



MURAMAI (Village-Rice) System

World as in Bourgogne

Passion and Bonds Grow High-quality Rice

The Yamada Nishiki Festival is held every March in Yokawa Town, Miki City. It is a very special day. Eleven major Nada Gogo breweries, who utilize Yamada Nishiki produced in Yokawa Town, run booths and meet and interact with sake lovers, together with their contracted rice farmers. Yokawa Town is the production site ranked the highest in Japan, i.e. Toku 'A' (Special place 'A').

There is one exceptional booth that is not run by a Hyogo brewery, but by a brewery named Kikuhime Co., Ltd. from Hakusan City in Ishikawa Prefecture. The company is known for its strict adherence to using only Yamada Nishiki from Yokawa and also its successful effort to promote the existence of Yamada Nishiki while it had not been recognized as a national brand.

"Yamada Nishiki was a precious resource of Nada, and indispensable in producing Koji mold, which is the key to brewing sake," stated Tatsushi Yanagi (aged 67), the representative of the company, looking back in around 1978. In response to the declining consumption of Sake, he was considering how to pave the way for survival by producing the very best sake using Yamada Nishiki produced in Hyogo Prefecture, but which was not easy to obtain in those days.

Yanagi repeatedly visited Kobe and Kitaharima to research old documents and came across a reference table. Upon reading it he then thought "This is it." It was a Village Rice Rating Table for crop of 1938. The prices of

Tatsushi Yanagi, Representative of Kikuhime Co., Ltd. discusses the newspaper advertisement that introduced MURAMAI (Village-Rice) System of Hyogo (Hakusan City, Ishikawa Prefecture)



sake-brewing rice from more than 100 villages, for example Kitaharima, were displayed in the table in the unit of 10 sen (1 yen = 100 sen). The table revealed part of the "MURAMAI (Village-Rice) System," a system of rice production that was contracted to breweries, which had commenced in the middle of the Meiji era. The Bourgogne landscape, a famous wine producing region of France, immediately sprang to his mind.

"All the vineyards are ranked there, and so are the rice fields in each terrace here. The best sake-brewing rice was created due to natural features that are best suited for rice production and the enthusiasm of our predecessors. I firmly believed that use of this rice could enable Japanese sake to win out over its rival, white wine."

However, at the time Yamada Nishiki in Hyogo Prefecture was facing a major challenge. The growing trend of manufacturing low-cost sake across the industry had led to the rice production area of Yamada Nishiki of over 7,000 ha in the early 60s having sharply dropped to just 2,000 ha by 1979. Because of those circumstances, Kikuhime and Kenbishi Sake (Higashinada Ward, Kobe) were accepted as new members of the MURAMAI (Village-Rice) System in recognition of the enthusiasm and techniques they brought with them.

Kikuhime started to place a series of newspaper advertisements to introduce Yamada Nishiki and brewing techniques in the latter half of the 80s. The catch phrase, "Here is the Same World as in Bourgogne" created a sensation and drove sake breweries from all over the nation to seek out Yamada Nishiki.

The relationship between brewers in the Nada Gogo district and rice growers is not just limited to the sake-brewing rice trade. When farmers were struck by a severe drought in the Taisho era the brewers provided lifting pumps. Likewise, when the Nada Gogo district was hit by the Great Hanshin Flood Disaster (1938), a large number of rice growers became volunteer workers for the period of about one month, without any compensation, in helping with restoration work.

After the Great Hanshin Earthquake rice growers brought water, food, and fuel, and worked hard to clean up the affected breweries. "We are definitely aiming to maintain our relationship of mutual trust, which is an asset to the region," firmly stated Toshihiro Ioo (aged 72), the Head of the Yamada

Nishiki Village Rice Division in Yokawa Town, when looking back on those days.



Yamada Nishiki Festival held in March (Kichiyasu, Yokawa Town, Miki City)

The new symbol of that relationship is provided by the banners of breweries that can be spotted here and there in the rice fields. "We wanted to accentuate

somehow the presence of the sake-brewing rice that is used by nation-wide sake breweries and also that of the agriculture scene in Hyogo Prefecture," said Masataka Shirakashi (aged 39), the Managing Director of Kenbishi, which was one of the first to set up banners in 2007.

Banners start getting raised when the rice planting season approaches and re-raised if destroyed by typhoons. The repeated visits deepen understanding of the region even more. "I came to understand not only the form of the rice fields and the sunlight conditions but also issues of the communities of the region such as the aging population. I would like to explore with the growers possible methods for maintaining production of this important sake-brewing rice."

(Kazuyoshi Tsujimoto)

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兵庫の村米制度を紹介した新聞広告について語る
柳達司代表 石川県白山市、菊姫合資会社

三木市吉川町で毎年3月に開かれる山田錦まつり。産地最高の特A地区である同町の山田錦を使う灘五郷大手など11社がアースを開き、契約栽培する農家と二階に日本酒ファンと交流する日だ。

その中にたまたま二つ兵庫以外の酒蔵のアースがある。石川県白山市の菊姫合資会社。吉川

兵庫に乾杯 日本酒と酒米の聖地

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村米制度

産のみを使うこだわり 978年ごろ、日本酒と、山田錦が全国的に消費が減少する中、当知られていなかった時は人手困難だった兵代にその存在を広めた。大事に「大事に酒造りに考えていた。欠かせない灘の宝物だ。神戸北播磨に何度かた。柳達司代表も足を運び、古い資料が振り返るのは1を調べる中、ある表が

を見つけた。これだと思つた。38昭和13年度の村米格付表。北播磨な100以上の集落の酒米の価格が10銭単位で記されている。明治半ばに始まった酒蔵との契約栽培「村米制度」の一端を示すも

ブルゴーニュと同じ世界観

適した風土と先人の情熱から最高の酒米が生まれた。これならライバルの白ワインに勝てる。確信した。そのころ、兵庫県の山田錦は危機を迎えていた。業界全体でコストの安い酒造りが進む中、60年代前半に7千超えた栽培面積は79年には2千弱まで急減。こうした中、熱意や技術が認められ、菊姫と剣菱酒造(神戸市東灘区)が村米制度に新たに迎えられた。

最高品育む情熱と絆

山田錦や酒造技術を紹介する新聞広告の連載を始める。「そこにはブルゴーニュと同じ世界があった」。キャッチコピーは大反響を呼び、全国の酒蔵が山田錦を求める動きが加速した。地への理解がより深まった。「田んぼの地形や日当たりだけでなく、高齢化や集落の米の取引にとまらなく、大正時代の大半はつ時には酒造家が揚水ポンプを提供。逆に、灘五郷が大被害を受けていた(辻本一好)



3月に開かれた山田錦まつり
三木市吉川町吉安

では、大勢の農家が1カ月間無償ボランティアで復旧に協力した。阪神・淡路大震災では農家が水や食料、燃料を運び込み、被災した蔵の片付けに励んだ。吉川町山田錦村米部会の五百尾俊宏会長(72)は当時を振り返り「地域の財産である信頼関係をしっかりと守っていく」と前を向く。