

Sayamaen's Newsletter "IPPUKU" May 2022 issued by Sayamaen Japanese tea l.t.d.,



(Middle/Mr.Yoshiharu Matsushita) Matsushita organic tea farm

Matsushita tea farm's organic farming Japanese tea received the Minister of

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Award at the 75th National Tea Fair in the Fukamushi sencha category in Japan last November (2021).

So many Japanese teas are numbered tags lined up in front of the judges, and they are graded by a point deduction system. The highest scoring tea was the Matsushita tea farm organic grown tea.

However, People were surprised by this unexpected happening, It's kind of like "Is it really possible for organic tea to win awards?"

Mr. Matsushita's son, Akira said proudly, "The award-winning tea was picked around April 12. We rented the smallest tea processing machine at the agricultural cooperative to refine it because the tea is just a small quantity, therefore technically it can not be defined as "Organic tea" (because it's not made using organic farming-approved tea-making machinery as organic crops). But it is definitely that this tea was produced in our certified organic tea plantation.

Mr.Yoshiharu Matsushita : Sometimes other farmers ask us, "We want to try organic tea farming. Could you teach us how to?," But the environment and conditions differ from each farm. I can't take responsibility if someone says, "We did what you said, but couldn't get any."

Mr. Matsushita has also gained experience one at a time. To this point he has been working on it for a long time.

Mr. Matsushita : When you catch a cold, you go to hospital to get pills to recover it quickly, but what you should do to build a healthy body in order to not catch colds. This is the same method of organic farming. However It takes a lot of time and hard work, and I say only an eccentric person can do. In organic farming, insects eat the crops, so everyone uses pesticides to kill them, but it is up to each farmer to decide whether or not to use. I just don't like pesticides, so I don't use. But just because it is non-agrichemical crop doesn't mean it will sell better than conventional farming crops. If people don't really think our organic tea is delicious, it won't sell. That's why winning this award was very encouraging this time.

Everyone strives to produce good quality tea, However the tea is devoured by insects and bugs, the quality of tea would be poor. So using chemicals such as insecticides to eliminate insects is a shorter way to make good tea.

This is why it got so much attention in the award for organic tea at this time. Better fertilizers are needed to produce a more flavorful tea, and organic fertilizers such as fish meals are expensive, placing a heavy burden on farmers. However, If farmers' incomes have been reduced so they have to switch to cheaper chemical fertilizers, as a result the taste of the tea obviously deteriorates. (Generally, tea grown with organic fertilizers is better quality than tea grown with chemical fertilizers, and Matsushita tea farm mainly uses organic fertilizers, although they are more expensive)

Mr. Matsushita says with concern that our job as tea farmers is to bring out the inherent power of nature and plants. But everyone has a hard time doing that. Do you quit because you can't continue, or do you still keep doing it? You can only choose one of them. Some people quit because they can't support their families in tea farming any longer although they love tea and are really motivated..

This is the second consecutive year that Kakegawa city Shizuoka, has won the production area award in the Fukamushi sencha category. Mr. Matsushita believes that Kakegawa is blessed with a climate and environment suitable for tea production, and due to the teachings of tea cultivation that have been passed down from generation to generation in this area since the Meiji Era.

There used to be about 500 tea factories in Kakegawa, but now there are only about 50, but there are still many tea growers in Kakegawa compared to the rest of the country. The more tea growers there are, the more they work together to improve themselves. Matsushita said that "When I have time, I go to see other farmer's tea plantations. It seems as if neither of us is looking at the other's plantations, but actually we are both watching each other closely."

I first visited Matsushita Farm in the spring of 23 years ago. Mr. Matsushita was 43 years old, He was absorbed in organic tea farming, despite his many failures. I still remember the happy smile on his face when he reclaimed a new tea plantation on Ogasawara Mountain. But I once saw a plantation turn completely brown from green and unharvestable because of a frost just before a Shincha New harvest season even though he had worked so hard to care for a year. And when the nuclear accident occurred in 2011, He was faced with a reality that He had no control over.

Matsushita said: You don't know if it's going to be better or worse until you try.

However, the problem of financial resources for the young tea farmers is also concerning.

A few years ago, Matsushita opened "Cafe Maruha" near his tea factory. With its high ceilings and large windows, people can enjoy organic sencha and matcha from Matsushita farm while relaxing and chatting, and looking at the flowers blooming in the hills behind the plant. His wife's homemade tea sweets will also be on the menu. Why did they start the cafe now?

Mr.Matsushita: Nowadays, the culture of brewing and drinking tea is disappearing. I want to create a place where anybody, including young people, can meet "Japanese tea". I hope this café will become such a place.

And Mr. Matsushita's challenge is not over yet. In the newly built factory, he will begin production of "C h a n p a n " a liqueur made with tea, which he hopes to start selling this year. His desire to pass on the culture of tea to the next generation is palpable.



I stood in the tea plantation in "Ikenotani" where Mr. Matsushita took me in the past. I drove up the narrow mountain road, I saw the same scenery as that time. Birds were singing, the wind was blowing, and the tea trees surrounded by forest were waiting for the buds to sprout. I looked up and saw small tea saplings, about 30 centimeters tall growing. They are only the third year since they were planted. A new variety was planted to produce another higher grade of Tencha (the row tea material of Matcha). Over the past decade, Matsushita Farm has increased its production of matcha. The trend of tea consumption seems to be changing little by little.

I look forward to tea from these new saplings in another five years. I wonder if the environment surrounding tea will have changed a little by then...

Translation from original text•KAYOKO IKEYA of Sayamaen Japanese tea l.t.d.,

