

Social Capital and the Local Food Movement in Japan: The Case of the Chiba Prefecture

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between social capital and local food movements in rural Japan, with the latter factor markedly leaning towards the goal, “Local Production for Local Consumption” (LPLC). Promoted by the central and local governments in Japan since the 1990s, LPLC was envisioned to increase food self-sufficiency, revitalize rural communities, address consumers’ food safety concerns, and provide food education. A structured interview survey is conducted on 56 agricultural communities in Chiba Prefecture, Japan. The social capital indicators used represent both the structural and cognitive types of social capital. The scores measuring the level of social capital are compared against the presence or absence of LPLC activity in the household. The data collected yield several important findings. First, structural social capital at the community level contributes to both profit-oriented activities and socially oriented voluntary community activities. Second, structural social capital at the household level affects LPLC activities in various ways. The higher the farmers’ level of participation in local social groups, the more actively they sell their products at farmers’ markets. In contrast, the personal networks of those farmers who run agritourism tend to be limited within the same communities. Third, cognitive social capital at the household level indicates no particular relevance with LPLC activities.

INTRODUCTION

The local food movements in rural Japan have generally conformed to the principle advocating “Local Production for Local Consumption” (LPLC). LPLC has been promoted by the central and local governments in Japan since the 1990s, with the goals of

increasing food self-sufficiency, revitalizing rural communities, satisfying consumers’ food safety concerns, and providing food education (Kimura and Nishiyama 2008). LPLC broadly refers to efforts that aim “to connect producers and consumers through activities to consume locally produced agricultural and marine products”. This definition suggests that LPLC-