In his highly acclaimed work *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills stated that: “What you need... is a quality of mind that will help you to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within yourself” (Mills 1959: 5). What Mills described as a “sociological imagination” is the ability to see things interactively, between the personal and the societal, rather than from the narrow lens of personal experience; the ability to have diverse perspectives to look beyond the narrow and immediate scope of ourselves.

Food Security in the East Asian region does not just mean having access to sufficient and affordable food for the region’s own populations; it is also closely linked to world food security. As far as it is almost impossible to ensure 100% food self-sufficiency in the region, we have to continue to depend substantially on food import. However, given the vast amount of (necessary) food import as well as its huge (possible) influence on the shape and direction of agriculture production and food distribution in countries that receive our governments’ ODA and corporations’ FDIs, we should acknowledge that it is problematic to argue about food security without considering its contents and impacts. Since the late 1990’s the concept of food sovereignty has emerged from social movements and civil society to address the limitations (political manipulations) of the food security concept and refer to the right of communities, peoples, and states to independently determine their own food and agricultural policies. Although the food sovereignty concept can be applied to both developing countries and developed countries, when it comes to the latter the concept needs to be complemented with the concept of the right to food, since it, as an international ethico-legal framework, sheds light on the international obligations of nation states to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food and other economic, social and cultural rights for all, whether territorially or extraterritorially. As one of the biggest food importers, as one of the biggest donors of ODA, as one of the core members of international financial and aid institutions, and as one of the biggest home countries of transnational corporations and investors, Japan must have a great responsibility in this regard. Alternative agri-food initiatives in Japan might be very limited in terms of the scope of production and consumption vis-à-vis the entire size of economies, but they still are expected to assume a significant role in problematizing the food security policy of Japan and holding the government and corporations accountable for their (possibly negative) impact on world food security.

We are what we eat, and what we eat defines who we are. Therefore, we have to be aware of what we eat, and indeed many of us are becoming more concerned about what we eat, but this is not enough. We have to think about how we get what we eat, what is happening to others in the world, and whether we can obtain what we need sustainably. This requires us to understand something that is going beyond the scope of ourselves. Our personal anxiety probably needs to be a starting point; many local alternative initiatives started in this way. But through involving ourselves in these alternative initiatives, we might become empowered and able to connect the “personal troubles of our immediate milieu” with “public issues of social structure” (Mills 1959). By so doing, we can develop actual approaches to making this society in general, and the mainstream agri-food system specifically, more just, equitable and sustainable.

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