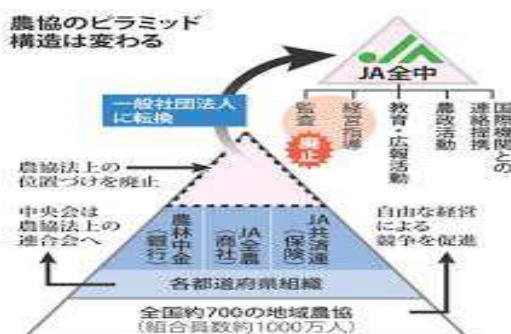


Editorial: Revitalize agriculture through co-op reform

1. The system of the Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives (JA-Zenchu) will be drastically overhauled for the first time in about 60 years under the government's agricultural cooperative reform plan approved on Feb.9.
2. It is an achievement for the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which regards the plan as the core of reforms of rigid regulations. Such regulatory reform is one of the pillars of the government's growth strategy. However, it is necessary to realize agriculture that is suited to the realities of each region and effectively revitalize agriculture in order to achieve growth. The reform of the agricultural cooperative system is just one method of and one step toward achieving this goal.
3. The core of the reforms is to transform JA-Zenchu from a corporation specially authorized under the Agricultural Cooperatives Act into a general corporation, thereby stripping the organization of its authority to audit and supervise regional agricultural cooperatives.
4. Such authority has allowed JA-Zenchu to strongly control local cooperatives. The organization has taken advantage of its authority mainly to protect small-scale farming households that make up the majority of members of each agricultural cooperative. In line with this policy, the organization has put pressure on the government, which has weakened Japan's entire agricultural industry.
5. It is only natural for the government, which has begun to support those who are aspiring to operate large-scale farms in an effort to revitalize the industry, to review JA-Zenchu's authority. It should be appreciated that the government overwhelmed resistance by the organization backed by ruling coalition legislators and formed a consensus on the reform plan.
6. Still, questions remain about the agreement between the government and JA-Zenchu. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has complied with JA-Zenchu's request that a supplementary provision giving the organization power to coordinate between regional agricultural cooperatives and represent these local cooperatives be incorporated in the Agricultural Cooperatives Act. If JA-Zenchu is to continue exercising its influence on regional cooperatives under the provisional clause, it would render the reform ineffectual.
7. Moreover, regional central unions in all prefectures that come under the umbrella of JA-Zenchu would also be retained as unions authorized under the Agricultural Cooperatives Act. The ruling bloc appears to have decided to retain such organizations for fear that the coalition would lose support from farmers prior to nationwide local elections in April and a 2016 House of Councillors election, but the decision runs counter to reforms. Regional central unions should not be allowed to exercise excessive influence on their member cooperatives, which could prevent farmers from being independent and self-sufficient.
8. The goal of reforms of agricultural cooperatives is to revitalize Japan's farming industry as part of the growth strategy. To achieve this, it is indispensable for local agricultural cooperatives to be independent and self-sufficient.
9. Local agricultural bodies should no longer be allowed to sell agricultural products collected from member farmers to the market through the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations at uniform prices and procure necessary materials and equipment from JA group-affiliated organizations regardless of their prices.
10. JA-Echizentaketu, an agricultural cooperative in Echizen, Fukui Prefecture, sells the full amount of rice collected from its member farming households without passing through the JA group. Moreover, the cooperative procures necessary production equipment and materials on its own to reduce sales prices. The cooperative is thereby successful in increasing the earnings of member farming households. Each agricultural cooperative should seek to operate in a way suitable to the realities of their respective region to be a successful example of revitalizing regional agriculture.
11. The government is set to submit a bill to revise the Agricultural Cooperatives Act to reform the agricultural cooperative system to the Diet during the ongoing Diet session. It is necessary for the legislative branch to hold in-depth debate to improve the reform plan and to achieve the goal of revitalizing Japan's agriculture.

【February 10, 2015 / Mainichi Japan】 overhaul 徹底的に見直す strip 取り上げる. render させる ineffectual 無益な
☆Ice breaker for active discussion☆



1) Please explain about agriculture industry in Japan.

2) What is the role that the JA-Zenchu plays in agriculture?

3) What do you think about the revisions in JA-Zenchu?

Do you believe that it will help in reviving the agriculture industry?

4) What kind of difficulties the Japanese farmers have experienced under the JA-Zenchu?

5) Can you think of other industries that need reform?

What reform would you suggest?

6) Make sentences using the following words: strip, authority, ineffectual, overhaul, revitalize, in-depth and overwhelm.

規制改革の中で最も困難とされる農協改革だが、成長産業と位置付け、10年で農家の所得の倍増、2020年までに農林水産物・食品の輸出額を1兆円に倍増させる目標が掲げられている。JA全中の巨大な力とカネにメスを入れたが、まだ踏み込み不十分との指摘もある。