



Women's Empowerment in Agricultural Entrepreneurship in Japan

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Japonya'da Tarımsal Girişimcilikte Kadınların Güçlendirilmesi

Abstract

Women in Japan have almost always been intertwined with agriculture. However, agri-women could not see the value of theirdeserve in agricultural production processes. The increasing importance of agriculture in the economic growth and the raising awareness on food safety brought the issue of women's empowerment in agriculture. Although the general entrepreneurship tendencies are not high in Japan, in order to ensure that agriculture has positive effects on the economy, it is seen that the arrangements for the development of agri-women entrepreneurship have accelerated after 2015. Our study is aimed to reveal the situation of women in agricultural works, the reasons that lead women to work in agriculture, the support provided to women as agricultural entrepreneurs and the problems have experienced by Japanese women entrepreneurs in agriculture. Based on these statements, it is also aimed to present concrete proposals that will ensure the empowerment of women in Japan on the axis of agricultural entrepreneurship. According to the main results, women entrepreneurship in agriculture is getting more attention due to the increasing importance of safe food production in agriculture and agricultural factors for economic development. On the other hand, it is understood that more social consciousness is needed to increase the women entrepreneurship in agriculture.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, agri-women's empowerment, agricultural entrepreneurship, Japan.

Öz

Japonya'da kadınlar neredeyse her zaman tarımla iç içe olmuştur. Ancak tarımda yer alan kadınlar tarımsal üretim süreçlerinde hak ettikleri değeri görememişlerdir. Ekonomik büyümede tarımın artan önemi ve gıda güvenliği konusunda artan farkındalık, kadınların tarımda güçlendirilmesi konusunu gündeme getirmiştir. Japonya'da girişimcilik eğilimleri yüksek olmasa da tarımın ekonomiye olumlu etkilerinin olması için 2015 yılından sonra tarım-kadın girişimciliğinin geliştirilmesine yönelik düzenlemelerin hız kazandığı görülmektedir. Çalışmamız, Japonya'da kadınların tarımdaki durumunu, kadınları tarımda çalışmaya iten sebepleri, tarımda girişimci olarak kadınlara sağlanan destekleri ve Japon kadın girişimcilerin tarımda yaşadıkları sorunları ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu yaklaşımdan hareketle, Japonya'da kadınların tarımsal girişimcilik ekseninde güçlenmesini sağlayacak somut önerilerin sunulması da amaçlanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın ana sonuçlarına göre, tarımda güvenli gıda üretimi ve tarımsal faktörlerin ekonomik kalkınma için artan önemi nedeniyle tarımda kadın girişimciliği daha fazla ilgi görmektedir. Öte yandan, tarımda kadın girişimciliğinin artırılması için daha fazla toplumsal bilinç ihtiyacı olduğu anlaşılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Girişimcilik, tarımda kadınların güçlendirilmesi, tarımsal girişimcilik, Japonya.

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Introduction

Agriculture has a long history in Japan. In this process, agricultural activities has primarily carried out for small-scale production and consumption purposes. Agricultural production has been a job covering all family members and women has worked in agriculture as an unpaid family workers within this system.

In time, the share of agriculture in the GDP has started to decline and Japan has become dependent a country on imports in agriculture. Although the Japanese business culture have not supported entrepreneurial activities in the long term, the increasing food security issue and the increasing costs in agricultural imports cause the economy to be adversely affected. In this context, the issue of agricultural entrepreneurship comes to the fore in the context of the revitalization and diversification of agricultural production in Japan. The fact that agricultural entrepreneurship provides career opportunities in the business life, makes people economically and socially independent, and has an important contribution in maintaining work-life balances has caused Japanese women to meet with agricultural entrepreneurship in recent years.

In this study, it is aimed to reveal the situation of women in agricultural works, the reasons that lead women to work in agriculture, the support provided to women as agricultural entrepreneurs and the problems have experienced by Japanese women entrepreneurs in agriculture. Based on these statements, it is also aimed to present concrete proposals that will ensure the empowerment of women in Japan on the axis of agricultural entrepreneurship.

The Framework of Women Entrepreneurship in Japan

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) describes the entrepreneurial activity in Japan as very low. This is due to the institutional structure of Japanese society. Cultural norms such as the cautious attitude of the Japanese and their desire to escape from failure and uncertainty negatively affect their perspectives on entrepreneurship (Kegel, 2016: 23). Japan is a country where women have lower levels of entrepreneurship than men. According to The Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications latest report, there are 1,063,000 women entrepreneurs and 4,847,000 male entrepreneurs (Welsh et al., 2014: 287). In Japan, 37 percent of men and only 22 percent of women state that they would rather take a risk and start their own business than work for someone else (OECD, 2016: 1). The dominant Confucianism, which has dominated for many years in Japan, is among the most important reasons for this situation. Today, limited women work outside the home in Japan with this effect. With the influence of patriarchal culture, the duty of women in Japan was determined and restricted as working at home like cleaning house, cooking, child care etc. while men were empowered to work outside the home as a breadwinner (Barbasiewicz, 2013: 163; Franzke et al., 2022: 357). Also, Japan takes place among the countries with the oldest population in the world, it makes

Japanese women dependent on their homes for a long time in terms of elderly care. This is a situation that limits the energy and time needed to create new ventures for Japanese women. In this context, Japanese women face barriers due to the low general entrepreneurial tendencies for cultural reasons and the predominance of women's roles by gender (Futagami & Helms, 2008: 6-8).

Regarding this issue, Leung (2011) investigated the relationship between motherhood and female entrepreneurship in her study. According to the findings of Leung (2011) study "The identity of motherhood can serve as the propellant for female entrepreneurship. Gender role identity can be a significant resource leading to a competitive advantage in female entrepreneurship "(Leung, 2011: 262). In this case, entrepreneurship for Japanese women is an important way to maintain an independent lifestyle by starting their own business and managing their own business. Especially for Japanese women entrepreneurs with children, starting a new venture in Japan means both more financial gain and more flexibility and comfort (Taeko, 2022: 1).

Recent GEM 2019/2020 report shows that 40 percent of women in Japan think entrepreneurial activities as an important motivation to continue their lives. On the other hand, 48.3 percent of women want to become entrepreneurs in order to obtain great wealth (GEM, 2020: 126). Although the entrepreneurship level of women in Japan is lower than men, the continuous increase in the labor force participation rate of women (labor force participation rate of women in Japan tends to increase at 44.4 percent as of 2021) is explained as an important driving force supporting the entrepreneurship (World Bank, 2022a: 1). Especially women who have "work experience" decide to become entrepreneurs because of the barriers that they encounter in working life (Welsh et al., 2014: 287).

Place of Agriculture in Japan Economy

Japan, the third largest economy in the world, has a small land area due to the geographical conditions and high population density. By the 21st century, abandoned rice fields, increasingly aging agricultural land workers, flooding the fields due to natural conditions, and roughness of the land reduce agricultural productivity are important problems in Japan. Today, there are four main objectives in Japanese agricultural transformation. These goals are listed as follows;

- Innovation in agriculture by using smart agricultural techniques,
- Creating and supporting new agricultural leaders (women of all ages, especially younger than 65 years old and disabled persons),
- Increasing the export of agricultural products (not only harvested once, but also processed special products),
- Adapting and transitioning agriculture to a sixth industrialization¹. Generating new products by using agricultural products to increase the consumption of agricultural products is defined as the sixth

industrialization within the scope of food processing and retail activities. Hereby, new job opportunities will be created for women (Nakano, 2014: 61).

Improvement policies for Japanese agriculture is planned to be shaped around these four main objectives beyond agricultural production. Even if the share of agriculture in the Japanese economy has decreased in time, the control of agriculture is important as the agricultural sector uses about 40 percent of the habitable land and about 70 percent of the total water withdrawal (OECD, 2019: 38). The share of the primary sector in GDP in Japan is stayed behind the world average (Figure 1).

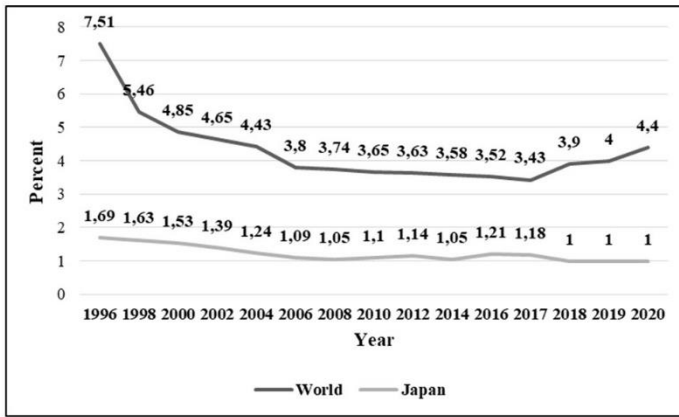


Figure 1. Primary Sector Value Added of GDP (Percent) in Japan (1996-2020)

Source: (World Bank, 2022b: 1)

The main reason for this decrease is the increment of imports for food and agricultural products and the decrease in domestic food consumption (OECD, 2019: 38-39). If an assessment is made with the current data, it has seen that imports of agricultural raw materials comprise 1.56 percent of merchandise, while exports of agricultural raw materials comprise 0.62 percent of merchandise (Figure 2).

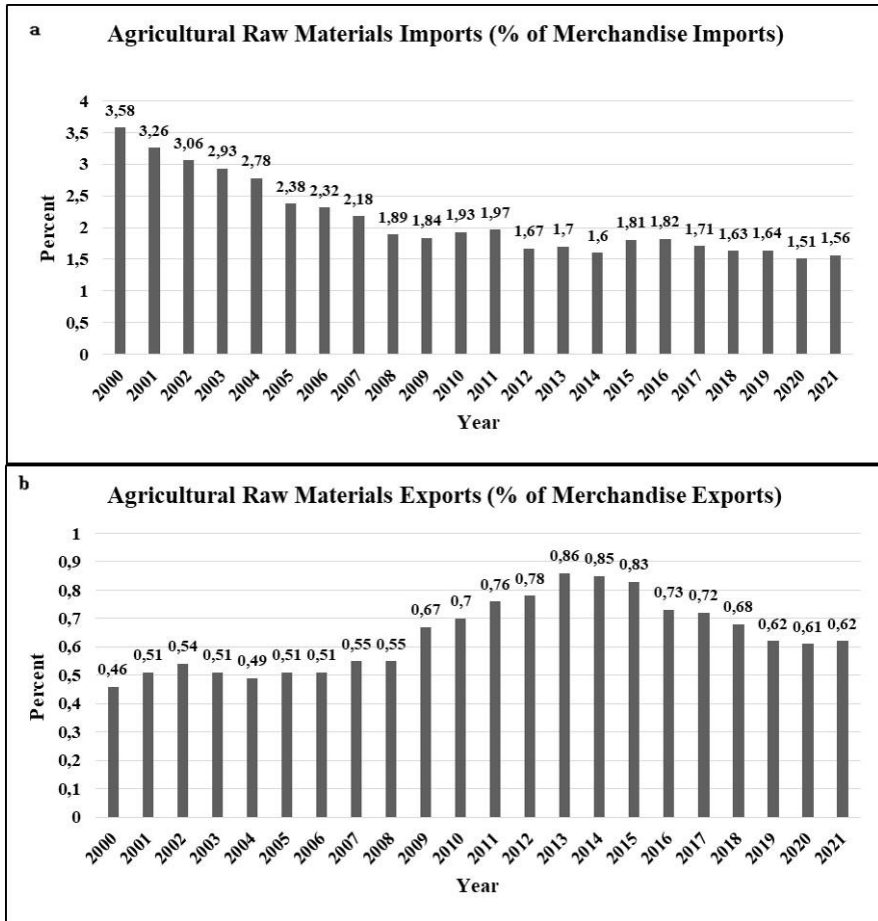


Figure 2. Import and Export Values of Agricultural Raw Materials (Percent of Merchandise, 2000-2021)

Source: (World Bank, 2022c: 1)

This reveals that Japan meets 60 percent of its food needs within the scope of imports which indicates the low international competitiveness of Japan in terms of raw agricultural materials (Roman & Okada, 2015: 1). It is aimed to increase exports and reduce imports by producing more varied products with higher added value in agricultural production. Today, it is necessary to provide some basic conditions primarily to improve agricultural production in Japan and to increase the added value of agriculture in the economy. For ensuring this;

- Agricultural producers make production on larger lands should be facilitated,
- Land leases should be facilitated for more productive production of agricultural producers,

- Technologies used in agriculture should be developed more with taking into account natural disasters and the structure of agricultural areas of Japan,
- Production of high value-added products in agriculture should be increased,
- Agriculture should be harmonized with the sixth sector,
- Agricultural enterprises should be supported more,
- Women entrepreneurship in agriculture should be supported and women's employment should be increased.

With these practices, it will be possible to eliminate the Japanese people's worries about food safety and security which contains quality, food supply potential, domestic product potential, international food and food import potential, freshness and price factors of the agricultural products.

Women's Role in Japanese Agriculture

The role of women in agriculture in Japan has divided into two phases. The first phase is the period of independence that started with the End of World War II and continued until the mid1990s. The second phase is the development and transformation period since 1995.

In the first phase, rural production system and rural family examples in Japan have taken until the 1950s, it has seen that production in large farms takes shaped within the large family structure in this system. When agricultural production entered an intense period, the main duties of women were raising-children and also taking part in agricultural production as unpaid family workers. In this context, they supported their fathers or husbands on settled farms and agricultural lands. The rapid development of the Japanese economy and the growing importance of the industrial sector after 1950 have been an important reason for this transformation. From now on, while the male population started to work as a full-time worker in the industry, women turned into full-time workers in agriculture. In 1955, the number of farmer women was 7.8 million and nearly half of the working women worked in agriculture. It was 7.1 million with the number of men working in agriculture. So almost one third of men worked in agriculture. While 85 percent of women were unpaid family workers, 60 percent of men worked on their own account (Koyama, 1961: 81). Japanese women farmers are expressed as helpers on the background of their husbands or fathers who are entrepreneurs of modern agriculture. As a result, women working in agriculture have mostly left out of decision making processes for a long time (Kawate, 2008: 3).

In the second phase, with the increase in individualization and heterogenization, the stem family system in Japan has begun to weaken. In this case, change in lifestyles has increased. The most prominent features of the process could be listed as follows; women's participation in farm management and increased responsibility, moving away from seeing women's labor as an unpaid labor in agriculture. In this case agricultural production shifted from domestic labor-based production to an individual

human-network-based production. However, the fact that women who leave rural areas for educational purposes prefer urban areas to work after their education and do not return to rural areas was reduced the number of women working in agriculture. In Japan, employment rate of women in agriculture was 5.7 percent in 1995. As of 2019, the share of the primary sector in employment has recorded as 3.38 percent, the share of the secondary sector as 24.39 percent and the share of the tertiary sector as 72.23 percent. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) While women workers working agriculture 57.3 percent of total in 1995, this ratio has decreased to 46.1 percent in 2018 (Table 1).

Table 1. Japan Female Working Population in Agriculture by Year (1995-2018)

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018
Population engaged in Agriculture (000)	4,140	3,891	3,353	2,606	2,097	1,922	1,816	1,753
Female (total)	2,372	2,171	1,788	1,300	1,009	900	849	808
Proportion of Female within total (%)	57.3	55.8	53.3	49.9	48.1	46.8	46.8	46.1

Source: (MAFF, 2018: 1)

However, the importance of agriculture has started to be emphasized again with the issue of food safety in recent years. In this context, even if the number of women working in agriculture has decreased, the average age of women new comers in agriculture is young.

When women in agriculture are analyzed in terms of average age, it has seen that 50-59 age group has the highest share in total population. However, the share of women age 49 and under has increased in agriculture. Women working in agriculture 60 years and older age constitute an important part. In this case, it can be said that agricultural work has been carried out by elderly women for many years in Japan. (Table 2).

Table 2. Female Working Population in Agriculture by Age (2018)

	39 and below age	40-49 age	50-59 age	60-69 age	70 years and over age	Total
Population engaged in Agriculture (000)	101	91	163	649	749	1753
Female (total) (000)	33	38	83	313	341	808
Proportion of female within themselves (%)	4.1	4.8	10.2	38.7	42.2	100.0

Proportion of female within total(%)	32.7	41.8	50.9	48.2	45.5	46.1
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Source: (MAFF, 2018: 1)

When women newly entering to agriculture are evaluated in terms of their ages, it is seen that women aged 44 and under have the highest share (Table 3). Aging of the working population in rural areas, the gradual abandonment of agricultural lands in the progress, and lack of people who can work in agriculture caused agricultural areas to open to newcomers.

Table 3. Female Newcomers in Agriculture by Age Group (2016)

	44 and below age	45-49 age	50-59 age	60-64 age	65 years and over age	Total
Number of female newcomers(000)	5,060	960	2,340	3,340	3,490	15,190
Percentage by age group (%)	33.4	6.3	15.5	21.9	22.9	100.0

Source: (MAFF, 2018: 1)

Increasing access to rented land allows young women's to choose agricultural production as a career option and turns them into agricultural workers. In addition, quick and easy adaptation of young people to new agricultural technologies and agricultural production techniques and their greater participation in training programs have been an important factor in the emergence of young women newly entering in agriculture in recent years (Kurochkina, 2015).

Women over 65 age is on the second rank among the newcomers in agriculture after women under 44 in Japan (Table 3). The reason for this, especially, they are retired from non-agricultural jobs. To start farming, they mostly prefer to return their own land to make agricultural production. In this case, young farmers often tend to be hired by people returning to the farms (Uchiyama, 2014). Even if thought that the elderly population may have a negative impact on the development of agricultural entrepreneurship by displaying a traditional approach (not to make any agricultural production, planting only rice or vegetables, farming with traditional techniques, etc.), 65 and over age agricultural producers can offer new employment.

Development of Women Entrepreneurship in Agriculture

In Japan, it is important to support agricultural entrepreneurship in order to ensure innovation in agriculture and to create high value added production by creating new ideas (Bosma et al., 2020: 56). In this context, The Act on promoting Agriculture-Commerce-Industry Cooperation, which came into force by the Government in 2008, has been important. In this direction,

agricultural inputs and product marketing have been reviewed for the development of agricultural entrepreneurship (OECD, 2019). Improving research and development in agricultural machinery and making uniform production of original seeds, etc. arrangements have been made to compete in agricultural production and marketing. Also, arrangements have been made for non-farmers to lease agricultural land and to have own agricultural land. Technical consultancy, banking, insurance, marketing and input supply services of Agricultural Cooperatives for their members play an important role in increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector. Thus, important steps are taken for promoting agricultural entrepreneurship.

In fact, the development of women's agricultural entrepreneurship has taken a long time in Japan. Japanese women have not seen as primary breadwinner in the family in patriarchal family structure. Especially, within the patriarchal family structure, women have become as an unpaid family workers. Although this has continued for a long time, home advisors at agricultural extension centers have been provided important services for the change of the status for women in agricultural production. By the positive effect of agricultural extension centers, women have achieved a balance between home and working life both at the process of increasing production and earning their own money. This has been become a driving force for women in Japan to easily enter to agricultural entrepreneurship. After the World War II, by the assistance of the Corporate Extension of Service, women's skills in agricultural production and marketing have been developed rapidly in Japan. Corporate Extension of Service has been the driving force behind the increasing ability of women in agricultural production to become agricultural entrepreneurs (Aoyama, 2019: 97).

In the 1980s, with the "One Village One Product" application, local practices have been built to improve women's activities in agriculture. Also, women have attended to domestic production in agriculture from World War II to the beginning of 1990s as an unpaid family worker. Since the early 1990s, agricultural works have increased rapidly and organizations supporting women in agriculture have come to forefront (Kano, 2005: 87).

As a result of the "The Vision" application which applied by the MAFF in 1991, policies were determined for women working in agriculture, and the importance of family management agreements was emphasized for empowering women in agriculture (Kawate, 2008: 11). The term "women's entrepreneurship in agriculture" officially came to the agenda by report of MAFF's "A fresh view of women in rural areas of farming, forestry and fishery: toward the year 2001" in 1992 (Kano, 2005: 91). In this context, women entrepreneurship in agriculture has explained as the independent economic activities in agriculture started up of women in rural areas. The first example of this was eco-tourism and selling regionally grown products as a special product category in farmer market. In 1994, with the establishment of the Rural Heroines network in Japan, women's communication with agriculture became more active. (Hara Fukuyo, 2010: 261). In 1995, the first major development has been the introduction of "Agreement among Family

Members on the Family Farm”. Thus, the roles and responsibilities of family members (women, children etc.) in agricultural production were also officially determined for the first time. In addition, in 1996, the Women's Farm School was opened in Hokkaido to raise educated women in agriculture (Gergely, 2004: 507). With the “Basic Act for a Gender-Equal Society”, which came into force in 1999, equal rights for women and men in all areas of society were brought to the agenda. Also, in 1999, “The Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas” have covered “Promotion of Women’s Involvement in Agriculture.” Thus, women have actively participated to the management of agriculture and also have encouraged to start innovative agricultural work (Iijima, 2015: 3).

In this context, with the start of the new millennium, women started to be empowered rapidly in agriculture. In this case, it is seen that the roles of women who came to the world after World War II and reached the age of 50 in the millennium, started to be differ according to their mothers and grandmothers. Especially increasing education and development of career opportunities have changed the traditional roles of women in agricultural production. The policies developed in this process enabled women to reach an executive position in the agricultural sector, and the opportunities and responsibilities of women establishing new businesses related to agriculture increased with the introduction of post-production and marketing processes of agricultural products (Kawate, 2008: 4).

In 2010, 50 billion dollars has been spent to raise awareness of women on land ownership and the right to income. With these developments, in 2011, women made up three-quarters of the start-ups in agri-business. However, it has seen that the share of men in the sector was higher than women until a few years ago (Kakuchi, 2013: 1).

Within the scope of “Abenomics” policies implemented in 2013, an important area of growth has been described as agricultural policies and it is aimed to double the agricultural food exports by 2020. Thus, within the scope of supporting agricultural workers, it has been brought to the agenda in terms of increasing the marketing of agricultural products and developing agri-tourism. It was pointed out that entrepreneurial women in agriculture should be supported in order to create economic value for agricultural production (Assmann, 2016:n.p.). In this process, first of all, the Implementation of the Act on Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace has been enacted in 2014. Meanwhile, Establishment of an Award for Women’s Active Participation in Agriculture Management has been introduced in 2015. Thus, the rapid development of women’s agricultural skills has been the driving force for the rapid increase of female entrepreneurship in agricultural areas in Japan. (Aoyama, 2019: 97). Processing of agricultural products by combining traditional and modern methods, creation of new products, environmentally friendly production, establishing more connections with consumers is placed among the practices that agricultural entrepreneur women consider. Japan is now aware of the need to move to an entrepreneurial society. In this context, despite the

traditional views on the roles of women in society, the issue of women entrepreneurship in agriculture has been one of the important issues in recent years. The fact that women entrepreneurs in agriculture have increased their activities in the last few years which confirms this situation (Welsh et al., 2014: 287).

Reflection of Women’s Empowerment on Agri-Women Entrepreneurship

There are no deep statistics that comprehensively show the number of agri-women entrepreneurs in Japan. Because, Economic Census have not clearly defined the proprietors and their representatives in the corporations by gender. However, the regular statistics published by MAFF provide important information about the effects of women entrepreneurs in agriculture (Kazumi, 2019: 6). According to MAFF research which was published in 1997 for understanding of women entrepreneurs in agriculture, it is seen that women’s activities have increased in the context of self-employed business and group business (Figure 3).

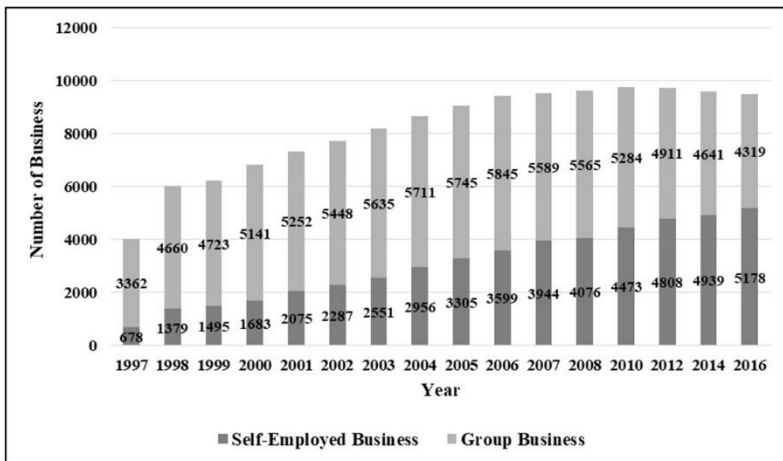


Figure 3. Number of Farm Business of Women in Rural Areas (1997-2016)

Source: (MAFF, 2008; MAFF, 2018: 3)

Agricultural activities of women increased approximately 236 fold in the period between 997-2007, and as of 2016, the number of these activities has reached to 9497. There has been a significant and continuous increase in self-employed businesses. Especially, self-employed businesses have been higher than group businesses after 2012. This shows that women in agriculture come to the fore with self-businesses as well as group businesses (Figure 3).

On the other hand significant increases have been achieved in the number of certified women farmers who have trained in the field of agri-women entrepreneurship between the years 2000-2019. The total number of certified women farmers increased from 2539 in 2000 to 11102 in 2017. While there were no certified women farmers in the scope of joint application by married couples in 2000, the number of certified female farmers increased to 5572 people in 2019. In 2000 and 2019, the number of certified women farmers within the scope of application by women alone was recorded as 2539 and 5921 respectively (Figure 4).

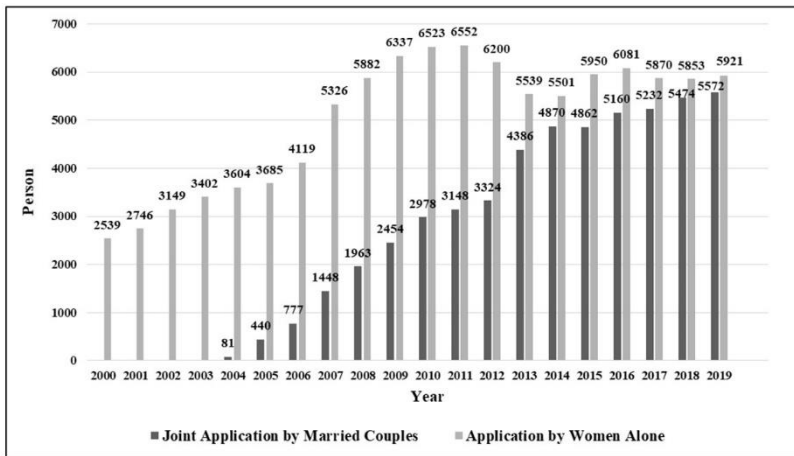


Figure 4. Changes in the Number of Certified Female Farmers (2000-2019)
Source: (MAFF, 2021)

According to data, the number of certified women farmers within the scope of application by women alone increased rapidly until 2010. "Basic Act for a Gender-Equal Society", which came into force in 1999, has been effective in this case. Also, certified women farmers in the joint application by married couple's coverage also showed a rapid and steady increase after 2005. "Promotion of Women's Involvement in Agriculture" had an important effect in this development. While certified women farmers increase, participation of women in management policies in agricultural areas also increase day by day. In about 47 percent of commercial farm households, women actively participate in management (MAFF, 2018: 3).

When the amount of farm product sales is evaluated in the households where women in agricultural areas participate in decision making, according to the data of MAFF 2015, 65 percent of the cases where farm product sales amount is over 100 million Yen. However, in cases where the amount of farm product sales is less than 3 million Yen, women do not participate in the decision-making process is stayed behind men (Figure 5). In other words,

the amount of farm product sales increases when women participate in decision-making processes.

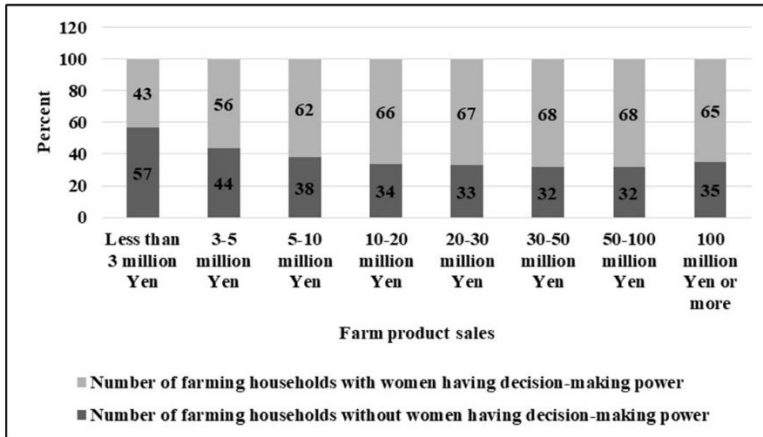


Figure 5. Participation of Women in Management Policy Decisions in Household Agricultural Enterprises by Farm Product Sales Amount in 2015

Source: (MAFF, 2018: 3)

The sixth industrialization, defined as a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary industrial activities, initiated a process that combines production, distribution, marketing, sales and consumer relations in agriculture. This accelerated the inclusion of women entrepreneurs in agriculture, so women started to participate in agricultural processes as more active entrepreneurs. With this transformation, women in farming households have started to actively participate in decisions in different business types. According to MAFF 2015, women participate in the decision-making process in the export of agricultural product is 70 percent of farming household. Likewise, women play an active role in managing the process during the establishment of farm guest houses in agricultural areas (Figure 6).

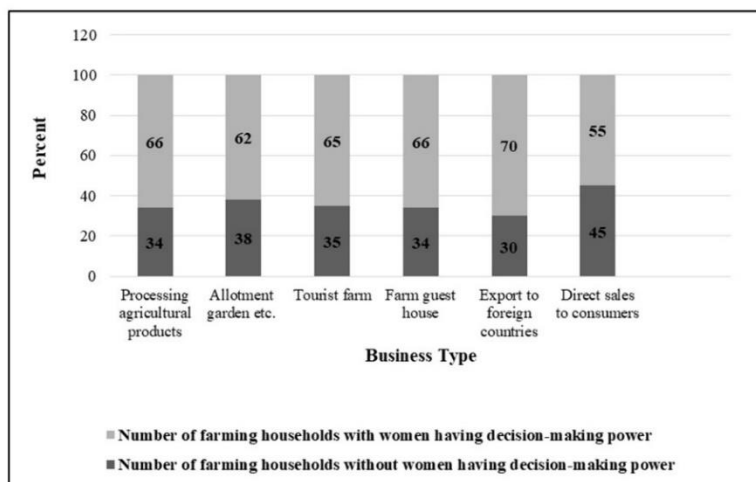


Figure 6. Participation of Women in Management Policy Decisions in Household Agricultural Enterprises by Business Type in 2015
Source: (MAFF, 2018)

This situation shows that women are moving away from only as unpaid family workers in the fields. Meanwhile, the impact of women on the sale of farm products is important. Although women's inclusion in the decision-making process in direct sales is 55 percent, in fact, women play an increasing role in the marketing and direct sales of local agricultural products and processed specialty products in the farm market and through online sales channels by start-up activities.

New Applications and Regulations on Japanese Agri-Women Entrepreneurship

New arrangements for agricultural entrepreneurship in Japan are primarily aimed to empowerment of women entrepreneurs. One of the most systematic and regular practices, in this process, has been the Japan Finance Corporation's low interest loans to entrepreneurial women in terms of creating new ventures since 1999. In addition, MAFF offers subsidies from processing to distribution of agricultural products to support entrepreneurial women in agriculture. More specifically, in the near time, the Abe Government has created a specific fund to support women entrepreneurs and 20 billion Yen was allocated for this fund in 2012. Under the young farmer benefits application, arrangements were made within the scope of independent farmer farming support for entrepreneurs aged 45 and under. With the help of the young farmer benefits application, it is aimed to support 1.5 million yen for young farmers in the training process for a maximum of two years, and for a maximum of five years after starting agricultural production. (Bobrowska & Conrad, 2017: 1; MAFF, 2016: 4).

Considering that women's labor is an economic resource and it has not been used effectively for many years, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

launched "womenomics" policies which have been implemented under the motto "every woman shines" in 2013. Although the effects of these policies have caused important discussions, the government have supported women in agriculture under the name of "Shining Women Farmer Training Program" in 2014. During this time process, "The Women's Association for Agriculture" have made significant progress for accelerating women's entrepreneurship in agriculture in 2014 (Aoyama, 2019: 97). Within the scope of the program, practical training have been organized under "Next Generation Leader Training Academy" for women who is the leader of the new generation and aim to be strengthen local agriculture in Japan. In addition, certification of superior agricultural companies and farms have been provided which promote women's participation in agriculture (MAFF, 2016: 8-9). By this program, different experiences are offered to women within the scope of seminars and business meetings to improve their management and marketing skills in agriculture. Thus, it is aimed to improve women's job skills at the scope of revitalization of local agriculture (Kazumi, 2019: 30).

At the same time, MAFF launched a project called "Nougyou-Joshi Project/Project for Female Farmers" within the scope of strengthening the Japanese economy. With the project, JA aimed to ensure that women assume new leadership roles in agriculture. In the following process, "the Online Lectures of Management for Farmers Application" and, "the Nationwide Development of the Agriculture Management School" have become operational between 2014 to 2016 (Aoyama, 2019: 97; MAFF, 2017: 18). Thus, women's management skills in agriculture will also be improved and a positive effect will be provided for the economy. One of the most important features of the project is the introducing of agriculture as an important career option especially for young women (Iijima, 2015: 5; MAFF, 2016: 8-9). As of 2018, this project has over 716 women members, 6 educational institutions and 34 participating firms. While 88 percent of Nougyou-Joshi Project participants are women under the age of 40, 12 percent of the participants are women between the ages of 50-69. On the other hand, 35 percent of women participated to this project as part of providing a new business venture (Kazumi, 2019: 30-31; MAFF, 2016: 10; MAFF, 2018: 8).

As the applications and regulations reveal that the Japanese government provides financial, educational and technical support for agri-women entrepreneurs for development of their skills. Within the scope of these practices, agriculture has turned from dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs to cool, impressive and profitable business for women.

Opportunities and Challenges on Agri-Women Entrepreneurship in Japan

In Japan, the developments, preparing women for agricultural entrepreneurship are the product of a long process. However, comprehensive practices have become more prominent especially in the last few decades which has aimed to support women entrepreneurs in agriculture. In recent years, the aim of creating high value added

agricultural product in agriculture has brought along an agricultural system integrated from the traditional agricultural production to the sixth industry. This situation has brought up new business ideas in agriculture. In this case, the idea of supporting agricultural entrepreneurship of women as much as men is getting more and more attention. Accordingly, it is seen that a number of opportunities to increase women's entrepreneurship in agriculture. These opportunities can be listed as follows;

- To provide low interest loans,
- To provide education and funds for attending workshop, seminars, conferences and business meeting programs,
- To provide the new carrier opportunities to rise the chance in business,
- To support the participation of the elderly female population in entrepreneurial activities in agriculture within the scope of projects,
- To increase the belief that women can be successful as agricultural entrepreneurs through government programs and projects,
- To provide the flexibility for women who can integrate themselves into a balance between home and work more easily by agri-entrepreneur activities.
- To witness the stories about successful women entrepreneurs in agricultural entrepreneurship,

As stated above, although there are many reasons and supporting factors for women to become entrepreneurs in agriculture, some situations prevent agri-women entrepreneurship. These obstacles, which can be regarded as an important restrictive factor in the development of women's agricultural entrepreneurship, are listed as follows;

- To maintain the import of cheap agricultural products,
- Tendency about low level entrepreneurship culture in Japan society,
- To support security and stability beyond taking risks in Japanese business culture,
- To support entrepreneur activities as long as they are in the public interest in Japan, where lifelong employment is widespread,
- Prejudice among men about women' work in domestic jobs with the effect of traditional structure and family responsibilities.
- To support the idea that entrepreneurship is not an opportunity with the effect of the cultural barriers,
- To have an anxiety about being new agri-entrepreneur due to the lack of any previous work and management experience,

Even if these factors seem to be an obstacle for agri-women entrepreneurship, it is also possible to overcome these problems by changing the common socio-cultural perspective in society and supports and encourage the women in agriculture.

Conclusion

The role of women in agriculture in Japan has a long history. In this process, women primarily worked as an unpaid family worker in agriculture. Then, with changing economic and social conditions, women became full-time workers in agriculture. Globalization, changing economic and social life and increasing women's education have made the issue of entrepreneurship as an important factor for Japanese women in recent years. In this process, high agricultural imports, food safety problem and the impact of agriculture on the economy increased the interest in agricultural entrepreneurship in Japan. Thus, the importance of the contribution of women's labor to agriculture has turned into a government policy and rapid arrangements have been made for women to direct towards agricultural entrepreneurship area.

As it can be seen from this paper, women entrepreneurship in agriculture is in the agenda of Japan with its pros and cons. In sum, main reasons for supporting women's agricultural entrepreneurship in Japan can be listed as follows;

- Obstacles to career growth of women and gendered division of labor,
- Changing the traditional perspective of society towards women labor in time although the patriarchal family structure still seems dominant,
- Food safety issue gaining more importance in terms of economy and health scale,
- Chance to provide work-life balance better,
- The desire of women's self-actualization to create success and new (paid) jobs.

While women entrepreneurship in agriculture is supported on the basis of these basic factors, there are also some basic practices that need to be done to increase women entrepreneurship in agriculture. These can be listed as follows;

- Social awareness should be increased and gender inequality must be eliminated. For this, gender equality should be expanded,
- Women's knowledge and skills should be increased and renewed. To do this, women should be supported with continuous training programs to improve themselves. Also, women entrepreneurs' access to entrepreneurship-related networks should be supported and their active participation in entrepreneurship training should be ensured,
- Government should establish comprehensive funds for agri-women entrepreneurs to encourage co-investment by private sectors,
- Under civic duty, social responsibility should be increased. For making this, the awareness of being an agricultural entrepreneur should be generalized for the social and economic development of the country.

In this context, it should not be forgotten that any activity aimed at paving the way for empowerment of women entrepreneurs in agriculture will create significant national and international value.

Finally, it can be said, in Japan, agri-women entrepreneurship has gained momentum especially in the last decade. Improvements about agri-women entrepreneurship are still new. In this direction existing data are limited. It is thought that the information about women entrepreneurs in agriculture will be accessed more easily with more systematic activities and more detailed sharing of current data.

As we have seen in our research, there are few studies that reveal the situation of women entrepreneurs in agriculture, evaluate their problems and offer solutions from past to present in Japan. In this context, our study is expected to make an important contribution to the literature. Also, increasing the number of theoretical and empirical studies carry importance in terms of better understanding. With the new studies, it is expected that more attention will be drawn to agri-women entrepreneurship in Japan, and this situation is expected to create an important concept in terms of women's empowerment. Hence, more detailed and comparative studies will feed our knowledge about agri-women entrepreneurs.

Not

1 Primary industry (agriculture) is categorized as number 1, secondary industry (industry) number 2, and tertiary industry (services) number 3. Multiplying these three numbers gives us the number six which refers to the sixth industrialization.

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