

Seek global food certification

- ① With the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics Games less than four years away, Japanese farmers are being urged to make every effort to win a certificate under Global Good Agricultural Practices, an internationally influential farm certification scheme for sustainable production process management covering product safety, environmental impact and the health, safety and welfare of workers and animals. The government for its part needs to help farmers clear the Global GAP criteria and receive the certificates as quickly as possible. Otherwise there is a chance that food made from domestic farm products will not be served in the Olympic and media villages during the Tokyo Games. (*Good Agricultural Practices 農業生産工程管理 GAP*)
- ② The standards for foodstuffs to be used at the 2020 Games will be adopted in March. It is expected that priority will be given to foodstuffs that have cleared the Global GAP standards. For the 2012 London Olympics, only foodstuffs that had obtained certification under such programs as the Global GAP and Marine Stewardship Council were allowed in meals served to participants. The Rio de Janeiro Games last year set similar standards. (*Marine Stewardship Council 海洋管理協議会 MSC*)
- ③ Retailers in Europe worked out a common farm certification scheme called EurepGAP in 1997, which evolved into Global GAP in 2007. Some 160,000 farmers and farming groups in 124 countries have acquired the certificates. It is thought that 70 to 80 percent of foodstuffs marketed in Europe have the certification. However, as of the end of June last year, only 399 farmers and farming groups in Japan held the Global GAP certificates. It will be impossible for them to supply the millions of meals that will be served to participants, which include athletes, coaches and other officials, during the entire period of the Olympics and Paralympics. In the worst case, the ingredients for most of the meals would have to be brought in from abroad.
- ④ Obtaining a Global GAP certificate is not an easy task. To be certified, farmers need to clear a checklist of more than 200 items, ranging from the way farm chemicals are used, the quality of water used in production and cleaning of products to the safety and education of farm workers as well as the quality of products.
- ⑤ After being certified, farmers are required to keep data tracking the conditions covered by the examination items. The data need to be examined every year for renewal of the certification. Because of the complexity of the procedure and the cost of the certification, which amounts to roughly ¥1 million, many farmers hesitate to apply.
- ⑥ While the government hopes that more farmers and farming groups will get the Global GAP certificate in time for the Tokyo Games, time is running short. Even if farmers obtain the certificates, it will take around two years before their certified products are shipped.
- ⑦ Without Japanese farmers receiving Global GAP certificates in large numbers, exporting domestic farm products to overseas markets in significant volumes will remain just a dream. That high-quality Japanese farm products cannot find their way into global markets will be a great setback for the nation's agricultural sector. Farmers and farming groups need to look beyond their domestic markets and take the necessary steps to convince retailers and consumers abroad of their products' safety and quality.
- ⑧ The farm ministry, which has a goal of boosting farm product exports to ¥1 trillion a year by 2019, is providing support such as subsidies to cover part of farmers' cost of obtaining the certificates and developing manuals explaining how to get the certification. More efforts must be made in both the public and private sectors.
- ⑨ In an encouraging sign, Goshogawara Agriculture and Forestry High School, run by Aomori Prefecture, received a Global GAP certificate in 2015 for the management of its apple orchard and was chosen as one of four organizations that won a 2016 GAP Award. It was the first Japanese high school to get the certification. Students at the school improved the orchard and related facilities on the basis of a checklist of more than 230 items. The school has also developed a tablet device program designed to help farmers with acquisition of the certification. A suggestion by Shinjiro Koizumi, head of the Liberal Democratic Party's Agriculture and Forestry Division, to make it a mandatory course of education at agricultural high schools in the country to obtain the certificate is worth considering. (*orchard 果樹園*)
- ⑩ There is a trend among large retailers in North America and Europe like Wal-Mart Stores and Carrefour S.A. of shunning foodstuffs that have yet to be Global GAP certified. Awareness of the importance of the certification remains poor among farmers in Japan. Both the government and relevant private-sector organizations should raise their awareness and encourage farmers and farming groups to acquire the certification. Otherwise, the government's goal of boosting farm exports will remain little more than pie in the sky. (*shun 避ける、遠ざける pie in the sky 実現性の無いもの、絵に描いた餅*)【2017-02-18 |Japan Times】
- ☆be breaker for active discussion 1. What is the significance of the Global GAP certification? 2. Why not so many Japanese farmers acquired this certification? 3. What are the merits and demerits of acquiring the certification for Japanese farmers? 4. What other preparations Japan must do for the upcoming Olympics? 5. Make sentence using the following words: scheme, complexity, setback, subsidy and pie in the sky.