

## RADICALISM IN THE MIDST OF CONSERVATISM: ORGANIC FARMERS' GROUPS IN NAGASAKI PREFECTURE

DARRELL GENE MOEN

### *Introduction*

The two organic farmers' groups I will introduce in this article are both in Kyushu, the southernmost of the four main islands of Japan. The organic farmers in Kyushu, enjoying a mild winter with no snowfall and sub-tropical climate in the summer months, are able to work their fields all year-round. Although organic farmers are farming on a full-time basis, close to 90% of conventional farmers in Kyushu, just as throughout Japan, unable to compete with cheap imports of various agricultural products flooding the nation, are working their farmland on a part-time basis.

The agricultural landscape in Kyushu looks bleak, with abandoned citrus orchards and terraced rice paddies neglected and overgrown with weeds. The remaining farmers tend to work only their most conveniently located fields, growing rice and specialty crops such as potatoes and certain vegetables. The organic farmers, on the other hand, are not only utilizing all of their farmland, many of them are renting land from neighboring elderly farmers who can no longer work their fields.

In Nagasaki Prefecture, ideological contradictions abound. For example, the city of Nagasaki hosts the annual World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs organized by the Japan Communist Party. The city is filled during the first two weeks of August with activists representing various progressive organizations from throughout Japan as well as from many foreign countries. This has in turn attracted the attention of numerous right wing nationalist groups who, opposing the anti-war movement, assemble in force in the attempt to disrupt the conference activities using sound trucks and various intimidation tactics.

The aversion to war on the part of Nagasaki City citizens forces the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) politicians to espouse anti-war rhetoric in order to win elections and remain in office. This led to the assassination attempt on the LDP mayor of Nagasaki City in 1989 by a right wing nationalist, when he merely stated that Japan's emperor should accept some responsibility for the Pacific War.

The presence of a huge U.S. naval base in the city of Sasebo in Nagasaki Prefecture has precipitated numerous clashes between groups opposing the continuance of the U.S.-Japan military alliance and the very conservative police force, aided by the *yakuza* (organized crime syndicates) when needed. The presence of *yakuza*-controlled brothels and hostess bars servicing the needs of both American and Japanese military men (several Japanese military bases are located in Nagasaki Prefecture), usually employing young women from Southeast Asian countries, has led to the increase in activities of various women's groups opposing sexual exploitation and offering support to the women involved in the sex trade. Crimes committed by

U.S. military personnel, including rapes of adolescent girls and the murder of unarmed civilians, provoke mixed feelings of hostility and humiliation.

In addition, the existence of a nuclear power plant in the city of Karatsu in nearby Saga Prefecture; the construction of major theme park/resort complexes and the associated destruction of farming and fishing villages outside the cities of Nagasaki and Sasebo; and the continued construction of golf courses throughout the prefecture, have all contributed to the proliferation of various social movements opposing the status quo and demanding basic structural changes.

Although these pockets of resistance appear insignificant when contrasted to the seemingly unified strength of the dominant conservative forces in Nagasaki Prefecture, the fact that these progressive opposition forces even exist in such an intimidating socio-political environment points to the increasing possibility that their voices are being heard and their messages internalized by many citizens of Nagasaki Prefecture, who, for the most part, remain socially inactive and politically apathetic. Although many people I talked with in Nagasaki Prefecture profess to have respect for the courage of the vocal minority of social activists who persevere in their efforts to effect progressive social change, many of these same people also admitted that they were afraid to become directly involved themselves.

However, an increasing number of Nagasaki Prefecture's population is becoming directly involved in the organic farming movement. Direct marketing structures between organic farmers and consumers have been established; numerous organic farmers' groups have been formed; co partnerships as well as new consumer cooperatives have come into existence; and many participants are directly and indirectly supporting the actions of others involved in numerous related social movements.

The Japanese organic farming movement, with its seemingly uncontroversial emphasis on food safety and environmental protection, allows its participants the opportunity to become involved in a movement with much broader social aims than is apparent at first glance. Once convinced of the need to protect their families' health and the health of the environment, the participants become convinced of the need to protect the future of family farming in Japan. Steps in the politicization process lead to opposing government measures that allow the import of foods with residues of previously banned chemicals; opposing the construction of golf courses with their destruction of farmland and contamination of water supplies; and eventual involvement in a range of social issues that would most likely not have concerned them otherwise.

The two organic farmers' groups I have chosen for discussion in this article are dissimilar in size and methods of operation, one with eight farm families and the other with 115 farm families. However, both are making inroads in the midst of conservatism, influencing the farmers and consumers around them, and engaging in radical and innovative approaches to revive local economies and redefine social relations.

The organic farmers' groups I visited in Nagasaki Prefecture (as part of my dissertation research in 1993) included members who had been radicalized by their involvement in protest activities as university students; members who supported, or were in some way affiliated with the Japan Communist Party; members from outside the community who brought in new ideas; as well as members who had never left their natal town or village.

The first group I will introduce is a relatively new group, and is the smallest organic farmers' group that I visited in Japan. The farm wives in the group are very assertive, and

when I attended the group's year-end party (*bonenkai*), I was surprised to hear them candidly express opinions that seemed to contradict what their husbands were saying.

### *Saikai-cho Organic Farmers' Group*

Eight families make up this group of farmers, located on a peninsula outside the city of Sasebo, the second largest city in Nagasaki Prefecture, with a population of 250,000. Sasebo is about 90 minutes by train from the prefectural capital of Nagasaki and is the home of a major U.S. naval base, a national park comprising 99 picturesque islands, a major tourist attraction and resort complex called "Huis Ten Bosch" (House in a Forest), and a huge shipyard.

The Saikai-cho Organic Farmers' Group got its start in 1981 when a young couple who had previously been members of an organic farming commune near Nara moved to the area to take up farming full-time. They teamed up with an area farmer who had been growing crops organically for over 20 years who had been a member of another organic farmers' group near the city of Nagasaki. The group expanded its operations significantly in 1987 when Mr. and Mrs. Fuchi, local farmers known throughout the area as JCP members, along with three other farm families growing organically decided to join.

The group (in 1993) of eight full-time organic farm families makes deliveries to 230 consumer families (in a co-partnership arrangement) in Sasebo once per week. Fifty varieties of vegetables, along with potatoes, sweet potatoes, taro root, legumes, rice, and eggs are marketed directly by the farmers either to consumer household members of the co-partnership or to Polan Hiroba, a Tokyo-based, New Left-influenced organization with 80 organic food stores nationwide.

In an attempt to involve all family members in the interaction with consumer members of the co-partnership, three "couples" (husband-wife, father-daughter, or mother-son) go on the delivery rounds, with each family participating in deliveries once every other week. With the city of Sasebo within one hour by car from the Saikai-cho area, the farmers leave for their delivery rounds between 6:30am and 7:00am and are back by 11:30am. Stopping to chat with the consumers, the deliveries are made in a relatively leisurely manner and the farmers all stated that they enjoy the mornings of deliveries which give them a break from the routine of work in the fields. Gross sales of the group to co-partnership members in 1992 amounted to ¥15 million (\$150,000), and to Polan Hiroba, ¥20 million (\$200,000).

The farmers' group meets with representatives of the consumers' group once a month to keep the co-partnership functioning smoothly. As in other co-partnerships, the guidelines for co-partnerships provided by the Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA) are followed with prices, varieties, and quantities of crops pre-negotiated. When consumer members bring their families to the farms for *enno* ("connection farming") excursions, the farmers stated that they do not expect the consumer members to significantly contribute to the farm workload. They told me that they want "their consumers" to come to see their vegetables and other crops growing, and that by just being there, the consumers become a tangible part of the farming process.

Some of the farmers' children have established friendships with some of the "city kids" from Sasebo, and visits to each other's home and neighborhood environments have resulted in broadened outlooks based on varied experiences for children of both groups. The Saikai-cho

farmers try to include their children in various activities related to the operation of the organic farmers' group in order to impress upon them that farming can be an interesting and enjoyable way to make a living.

In order to increase their consumer base, the farmers' group offers three size options of produce for their consumers' group members to choose from: large (for four-member families), medium (for two-member families), and small (for single-person households). With 120 separate delivery locations, most of their deliveries are to young couples without children. With such young consumers' group members, the farmers (all of whom are in their 30s or 40s, with the exception of one 78-year-old man farming alone) are assured of the future growth potential of the co-partnership.

Since both the husband and wife of one of the farmers' group farm families are members of the Japan Communist Party (the wife was previously an elected member of the local town council), some of the members of two JCP-affiliated organizations in Sasebo (Shin Fujin [New Japan Women's Association] and Kokomo Gekijo [Children's Theater]), are members of the co-partnership. I was told that about 80% of the consumers' group members do the remainder of their grocery shopping at the Green Co-op in Sasebo, while the rest do their shopping at Seikyo Co-op.

The two farm couples who have had the most influence on the ideological orientation and growth of the Saikai-cho Organic Farmers' Group provide an interesting example of the necessity of downplaying ideological differences and emphasizing similarities in order to be able to work together to achieve similar goals. Both couples have brought in new ideas and outlooks based on outside experiences, and are sharing those ideas with the people around them. However, the very size of the farmers' group, with only eight families, necessitates that its members be ideologically flexible and able to adjust their viewpoints so that group harmony can be maintained.

The Tsudas (Mitsugu and Emiko) had both been long-term members of religious-based organic farming communes in Nara and Mie Prefectures, and had met each other at a commune in Nara in 1979. Influenced by the back-to-the-land philosophy associated with Japan's commune movement that emerged amidst the social turmoil of the late-1960s and by the "spiritual oneness of the universe" philosophies of these particular communes, when they first moved to the Saikai-cho area, they were initially more interested in finding an alternative lifestyle and being left alone with it rather than attempting to effect social transformation based on their opposition to the dominant culture's values and cultural norms.

However, their years of living and working with the Saikai-cho farmers; their interaction with various consumer members of the co-partnership; and their close working relationship with JCP farmers have enabled them to overcome their aversion to involvement in social and political issues. They now actively support the movements opposing resort development, golf course construction, nuclear power and nuclear weapons, and the presence of U.S. military forces in Japan. They stated that they now recognize the need to participate in the electoral process, particularly at the local level, and both vote for local JCP candidates because "they offer the only viable choice for farmers."

Mr. Tsuda had been working in the administration section of Fujitsu Corporation for three-and-a-half years after graduating from prestigious Kyoto University when he was transferred to the company's office in Mie Prefecture. Japan's largest commune was located about 40 minutes by car from where Mr. Tsuda was living in Mie Prefecture, and after reading

a book about “Yamagishiism,” he decided to attend one of their eight-day indoctrination courses in Toyosato. He found their philosophy to his liking, quit the company, and ended up staying at the Yamagishi Association headquarters commune in Toyosato, Mie Prefecture, for a period of eleven months. He stated:

When I attended the eight-day study session, I realized how unfulfilling my lifestyle was. The study was unique and I was really impressed, so I joined. I still believe in Yamagishiism to an extent. My own interpretation of Yamagishiism is that it is a philosophy of personal freedom; the freedom to be individuals, living together happily and in a carefree manner with nature.

During the eleven months Mr. Tsuda was a member of the Yamagishi Association, he lived at four different commune locations and he stated that it felt like ten years because he was learning so many new things every day. However, he left the commune and joined Japan’s second largest commune organization called Ajisai Mura near Nara. He said that he left Yamagishi because there were some people with whom he could not get along, stating:

I dislike both ultra-leftists and ultra-rightists. The reason I quit the Yamagishi commune was because at the time I was there fascist-types were in positions of leadership. They wouldn’t tolerate differences in opinion and were trying to force everyone to agree with their ideas on how the organization should be run and where it should be going from there. They were hardcore anti-communists and a lot of what they were saying sounded like the kind of things right-wing fanatics in those black armored personnel carriers are always shouting. They made me feel very uncomfortable.

Mr. Tsuda stayed at the Ajisai Mura commune as a member for two years combining office work with carpentry and farming. It was there that he met and married Emiko, who was not a member but was employed as an office worker by the commune. They accepted an invitation to join another couple (with three children) who were farming in Saikai-cho, and lived with them for ten months. However, they did not get along well together, and Mr. and Mrs. Tsuda made the decision to form their own independent household and settle down somewhere in the Saikai-cho area. Mrs. Tsuda explained:

We fell in love with this area as soon as we got here. We’re surrounded by the ocean on three sides and we have the view of the mountains to the northeast. The people around here are friendly, and we knew we didn’t want to live in another communal situation.

Most of the people I know who leave the city to become organic farmers, the wife works for a wage somewhere and the husband becomes a hobby farmer. That’s the way it was with the couple we lived with - she had a full-time paid position at the Yamagishi Association office in town and supported his hobby of organic gardening. He was just plain lazy and I couldn’t understand how she could put up with it!

Anyway, we didn’t want that. We wanted to be able to work together and succeed as a full-time farm family. Well, we did it, and I’m sure if we can do it, anyone can. I really wanted to raise my child in Japanese society, and not separated from it, living in a commune. Things have turned out very well for us.

Mr. and Mrs. Tsuda lived in a rented farmhouse for about six months before buying the land to build their own house. They continued to rent farmland and it was only after proving to their neighbors that they were there to stay and that they were serious about farming full-time, that they were able to buy their own farmland. They thus rented all of their farmland for a period of five years, and now own 36 *are* of farmland, in addition to the 70 *are* of land they still rent. Satisfied with their accomplishment, Mrs. Tsuda emphasized that she was glad to have been able to escape from the confining atmosphere of communal living, and become a part of the larger society once again.

Mr. and Mrs. Tsuda are a good example of Japan's entry into a new era of agriculture in which only people actually interested in pursuing farming as a career become farmers. It is possible that their eleven-year-old son may want to become a farmer someday and take over the family farm. He has seen that his parents enjoy the work they do, and that they, as a family, are able to live comfortably on the income from farming alone. On the other hand, it is highly unlikely (as statistics clearly reveal) that the sons and daughters of conventional farm families will want to become farmers when they have seen with their own eyes that farming is not a viable career option.

Although local residents were at first skeptical of ex-commune newcomers trying to establish themselves as full-time farmers and be accepted as members of the local community, Mr. and Mrs. Tsuda's determination to succeed earned them the respect of their neighbors. Their enthusiasm and energetic commitment to farm full-time organically convinced other farm families in the area to join them in their efforts. One such family that joined Mr. and Mrs. Tsuda's group in 1986 is a long-established farm family headed by the 37-year-old (in 1993) son, Fuchi Yasuhiro, an active member of the Japan Communist Party.

Mr. Fuchi works the farm with his father and his wife. His mother works as an office worker at a nearby supermarket, and his three children are all attending elementary school. The Fuchis work a 30 *are* citrus orchard, a 30 *are* kiwi orchard, and have 50 *are* in vegetables. They also raise ten head of cattle from which they make their own compost.

The cattle are marketed through the local agricultural cooperative and the other crops are marketed through the Saikai-cho Organic Farmers' Group, either to the consumer members of the co-partnership or to Polan Hiroba. Some of the citrus (*mikan*) is sold directly to regular customers who come to the farm to pick their own fruit, and oversupplies of kiwi fruit are sold to the Seikyo Co-op in Nagasaki. The Fuchis net between ¥5 million and ¥6 million (\$50,000-\$60,000) annually from their farm operation.

Mr. Fuchi attended Ehime University, and it was while he was a student there that he joined the JCP auxiliary youth organization, *Minsei* (*Nihon Minshu Seinen Domei*, or Japan Democratic Youth League), and became interested in various social issues. His activism with *Minsei* led him to believe in the strength of people working together toward a common objective. After graduating from the Agricultural College at Ehime University in 1978, he returned to Saikai-cho to work the family farm together with his parents.

However, he developed severe headaches from the application of chemicals in the citrus orchard so he decided to start converting the farm to organic production in 1979. He asked the woman who had been a fellow student at Ehime University and an active member of *Minsei* to join him in an attempt to revitalize the farming community in Saikai-cho by convincing other farmers to convert to organic farming and market their produce directly to local consumers. She agreed, and they were married in 1980.

Together, they converted the fields to organic production; formed direct-marketing relations with local consumer households in Sasebo and with the JCP-influenced Seikyo Co-op in Nagasaki; established a pick-it-yourself citrus operation; and convinced three other area farmers to convert to organic production and join forces with them.

When I asked Mr. Fuchi why he and his family had decided to join the Saikai-cho Organic Farmers' Group initiated by the Tsudas, he replied:

As JCP members, my wife and I would go from house to house in an attempt to solicit subscriptions to the party newspaper, Akahata. When we went to Mr. and Mrs. Tsuda's house, they received us warmly. Although they didn't [at first] subscribe to the paper, we had an enjoyable talk and found that we agreed about many things, especially about the need to work together to revitalize the farming community.

They impressed us with their relative broad-mindedness, their organizational skills, and their commitment to not only their farm but to transforming rural society. We met with them several times and agreed that we should work together. It's thanks to the Tsudas' organizational skills that enabled the group to succeed, and allowed my wife and I to devote more of our time to JCP activities.

Before joining the group, Mr. Fuchi had run for political office as a Japan Communist Party candidate for the local town assembly in 1984. He was not elected, but by running, he was able to give local residents the opportunity to hear the JCP stand on various issues, and ended up receiving more votes than he had expected. In the 1988 election, his wife ran as the JCP candidate for the town assembly and much to everyone's surprise, she won by an overwhelming majority. She was not only the first JCP assembly member on the town council, she was the first woman elected to the assembly.

However, in the 1992 election, she lost her seat on the town assembly and that came as a shock to many of the local residents who had voted for her in the previous election. Talking with one farm couple, they told me that they had just assumed that she would be reelected because she was so popular. The woman said, "If I'd known it was going to be such a close race, I would've gone to vote." Mrs. Fuchi herself explained:

It was my own fault. I was over-confident. I didn't campaign as hard as I should have and that led my constituents to believe that there was no danger of my losing the election. There was a low voter turnout, but I was told that my opponent's supporters turned out in force. I've learned my lesson and I won't let that happen again. I really feel badly because I let a lot of people down. I'm sure I can win my seat back in the next election by campaigning vigorously.

The Saikai-cho Organic Farmers' Group provides an example of a small group of farmers successfully working together to unite urban consumer families with rural farm families through a co-partnership arrangement; revitalize an economically-depressed farming community; and bridge ideological differences in order to attain objectives that will benefit all concerned parties. Although there are only three JCP members in the entire Saikai-cho area (with a population of 40,000), that a JCP candidate was elected to public office indicates that there are a significant number of rural voters who support the party.

The Saikai-cho Organic Farmers' Group gives a microcosmic example of the possibility of

alliance building between seemingly disparate groups assumed by many to be ideologically incompatible. The farmers' group consists of JCP members and supporters, former members of religious-based communes, and typically conservative farmers. They market their produce to a New Left-initiated organization of organic food stores; to members of JCP auxiliary organizations; to the JCP-influenced Seikyo Co-op; to the conservative Association of Agricultural Cooperatives (Nokyo); and to working-class as well as middle-class urban consumers. The farmers, initially out of economic necessity, are forced to be flexible in their ideological stance when attempting to form a coalition of organic farmers. Once ideological rigidity is overcome, it increasingly becomes apparent to the coalition-builders that the similarities in outlook outweigh the differences, and the alliance is strengthened.

The consumers (including the retail outlets) are interested in supporting organic farmers struggling to survive so ideological diversity within the farmers' group is not only tolerated, it is expected. Each ideologically distinct group within the direct-marketing structures that have been initiated by the organic farmers' group has opportunities to influence the outlook of farmers. The farmers, through their close interaction with a variety of groups, often appear to act as mediators in that they point out the positive aspects of each group to others in an effort to lessen the antagonisms which (to them) often appear to be unnecessary and clearly counter-productive.

To the farmers, the people belonging to organizations that oppose agricultural liberalization and support farmers' efforts to survive as farmers, whether they do so because of environmental reasons, family health reasons, political reasons tied to a specific party, religious reasons, ideological reasons tied to a New Left emphasis on grassroots-based social movements and Third World solidarity, or because doing so is directly or indirectly related to a social movement they are participating in, are all allies. The necessity on the part of the farmers to be inclusive and not exclusive, that is, to accept rather than reject all offers to form direct-marketing arrangements with them, enables them to recognize the importance of building coalitions, not only between themselves and a variety of progressive organizations, but between these organizations themselves. The Saikai-cho Organic Farmers' Group, with its emphasis on coalition building and with its relatively young consumer base, will undoubtedly grow in numbers and in influence in the Sasebo area.

The other organic farmers' group in Nagasaki Prefecture that I will now introduce has also formed direct-marketing relations with a variety of progressive organizations. This balance has enabled the farmers to be exposed to a variety of ideological perspectives, and these have, in turn, influenced their own outlooks and actions.

In contrast to the Saikai-cho group of organic farmers who are focusing their attention on increasing crop diversity and maintaining close ties to the consumer members of their co-partnership, the organic farmers of the Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union are relying on the marketing of specialized crops and processed food products and placing more importance on persuading more area farmers to convert to organic production. This emphasis has led them to expand their business activities so that other farmers can readily recognize the economic benefits that accrue from engaging in organic farming collectively.



### *Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union*

Lying to the east of the city of Nagasaki, Shimabara Peninsula, with the active volcano Mt. Unzen and the national park surrounding it located near the center of it, is the home of the Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union (*Nagasaki Nanbu Seisan Kumiai*). This is a youthful and dynamic group of 115 farm families, with the men averaging 38-years-old and the women, 34. Several of the farmers are still in their mid-twenties, having taken up farming immediately after graduating from either high school or junior college.

The group was initiated by Kondo Kazumi, who returned to his natal village in 1975 after graduating from a Tokyo university. Upon his return, he influenced four other farmers his age to join him in an attempt to create an organic farmers' group and directly-market their produce to urban consumers and consumer cooperatives.

Mr. Kondo had been part of the radical student movement during his years at university and had seen how the Sanrizuka farmers, opposing the construction of a major airport on their land, were successfully marketing organic produce directly to Tokyo-area consumers. Influenced by a New Left ideology that placed importance on people taking action at the grassroots level to effect the changes needed to improve their own lives, he wanted to encourage area farmers to join him in an attempt to revitalize the local farming economy.

In December 1993, when I visited the group, its membership had grown to include 70 farm families with capital investments in the collective business ventures, and an additional 45 farm families that only sold their organic produce to the group. Thus, a total of 115 farm families on the Shimabara Peninsula were benefiting from the group's existence.

The farmers have invested their money in various innovative ways to enable the group to expand the scope of its operations so that the farmers themselves are able to control the entire agricultural process, from the provision of prepared compost to the packaging and distribution of processed foods. The group's gross sales in 1993 was ¥750 million (\$750,000), and its projected gross sales for 1994 was ¥1 billion (\$1 million). The average net income for farm families in the group in 1993 was ¥8 million (\$80,000).

In addition to a large variety of fresh fruits, vegetables and root crops, the group markets rice and wheat as well as an impressive assortment of attractively packaged processed foods. These include ham and sausages; dried fish and seaweed (two fishing families are members), along with packages of fresh seafood salads; two types of wheat noodles; prepared vegetable dishes such as packages of curry stew (with potatoes, carrots, and onions), tempura sets (with sliced sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and lotus root), whole new potatoes (peeled, on wooden skewers), a vinegary vegetable dish (with carrots, taro root, and green beans), honey-glazed pre-cooked sweet potatoes, and a pre-cooked burdock root and carrot dish; a natural fruit jello made from organically-grown tangerines; and a variety of 100% fresh fruit juices. The basic ingredients of the above listed processed foods are taken to local, family-owned food processors that are contracted by the group to process and package their products for them. In this way, locally owned businesses are also able to benefit from the group's operations.

The only food processing that the group was directly involved in when I was there was the cutting up and packaging of onions (too large, too small, or too oddly-shaped to sell whole) for restaurant use. I was told that the demand for the pre-cut onions was so high that it was difficult to fill all the orders coming in. Also, because vegetables not meeting the uniformity

standards (set by the farmers in the group) were being discarded, the group had decided to establish a facility for pickling fresh vegetables in the near future in order to eliminate such waste.

With several pig producers and cattle ranchers in the group, livestock waste is combined with crop residues (rice and wheat straw, along with other organic matter) contributed by group farmers to produce a rich organic compost at the group-owned and operated compost production facility. The compost is packaged and then distributed to the group's farmers at cost, and any surplus is sold directly to other organic farmers' groups. It is thus not necessary for each farm family to own livestock or poultry in an individualized integrated farm management system. The group as a whole is practicing an integrated farming approach, and the time-consuming task of compost making is eliminated. All crop wastes as well as animal wastes are effectively recycled and the soil is continually being enriched.

The group contracts with locally based trucking and shipping companies to deliver their various agricultural products throughout Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa. The group markets its products to various groups, and maintains what appears to be a good balance between JCP-influenced and New Left-influenced consumer cooperatives, and between organic food stores and consumers' groups as well as mail-order customers. Marketing outlets include Seikyo Co-op (in Kagoshima, Nagasaki, Kobe, Okinawa, Niigata, and Hokkaido); Seikatsu Club Kanagawa; the New Left-influenced Group to Protect the Earth; and a large number of consumer groups, many of which are already involved in co-partnership arrangements with other organic farmers' groups.

In order to establish and maintain face-to-face contact with the members of various consumers' groups as well as with mail-order customers and members of consumer cooperatives, the group holds events throughout the year such as rice-planting parties, harvest festivals, children's festivals, farm tours, and information exchange meetings. This interaction between the farmers and consumers gives both farmers and consumers the chance get to know each other, exchange opinions, discuss a wide variety of issues, and learn from each other's experiences.

The group publishes its own monthly journal, places notices in area newspapers calling for anyone interested in a career in organic farming to contact the group, and contacts local media to cover various events and news stories. It has its own organic farming training program, and helps newcomers find farmland to buy or rent. The group hopes to convince another 100 area farmers to convert to organic farming, and to attract 50 non-farmers to take up farming in the area by the year 2000.

The group is involved in various social movements including the peace movement (anti-U.S. military bases and Japanese remilitarization); the environmental movement (opposing golf course and resort complex development, nuclear power plants, destruction of tropical rainforests); and the Third World solidarity movement.

In 1991, the group accepted a request that was made by a Japanese non-governmental organization, the Japan Volunteer Youth Association (*Nihon Seinen Hoshi Kyokai*), through the Group to Protect the Earth (a New Left-influenced Tokyo-based organic food distributor) to train young farmers from the Third World in organic farm management. One farmer from Thailand stayed with the group in 1991, and farmers from Bangladesh were with the group in 1992 and 1993.

The home stay program is set up so that the visiting farmers stay with three of the farm

families in the group for two months each, and with other farm families for two weeks at a time, for a total of ten months. In this way, the visiting farmers have the opportunity to work and live with a number of host families. I was told that the group was considering entering into a farmer-to-farmer exchange program with organic farmers in the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia.

This brief glimpse into the varied operations of the Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union clearly shows that farmers united in collective action are able to pool their expertise and their monetary resources to establish well-run business ventures that further contribute to their economic stability. More importantly, their "business success" attracts more area farm families to convert to organic production and either join the group or form their own organic farmers' groups.

Some of the farmers who had been members of the group for less than five years told me that their initial reason for joining was economic. By talking with member farmers and seeing the success of the group's various business ventures, they had been convinced that a comfortable living could be obtained by becoming members of the Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union. As one farmer explained:

I was a senior in high school when two farmers from the Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union came to speak at a school assembly. They talked about the organic farming movement and the need for more farmers. They said that by becoming organic farmers, we could help to remake rural society. My parents were farming part-time, growing potatoes and rice. They didn't want me to become a farmer, but I decided to give it a try anyway.

I got a lot of help and advice from the group's farmers on how to convert to organic production. I've been a member for five years now, and my old high school friends are amazed to hear me talking about political issues. I was never interested in such things when I was in high school, so my friends think I'm a different person. It's being a member of the Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union that's changed me. It's like being in school. I'm always learning something new. Now, I'm involved in groups opposing U.S. military interventionism, social discrimination against women, Japanese trade policies, and many other social issues. Sometimes, I can't believe myself how much I've changed! At first, when I'd get together with my friends from high school, I'd brag about how much money I was making as a member of the organic farmers' group. Now, when we get together, they complain because I'm always talking politics. Anyway, I feel like I have a purpose in life, and it's a good feeling.

Detractors may point to the various successful business ventures the group is engaged in and claim that the farmers are only interested in increasing their families' wealth. Certainly, the farmers are interested in providing their families with material comforts. No doubt, living in an advanced capitalist country, they want to "buy" opportunities for their children so that they may have a chance to live up to their potential; a good education in Japan is very expensive. Living in the concrete social reality of contemporary Japan, the farmers are concentrating their efforts on succeeding economically as an organic farmers' group.

However, once farmers become members, they find that they have not only joined an organic farmers' group, they find that they have joined a social movement. They discover that

the movement extends beyond the regional to include the national and international dimensions. They also become aware of, and often become actively involved in, numerous social and political issues that appear to be only peripherally related to food and farming.

The members of the Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union are providing an example of how farmers can reinvigorate the economy of an entire region. They have shown how organic farmers, locally owned food processors, cattle ranchers, fishing families, and locally owned trucking and shipping companies can all work together for mutual benefit. Their economic success has earned them the respect of local inhabitants, the cooperation of local governments, and coverage by local media of various aspects of the group's activities.

Local businesses have profited not only from the increase in the circulation of money, but also from the group's activities opposing large-scale development projects and supporting family-owned businesses such as restaurants, souvenir shops, and inns. The group's attempt to attract newcomers to farming (six non-farm families have relocated to the Shimabara Peninsula from urban areas to take up organic farming as group members since 1986) indicates the importance it attaches to reviving the entire region. With an established organic farmers' group such as the Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union willing to provide newcomers with the necessary introductions to buy or rent the land to farm and give them assistance and advice on organic farming methods, more urban dwellers will be motivated to take up farming as a career choice, not as a hobby but as a full-time profession.

### *Conclusion*

The organic farmers' groups that I have introduced in this article are involved in similar efforts to transform Japanese society. The farmwomen are making inroads against patriarchal attitudes and behavioral norms by uniting and influencing those around them by projecting their united voice. The farmers have established direct-marketing relationships with local consumers as well as with mail-order customers; are actively involved in efforts to revitalize rural society; and have become involved in various social movements.

The Japan Communist Party has had a presence and an influence at both of the organic farmers' groups I have introduced. JCP members and supporters were found within the farmers' groups as well as in the consumers' groups and the various social movement groups at each location. Local JCP representatives strongly supported the organic farmers' struggles to survive and encouraged all area farmers to consider converting to organic farming if possible. By farmers' circumventing conventional marketing structures, the JCP was in a position, through its auxiliary organizations such as Seikyo, Japan's largest consumer cooperative, or the New Japan Women's Association, to offer concrete assistance to the farmers in the form of an assured market for their organic and low-input produce.

The organic farmers' groups also had marketing relations with New Left-influenced organic food retailers, processors, and distributors as well as with consumer cooperatives. The New Left interest in Third World solidarity prompted the Southern Nagasaki organic farmers' group to establish direct farmer-to-farmer exchanges with organic farmers from countries in Southeast Asia. In this way, the Japanese organic farming movement has been able to expand beyond national boundaries to address the global issues associated with the internationalization of agriculture. Not content with economic gains for group members, they are working to

economically and socially revitalize their own rural regions and include as many of the local inhabitants as possible in the movement to transform Japanese society through redefined social relations and reformulated values and cultural assumptions.

The Southern Nagasaki Farmers' Union established its own compost production facility, and local livestock producers are directly integrated into and have become active participants in the organic farming movement. With consumer demand for safe meats as well as safe food crops, they are given the incentive to feed their animals locally-grown grass rather than imported feed grains, treat their animals humanely by pasturing them rather than caging them, and not subject them to hormone treatments and injections of prophylactic antibiotics.

With this growing consumer demand for organic foods, it is important to not only identify the different marketing outlets that are available to the Japanese organic farmers' groups, but to examine the ideological orientations of the major grassroots-based consumer cooperatives and other organizations involved in the procurement and distribution of organic foods in Japan, and identify the background to the growth in consumer demand for organic foods.

As the examination of the ideological component embedded in the organic farmers' groups revealed, the Japan Communist Party, with its emphasis on the parliamentary road to social justice and participatory democracy, and the New Left influences, with emphasis on grassroots-initiated social movements and personal empowerment, are the two major forces that have influenced the farmers in their actions to transform Japanese society. Organizations involved in the buying and selling of organically grown food in Japan are similarly influenced ideologically by the Japan Communist Party and New Left groups. It is their combined presence in the Japanese organic farming movement as a whole that gives it its radical character and social transformative potential. It is their combined influence that has allowed the movement to attract such a diversity of the nation's populace.

SHIBAURA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY