

Current status of reconstruction and challenges post the Fukushima disaster: Case study of Iitate Village

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Some farmers who evacuated due to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident have resumed farming at the evacuation destination. On the other hand, many evacuees have discontinued agriculture for several reasons. Furthermore, as the number of areas where evacuation instructions have been canceled increases, new issues arise with regard to returning to the village or settlement at the evacuation destinations. This presentation considers the perspective of restarting farming and compares the current status of reconstruction of the affected farm village with that of a general rural village. Furthermore, it clarifies the challenges for future.

We investigated Iitate Village in Soma-gun, Fukushima Prefecture. The entire village was evacuated due to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident. We conducted interviews and questionnaire surveys for farmers resuming farming at the evacuation destination and for evacuees being shifted to temporary housing. Through these surveys, we grasped the trends and intentions of farmers with regard to resuming farming as well as the conditions of temporary housing refugees.

Some large-scale farmers have resumed farming. The process of resuming farming for evacuees depends on their business contents. Floral cultivation farmers search farmland near the evacuation destinations. However, cattle breeding involves the use of a closed livestock barn. Therefore, farming can be resumed in an area where there are livestock barns. Restarting farmers use abandoned farmland and closed barn. Moreover, these farmers have high management skills and influence the community to resume farming. For example, they introduce new techniques in agriculture that were not previously used in the evacuation area.

On the other hand, most refugees placed in temporary housing have not resumed farming because these are mainly elderly people and semi-retired farmers. Thus, they do not possess management skills to secure agricultural land, work, and storage space necessary to resume farming as well as to purchase agricultural equipment.

Many farmers who have resumed farming consider returning to their villages, excluding those in the difficult-to-return area. However, they have not recovered the scale of business before the accident. Further, there are no cases concerning relocation of all the living bases and farming in the evacuation destination. Many restarting farmers have chosen to continue farming both in Iitate village and at the evacuation destination.

As in many other middle and mountainous areas, Iitate Village had a declining population before the accident. In addition, Iitate Village has witnessed not only a few decades of population decline but also significant changes due to the accident. For example, vegetable gardens cannot be used for self-sufficiency around the house after the accident as used previously. Elderly people find it difficult to return to their home, and there is uncertainty concerning decontamination results. Therefore, it is necessary to consider agricultural assistance as an industrial policy to deal with issues that the policy has not covered so far.

Many issues relating to regional agriculture and community are more difficult post the accident than during evacuation. Among measures to be taken, long-term situations that consider the succession to the next generation are essential. Furthermore, researchers will need to focus on issues faced by residents over a long period of time.

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