

# **Protection of Urban Farming and Farmland in Tokyo**

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## Summary

Japan is a mountainous country where arable land is restricted to narrow coastal plains and small intermountain basins. In such flatland various human activities have been concentrated, and urban functions and farming activities have competed with each other. Urban farmland is considered important as they are the basis of food production, they sustain green space with aesthetic values, and they provide open space when disaster takes place. There is a growing interest in protecting urban farming and farmland, in which grass-roots movements play an important role.

Tokyo is a highly urbanized part of the world. Its population is about twelve millions, two-thirds being concentrated in the central section of 23 wards. Tokyo differs from other world cities in that farming is a sustained economic activity and farmland is an important landscape element. As urbanization proceeded with the growth of urban population, residential areas sprawled along major suburban railroads. Small patches of farmland now remain as islands in the urbanized land use.

Attempts at protecting urban farming and farmland may consist of administrative, institutional, and grass-roots levels. Japanese government, provincial government such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and municipal office such as Nerima ward constitute the administrative level. The institutional level is composed of farmers' cooperatives, consumers'

cooperatives, schools, and elderly citizens' clubs, which are involved in farming in a group. Farmers, nonprofit organizations, and urban residents play respective roles in protection movement at the grass-roots level.

The case of Nerima ward well represents urban farming of Tokyo. Nerima had 681 farm households in 2002, owning 314 hectares of farmland in total. Average farmland per household was 0.46 ha (1.1 acres). Three-quarters of the total farmland are registered under the Productive Green Land Act. A great majority of farm households depends on non-farming income. A great diversity of farm products is another characteristics. Easy access to consumers is a locational advantage for urban farmers, some 60 percent of farmers operating direct sales facilities on and around their farms. Fresh vegetables are supplied to local schools for school lunch, while direct sales to consumers' cooperatives and retail stores are also important.

Municipal office of Nerima ward plays an important role in promoting education for coexistence and collaboration. Agricultural fair, flower and nursery show, "vegetable walk rally," and "experience of harvesting Nerima radish" are held annually. Agricultural forum is occasional held to attract wider audience.

While community gardens are becoming popular throughout Japan, a variety of community garden programs are practiced in Nerima to respond growing demands for recreational farming among urban residents. "Ward residents' farms," "citizens' farms," "agricultural experience farms," and "family farms" are open to the public. School farms and elderly citizens' farms are also operated. Agricultural experience farms appear to provide new opportunities for promoting sustainable urban farmland. Unlike ward residents' farms and citizens' farms, farmers and urban residents regularly meet with each other on agricultural experience farms. Thus, increased

understanding of urban farming may be facilitated.

Protection of urban farming and farmland is quiet environmental movements. It is fragile in that urban farmers and farmland are susceptible to various pressures while being protected by administrative devices. However, the heyday of rapid urbanization and sprawling appears to be over and Japan's population is estimated to decline in the near future. At the same time urban residents are more and more concerned with what they eat. There is a growing concern with preserving farming and farmland in Tokyo.

Key words for protecting urban farming and farmland are coexistence, collaboration, and education. Rural land use and urban land use could coexist as farmers and urban residents take full advantage of living side by side. Increased collaboration of farmers, residents, local institutions, and municipal administration will be required for peaceful coexistence. Since a large majority of population is those engaged in urban occupation, their consciousness of and participation in local food production are required. Thus, education of urban residents is important. A short-term need is to provide opportunities for the elderly as Tokyo's population continues to age. For the long run, education of children is crucial. As younger generations become conscious of the importance of healthy food, sustainable farming, and environment preservation, there will be a fair chance for the survival of urban farming and farmland in Tokyo.