

Problems of Family Management Agreement in Japan ; Based on Case Studies of Married Women in Agricultural Areas¹

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INTRODUCTION

It is true that married women in farm households have played very important roles both in quality and quantity of work performed, but it is hardly possible to state that their contributions have been properly appreciated from social, financial, or legal standpoints. In an effort to ameliorate these circumstances, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) has recently exhorted farm households to adopt a new idea, the Family Management Agreement (FMA).

Case studies were conducted in which the authors interviewed directly from twenty-five married women and members of farm households in six prefectures. On the basis of these representative cases, we endeavor to clarify the process of how a household consensus has been reached, and what outcome the agreement has produced.

METHODS

Most research about the FMA has had a tendency to focus on the output, that is, the contents adopted in the FMA. We are more interested in the series of dynamic processes involved, how a consensus has been reached on concluding an agreement in the household, what outcome the agreement has produced in the form of labor compensation, and to what extent participation in farm management has proved effective.

We have conducted research interviews with twenty-five farm families in six prefectures (from north to south, in Yamagata, Niigata, Gunma, Saitama, Hiroshima and Fukuoka Prefectures), about 80% of which are cases in Niigata Prefecture, seventeen of them have already adopted an FMA. This paper focuses on the households adopting it. Their agricultural products include rice,

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vegetables (tomatoes, peas), and stock raising (cows, pigs). Interviews were done mainly based on the prepared questionnaire, but also we have them speak freely. We endeavor to clarify the above-mentioned points by examining our interviewees.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF FARM WOMEN AND FMA

THE STATUS OF FARM WOMEN IN JAPAN

According to a previous survey conducted by a government agency in Niigata Prefecture in 1996 on the actual conditions of farm women, the percentage of women living together with their husband's parents just after marriage was 85% in agricultural households, while the percentage for self-employed households was 30% and 27% for employees' households. The percentage of married women who worked full-time in agriculture and received labor compensation was only 41%, including regular and non-regular payment (Table 1). The percentage was higher for younger women. In addition, the percentage of married women with their own property and an ordinary savings account was about 64% (Table 2). The percentage of property ownership increased with age. According to a 1997 survey of 457 married women living in Tokyo by the then Tokyo Women's Foundation (now called Tokyo Women's Plaza), the percentage of women who owned property was 76%, 59.0% of the housewives had a fixed deposit account, and the percentage that owned real estate was 23.6%.

As seen from these survey data, although married farm women may work full-time on the farm, they still remained economically weak. In general, farm management in Japan is controlled only by family members. Therefore, farm households have not had to document work rules concerning each member's responsibility for his/her share of work hours, holidays, labor compensation and the transfer of the right of management to the younger generation. There is apt to be no pay for their work, accounting in family finances tends to be sloppy, and after the manager's death, his wife will likely renounce the right of succession, especially in the Tohoku area (Kanamaru, Uemura and Kitou, 1992). In addition, some traditional customs still remain in these regions. Under these

Table 1. Labor Compensation

(%)

	Total		Age Bracket				
	n	percent	20's	30's	40's	50's	60's
Yes	341	40.8	44.3	51.0	43.2	32.4	20.8
Monthly	189	55.4	55.4	54.5	62.0	50.8	0.0
Yearly	56	16.4	12.9	18.2	10.9	18.6	53.3
Daily/hourly	17	5.0	3.2	6.1	5.8	1.7	6.7
Other	68	19.9	19.4	21.2	15.3	25.4	33.3
No answer	11	3.2	0.0	0.0	5.8	3.4	6.7
No	468	56.0	54.3	47.9	54.3	62.6	70.8
No answer	26	3.1	1.4	1.0	2.5	4.9	8.3

Note: 1) Data counted plural answers

2) Figures from Monthly to No answer show the percentage if Yes counts 100

3) Survey by Niigata Prefecture 1996

Table 2. Property Ownership

(%)

	Total		Age Bracket				
	n	percent.	20's	30's	40's	50's	60's
Yes	537	64.3	47.1	57.7	65.6	72.5	72.2
Real estate	75	14.0	9.1	9.8	12.5	16.7	25.0
Deposit	501	93.3	97.0	95.5	94.7	90.7	86.5
Securities	37	6.9	3.0	5.4	6.3	6.1	17.3
Other	9	1.7	3.0	1.8	1.9	0.8	1.9
No answer	9	1.7	0.0	1.8	1.9	2.3	1.9
No	290	34.7	52.9	41.8	33.8	25.8	25.0
No answer	8	1.0	0.0	0.5	0.6	1.6	2.8

Note: 1) Data counted plural answers

2) Figures from Real estate to No answer show the percentage if Yes counts 100

3) Survey by Niigata Prefecture 1996

conditions, married women have little free time, and little disposable money to spend without permission.

In an effort to ameliorate these conditions, including working conditions and daily activities, as well as recognize farm women as responsible persons in agricultural production, the MAFF has recently exhorted farm households to adopt a new idea, the FMA.

FMA

1. Outline

We can define the FMA as a kind of family covenant that is limited to family members; its aim is to clarify the status of the individual and his/her role in the family, and on that basis realize a modern family farm management. The articles adopted for most families include work planning for farm management, work hours, labor allocation on farm, and labor compensation. Unfortunately, the FMA has little legal effect, and does not impact the national taxation or social systems. It helps create a consciousness reform. From a historical point of view, the FMA has roots in the Family Agreement of the 1960s, which was mainly introduced to keep young farm-successors involved in family farm, but the character of the Agreement has evolved during the ensuing 50 years.

In the 1990s, the Division of Women and Life in the MAFF began to promote the FMA. This was the second stage of the FMA development. MAFF intended to modernize farm management and paid more attention to married farm women than young farm-successors with the aim of empowering women. The revision of the Farmers' Pension Act of FY1995 helped. In this revision, farm women who take part in farm management on an equal basis with their husbands as a farm manager, were acknowledged to have the right as a regular member to be a farmer's pension if they executed an FMA.

Now we are at the third stage of development. With the enactment of The Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, the FMA is treated as a new tool for improving the circumstances of farm women who act on their own initiative. As of April, 2002, the number of farm households that have adopted an FMA has risen to seventeen thousand in Japan. Figure 1 shows an example of

an FMA. It contains the same kind of work rules as found in private enterprises and thus is very helpful in encouraging farm women and young farm-successors to engage in family farming as a fulfilling endeavor.

**の食卓便 家族経営協定	
<p>目的(第1条) この協定は、甲(**)及び乙(**)が、相互に責任ある経営への参画を通じて、中山間地における漁業を含めた複合経営体を確立することを目的とする。</p> <p>労働報酬(第2条) 専従者給与は月給制とし、毎月20日に現金30,000円を支給する。特別手当は12月に月給相当を支給する。</p> <p>労働時間、休日(第3条) ①作業時間:農業は8:30より日没まで、漁業に関してはフレックスとする。②休日:日曜日 祭日。但し農繁期は、夫妻が協議の上決める。各種農業研修会、保育園、学校行事等には参加できるよう配慮する。</p> <p>作業計画(第4条) 毎週土曜日の夜に一週間の作業割り当てをする。</p> <p>作業計画(第5条) 事業主は、漁業、水稲、椎茸の三部門と食卓便の営業販売を担当し、経営全体の責任と管理義務を負う。専従者は、家事、採種、おけさ柿を責任を持って担当し、食卓便については、事務一般を担当する。専従者が夜間選別包装作業に従事する場合、事業主は積極的に家事、育児を手伝うこととする。</p> <p>その他(第6条) 事業主の長女が、農産物を通学途中に配達する場合、1回に付100円を支払う。事業主は、四半期に1回慰労会を設けることとする。</p> <p>付則(第7条) この協定は平成10年4月1日から実施し、有効期限は1年間とし、毎年見直すこととする。</p> <p style="text-align: right;">平成10年3月 **日</p>	<p>Art. 1 Purpose</p> <p>Art. 2 Labor compensation</p> <p>Art. 3 Work hours and holidays</p> <p>Art. 4 Work planning</p> <p>Art. 5 Labor allocation</p> <p>Art. 6 Other</p> <p>Art. 7 Additional rules</p> <p>Date / Address / Signatures (concerned family members, an officer, agricultural committee)</p>

Figure 1. Example of FMA

The representative areas of FMAs from north to south in Japan are Date City (Hokkaido Prefecture), Takasaki City (Gunma Prefecture), Nakano City (Nagano Prefecture), Sanwa Town (Hiroshima Prefecture), and Kamoto Town (Kumamoto Prefecture).²

2. System

Whenever a farm household is interested in an FMA, one of the officers of the Agricultural Extension Center recommends attendance at a seminar sponsored by the Agricultural Extension Center. The officers are regularly concerned with crop cultivation and improvements in farm family life. An officer visits farm households to explain the FMA in detail, and encourages all farm members to participate in family discussions to fully discuss without restraint all areas of farm management and household administration in which members would like to involve.

When the family finally decides to conclude an agreement, the officer helps to put in writing their somewhat vague but worthwhile ideas into concrete form. The articles included in an FMA are, for example, work planning for farm management (78%), work hours (74%), holidays (73%),

² Takasaki and Date Cities are known as the pioneers of Family Agreements. The main groups creating the atmosphere to conclude an FMA in an agricultural community are different from cities. Nakano City has an aggressive group of farm women, and Kamoto Town has many farm youth who will some day take over their family farm. Sanwa Town is known for having various types of FMAs (Kawate and Nishiyama, 1998, The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan, 1998, and Yazumi and Eguchi, 1998).

labor allocation on farm (72%), labor compensation (72%), distribution of profit (49%), and farm management transfer (46%) (Table 3). The persons covered by this agreement may consist of spouses (manager and his/her spouse) or parents and child (manager, his/her spouse and their successor) (Table 4).

A concluding ceremony is ordinarily held at a community center attended by the officers, members of the Agriculture Committee, and the family members.

Table 3. Items Included in FMA

Items	(%)	
	2001	2002
Work planning for farm management	77.8	81.1
Work hours	73.8	
Holidays	73.1	82.8
Labor allocation on farm	71.7	73.5
Labor compensation	71.6	73.2
Distribution of profit	49.0	47.9
Farm management transfer	45.7	45.6
Labor allocation for home management	34.9	38.3
Farm labor allocation	24.9	22.3
Inheritance of property	10.7	8.7
Monetary support for elderly after farm management transfer	10.3	
Housing, cost of living for elderly after farm management transfer	7.3	14.1
Housing, cost of living for child after marriage	3.0	
Labor hygiene, health management	—	24.7
Participation in social and community activities	—	14.9
Labor allocation for child care	—	6.9
Other	46.9	33.9

Note: 1) Data counted plural answers

2) Survey by Agricultural Extension Division, Management Improvement Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

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Table 4. Family Members Concerned with FMA Items Included in FMA

Type	Family Members	(%)	
		2001	2002
Between spouses	both spouses (husband and wife)	51.5	50.7
Within family		45.1	45.8
	husband with child (son or daughter)	7.2	6.3
	husband with wife, child and child's spouse	12.7	11.5
	husband with wife, child	13.7	15.0
	husband with father (and/or mother) and wife	9.2	10.2
	husband with father (and/or mother) wife and child	1.1	1.3
	husband with father (and/or mother) and child	0.7	0.7
	husband with father (and/or mother) wife, child and child's spouse	0.5	0.8
Other		3.6	3.5
Total		100.0	100.0

Note: 1) Data counted plural answers

2) Survey by Agricultural Extension Division, Management Improvement Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The major findings of our interviews were as follows. In the aim process of concluding an FMA with family members, there was not much differences among regions (such as to join the farmer's pension; to prepare the labor environment for their successor, and difficulties seldom happened to conclude it). However, there was a significant difference in the economic status of married farm women especially in terms of the labor compensation and the willingness to openly disclose figures on labor compensation or gross sales. For example, married farm women's labor compensation in rice-producing areas like Niigata show a tendency to be lower than that of their adult sons, even though the sons may have just started his career as a farmer. In stock raising areas like Fukuoka, however, this tendency is not seen (Takahashi and Okabe, 2002). We have the impression that in the latter area farming is regarded as one occupation to choose from, not just a farm business to inherit from one's parents.

Families who adopted the agreement had few difficulties in doing so because some had similar tacit rules before adopting the agreement or some did not hesitate to borrow proven provisions from their neighbors. But at the same time, it is true that managers, husbands, and especially middle-aged or elderly people, have had the most difficulty in understanding the spirit of the FMA and accepting it, because they could not recognize the problems of today's women or the ideals of personal identity and human rights; "Why we have to make such a formal rule among family members? That is too standoffish!" "Haven't I have to pay a salary to my wife? She has always had money as to manage our family budget," "As is usual with married women in rural areas, there is no need to have money except for daily living expenses."

By adopting FMAs, farm women's labor is changing from being invisible to being visible. Although the monetary amount is not high, the fact that their labor is valuable enough to put a price on is very important. Farm women's frank comments included, "I am very happy to be able to receive labor compensation for my labor like employees"; or : "Before marriage, I was an office worker and received a salary. Farm work is harder, so receiving no pay has been more than I would bear." Actually, many farm women who receive labor compensation spend most of the money on daily living expenses and little is spent on themselves mainly because of the slightness of their monetary amount, but they seem content.

The most important aim of the FMA is to build a partnership within the farm household and its members. The agreement has many possibilities for empowering farm women. It gives women both pensions and remuneration to secure their economic status, and gives them access to managerial posts to secure their social status on farms. The FMA also has the potential for securing true partnerships among all members of farm family throughout their lifetime with the help of discussion, planning and implementation. It is a first step towards creating a partnership of farm management.

From a Japanese social system standpoint, urban full-time housewives are given very favorable treatment in terms of taxation and the national pension system compared to rural farm women who undoubtedly engage in more work on the farm and more housework.

Farm families involved in second businesses are on the increase in Japan, especially in rice producing areas such as Niigata Prefecture, where cases like the following are not unusual. For example, the head manager of a farm household, according to an official document is, in truth, a regular employee all the year, while his/her spouse, in many cases a woman, is the actual farm manager. The real farm manager also works part-time during the off-season for farmers. Of

course, the number of times farmers receive agricultural payments influences their behavior. Rice cultivation farm families receive crop payments once a year, but at the same time, many of these farm households also have regular cash incomes from their family members who work as employees all year round or off the farm these days. We think one result of not being hard-up for daily household expenses is the little interest farm families have in adopting an FMA.

In addition, the present taxation and social security systems in Japan are designed to give preferential treatment to households with one working parent, that is, where a husband is a full-time worker and his wife is a full-time housewife or a part-timer. These systems are not neutral factors when making work choices. When the farm manager according to an official document is a regular employee, his spouse regards it as economically reasonable to adjust her working hours to those of urban employees' housewives, in order not to exceed the income amount which distinguishes independent and dependent spouses. This is because a dependent spouse does not have to pay income tax or social security fees.

We believe that the theme of the FMA deserves cross-disciplinary discussion from various viewpoints, such as law, economics, philosophy, psychology and home economics. We also believe that the FMA provides a good opportunity to think about the enormous amount of unpaid work done by women in Japan.

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