

Ways to utilize tourism resources in Northern Ibaraki, Japan

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INTRODUCTION

Attracting tourists to local cities, and increasing tourism spending, are key issues Japan faces in becoming a tourism-based nation (Japanese government, 2023). Also, rural tourism has the characteristic of internalizing the externalities of agriculture, but in Japan, it is less economical than in Italy (Ohe, 2017 ; 2019). Today, the question of whether a farmer's occupation is decent work is being raised (Ikegami, 2019). It is important to conduct resource surveys that contribute to improving rural tourism.

Northern Ibaraki Prefecture has relatively more rural areas, tourism research has been conducted with this area as a case study (Kuribayashi et al., 201; Obara, 2018; Kumasaka, 2022). The establishment of tourism requires local industries and human resources (Funck, 2019). When considering future utilization of tourism resources, it is essential to grasp recent resource trends.

Therefore, the author focuses on three nationwide biodiversity-related projects: (1) certification and publication of "Shizenkyousei Site," (2) construction and publication of the Traditional Varieties Database, and (3) support for creating "Organic Village" by municipalities. As interest in biodiversity grows, these certified sites, registered varieties, and organic farming resources could help attract tourists to local cities, by developing tourism products that integrate them with existing resources, such as hot springs and train stations.

Based on this awareness, this paper first clarifies the relationship between the above three projects and northern Ibaraki's resources. Secondly, it focuses on adzuki beans "Musumekita" (*Vigna angularis* (Willd.) Ohwi & Ohashi var. *angularis*) registered in the Traditional Varieties Database, and shows the relationship between producers and consumers. Because adzuki beans are self-pollinating, they are less likely to crossbreed with other crops (Kokubun, 2011), which helps preserve genetic diversity. In addition, processed goods, include traditional Japanese sweets from the Edo period (Kato, 2015), and are expected to attract inbound tourists. This variety is mainly cultivated in Hitachiota City, with relatively high production volumes. Thirdly, based on the above facts, it considers ways to utilize tourism resources in northern Ibaraki.

METHOD

Project 1 was launched to achieve the international biodiversity conservation target "30by30" (CBD, 2022). Information on certified sites is published on the Ministry of the Environment's website and on the OECM international database. This study examined the data from the former.

The subject of registration for Project 2 is plants. Information on registered varieties has been published on the website of National Agriculture and Food Research Organization [NARO] since March 2023. This study examined the data. Regarding the relationship between producers and consumers of "Musumekita," it conducted a document survey and interviews with relevant facilities and people.

For Project 3, the first "Organic Village Declaration" was made in November 2022. When making this declaration, each municipality must carry out trial initiatives related to organic farming, and to develop and publicize an "Organic Farming Implementation Plan." This study analyzed its contents.

FINDINGS

A summary of the results is as follows (see Table 1). There is one "Shizenkyousei Site" in northern Ibaraki, located in Hitachiota City. The main management organization is a long-established television company, which continuously preserves the satoyama (approx. 0.7ha), including farmland, as part of its long-term programming. Besides, there are two sites in the neighboring region, one a tall tree forest,

etc.,(approx. 9.8ha) managed by a company founded in Hitachi City in 1910. The site has confirmed 127 plant species, 184 insect species, and rare bird species, etc., and is used for relaxation and environmental learning by employees and local residents.

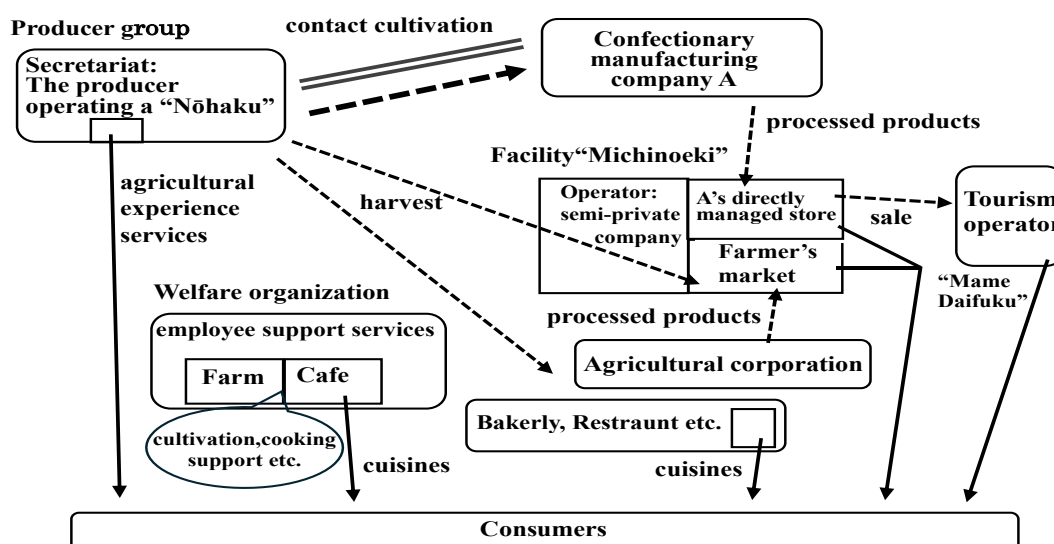
“Musumekita” is still cultivated under contract, between a producers’ group and a long-established confectionery manufacturing company A. “Mame Daifuku,” sold at Company A’s directly managed stores, is purchased by tourism operators and distributed to tourists as souvenirs(see Figure 1). Regarding “Shizenkyousei Site” and the Traditional Varieties Database, the public information consisted of 13 to 15 items. The former included “changes in land use” and “biodiversity value,” while the latter covered “variety characteristics” and “traditional use.” The information is concise, specific, and scientifically based.

Three cities have developed and publicized an “Organic Farming Implementation Plan” in Ibaraki. Located in the northern region, Hitachiomiya City has a local agricultural cooperative committed to production expansion. Despite differences in the three cities’ policies and stances, they share a common objective : conserving biodiversity through organic farming. Hitachiomiya City’s plan mentions “green tourism,” while Kasama City’s plan, located near the airport, refers to “inbound” and “kankō” (see Table 2).

Table 1. Biodiversity-related Nationwide Project in Recent Japan

	Implementing organization	Nationwide	Ibaraki Prefecture		
			Total	Northern region	Central region
1.Certification and publication of “Sizenkyousei Site”	Ministry of the Environment	253 sites	11 sites	1 site	2 sites
2.Construction and publication of the Traditional Variety Database	NARO and Yamagata University	291 varieties	5 varieties	5 varieties	0
3.Support for creating “Organic Village” by municipalities	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	129 cities	4 cities	1city	1city

source) Based on MOE(2024), NARO(2024), MAFF(2024)



source) Based on relevant documents and hearing surveys

Figure 1. Relation of Producer and Consumer on the Variety “Musumekita”

Table 2. Use of Terms in “Organic Farming Implementation Plan” by Ibaraki’s Cities

	added value, brand, “mōkarunōgyō”	immigration, settlement	school lunch	biodiversity	“kankō”, tourism, inbound
Hitachiomiya City	4	1	9	3	1
Kasama City	10	2	1	1	9
Kasumigaura City	9	0	19	4	0

note) Terms listed on the questionnaire are not counted.

(time)

IMPLICATIONS

In northern Ibaraki and neighboring regions, resources called “Shizenkyousei Site” or Traditional Variety are increasing and gaining significance in biodiversity, history, and culture, based on scientific evidence. At the same time, this information is available on public websites, making it easy for people to access and share. Long-established companies are strongly committed to these resources. Furthermore, “Organic Village Declaration” cities have been created, leading to the branding of local products and spaces (Kobayashi, 2016), and local governments have also shown their vision to utilize organic farming-related resources for tourism. The resources mentioned above appeal to those interested in biodiversity, and have a unique character with a story to tell. If domestic and international travel companies integrate this resource into package tours for these people, they can differentiate their products. This would be an effective way to utilize existing tourism resources in northern Ibaraki. However, not all resources have a proven record of tourist use. When developing a tourism product, it is essential to reach a prior agreement with suppliers on which materials to use, how to incorporate them into programs, and the purchase price at the destination.

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