

Sayamaen's Newsletter "IPPUKU"

MAY 2020 / issued by Sayamaen Japanese tea l.t.d.,

First time we visited to Matsushita Tea Farm at Kakegawa City, Shizuoka prefecture about 21 years ago. It was around the time that organic vegetables were finally starting to appear on the shelves of supermarkets in Japan.

But many people wondered "What is organic farming ? " If it was really possible to grow without any pesticides?"

Although there are strict standards regulations for the cultivation of organic crops in Japan some ignorant growers was selling their tea products as "Organic cultivated tea" even though they used even a little amount of organic fertilizers.

Around the time we heard that there was a Tea plantation in Kakegawa City where organic tea was grown without any pesticides, so we went there at once. There we met Mr. Matsushita the owner of Matsushita tea farm. Actually we had imagined about him like a someone very ambitious and stubborn farmer, but he was not actually like that.

"If I was the only one to cultivate a tea plantation without pesticides, I might cause trouble for other fields because of pests lives here could be fly there. Not all farmers have to pesticide-free cultivation if you can, do it." said Mr.Matsushita.

We've also learned that growing pesticide-free cultivated requires a suitable environment.

One of the Matsushita tea plantation was located on a small hilltop, surrounded by woods and really isolated place. Because there's no chance of any pesticides from other field being reached here.

However, this plantation was recently entrusted to Mr. Matsushita because the previous owner of this farm has become too old to manage this harsh environment. We also came to know the reality of problems the aging of the tea farmers.



2 years later, in the spring, Mr. Matsushita was working at tea field on Mt, Ogasa about a 30-minute drive south from his home. The gentle slope of the mountain was cultivated and cleared into a tea plantation of 6,000 square meters, with 8,000 tons of compost and rich healthy soil as part of a field. It was dug up more than 2 meters along with more than 50,000 tea plants of 4 different varieties, and more than 150 meters of ridges large enough for a ride-on plucking machine to pass through.

It takes five years from the time the saplings are planted to the time they are harvested. In the meantime, things that can be done and things that

must be done appear one after another. To installation of frost-proof fans and sprinklers and the addition of compost at each time.

It takes a lot of time and effort throughout the year, such as planting each time and taking measures against late frosts in early spring because if tea plant are not much grown yet get damaged by disease and harmful insects since all this hard working pesticide-free cultivation.

'We don't grow tea plants, they grow on their own. I tell them I prepare a nurturing environment but at the rest grown on yourself "

“I am not a fun of using pesticides. If you don't have nutritious soil you can't have a good crops. Making good soil is the basis of everything. The power of the air and the sun makes tea grow and transform its life into our life. It would be enough if the cost of pesticides it could turn into the cost of wages of we pull out weeds!” says Mr. Matsushita.

10 years after, he started making organic Matcha.

Mr. Matsushita holds “Ocha-kai” open-air tea parties in his tea plantation during the new harvested Shincha season. He was inspired by one of the participants who wanted to drink Matcha like a Tea ceremony.

Tencha is the raw material for Matcha the tea leafs grown by covering with a black shield in order to block the sunlight for about 20 days before harvested. It is produced unique umami and sweetness taste of Matcha by this process of blocking the sunlight. Then the Tencha leafs are steamed and dried lastly ground with a stone-mill to make Matcha.

Originally the making process of Matcha required a big investment in a plant facilities but the use of special high-temperature caldron machine saved the cost. He has been struggled during the 3 years.

Today he has many inquiries from overseas buying and import his organic tea products but he mentions that the situation of the environment surrounding tea farmers has been changed every year and the volume of tea production in Kakegawa city is less than half of its peak in the past.

“Because of that there is no way we are able to continue to make good quality organic tea because we can no longer make money to cover the cost we have been devoted on the tea fields. But we have to at least leave the way for next young tea farmers.” says Matsushita.



Akira, the son and successor of Mr. Matsushita he took us to the hilltop tea field where the planting just has started.

“We dug out and dug up old tea plants that were planted 30 years ago and has already been composted done twice. Next time I would like to make Tencha to use a tea variety from Kyoto. So we are preparing to plant saplings by the beginning of April at the latest. Organic farming can be much more challenging therefore you have to try various ways if you going to do only tea farming. By the time this tea is ready to be harvested the quality of the "Suppin-chan" (Organic Matcha instant packed tea) will be upgraded!” Akira said with a big smile.

Mr. Matsushita says “I wanted to make a place where everyone could meet up with delicious tea. If they come to know the true taste of the tea and they like it, we farmers can simply make tea again.”

Mr. Matsushita's search for his tea-road will still to be continued.

