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Public recognition of traditional vegetables at the municipal level: Implications for transgenerational knowledge transmission

Yuta Uchiyama ^{a,*}, Hikaru Matsuoka ^b, Ryo Kohsaka ^a^a Graduate School of Environmental Studies, Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan^b Institute of Science and Engineering, Kanazawa University, Kanazawa, Japan

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ABSTRACT

Background: In this paper, recognition of traditional agricultural products by the general public is presented and analyzed to explore the transgenerational aspects of traditional vegetables and their knowledge transfer. It is necessary to understand how the products are recognized by different generations and gender, in terms of retaining and branding the local products.

Methods: A questionnaire survey with random sampling was conducted to identify the recognition of traditional vegetables including the Kaga and Noto vegetables in Komatsu City, Ishikawa Prefecture. By understanding the degree of recognition, elaborating strategic plans for retention of traditional agricultural products and effective promotion of the products can be implemented.

Results: The results from 149 respondents indicate that there are differences of recognition depending on their gender or age. In particular, young people obtain information on traditional vegetables mainly from TV, whereas older people gain information from newspapers. Furthermore, more than half of the Kaga vegetables are better recognized among the older generation.

Conclusion: The analysis of this paper serves as the basis to capture the cultural importance, or to develop branding strategy as the results clarify the degree of recognition of residents and tourists from various generations. As the population has been aging, transmitting knowledge about the products to young people who have less knowledge is the urgent issue.

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1. Introduction

Recently, the roles of traditional vegetables have gained salience. Specifically, the multiple roles and values including the role as a symbol of the local brand strategy based on ethnic foods and the value of local identity requiring conservation have been rediscovered [1–4]. The methods to cultivate and gather ethnic vegetal foods including traditional vegetables, herbs, and edible plants are developed and transmitted as traditional local knowledge [5,6].

Simultaneously, the concept of traditional vegetable is somewhat illusive or “ambiguous” [7] and requires careful consideration. Relationships between ethnic foods and related traditional events can be changed depending on the event participants’ socioeconomic backgrounds [8]. In this context, producers and consumers

of ethnic foods and their raw materials including traditional vegetables are changing in history [9]. Food culture has dynamic characteristics [10,11], and it is difficult to fix them. If the conservation activities are not implemented, the food-related traditional knowledge that can enhance the quality of life and reduce environmental impacts will disappear. To transmit the food-related traditional knowledge, education for the younger generation is necessary [12], and assessments of food education have been implemented in terms of health maintenance [13]. As factors to be considered in education, the development of guidelines for school lunches [14] and location and gender of the younger generation [15] are global concerns. In addition to education, proposing new ways to create opportunities to eat ethnic foods for various generations including younger and elder generations is recommended [16].

In recent years, it has been an urgent issue for many countries including Japan to pass on knowledge regarding traditional agricultural products and their ethnic foods to the next generation. Vegetable seeds companies have historically contributed to distribution of seeds of traditional vegetables [17]. In Japan where the

* Corresponding author. Graduate School of Environmental Studies, Tohoku University, Aoba, 468-1, Aramaki, Aoba-ku, Sendai 980-0845, Miyagi, Japan.

E-mail address: yuta.uchiuyama.c1@tohoku.ac.jp (Y. Uchiyama).

population has been rapidly decreasing and aging, the number of elderly people with food-related knowledge has been decreasing rapidly. To lose agriculture and food-related knowledge cultivated by the people living in an area historically is almost equivalent to losing the multiple values of traditional and ethnic foods including vegetables. According to previous research, the variety of local foods is correlated to periods of residence [18]. This indicates that people construct social networks by living in a certain area for a long time and gain information on local foods from their local networks. However, it may be difficult to pass on knowledge to the next generation in the same way even if they live in the area for a long time because population has been aging and decreasing rapidly.

It is necessary to comprehend what particular knowledge younger generations should inherit and how to effectively pass it on to them. Therefore, we investigated their recognition of traditional vegetables and media from which they gain information on traditional vegetables. The research site, Komatsu City, is a cultural city where local *kabuki* style was established in 1766 and *kutani* pottery (九谷焼) was established in the early Edo period. Furthermore, Komatsu City's unique vegetables have been historically supplied to Kanazawa City, a major city of the region including Komatsu (Fig. 1). The green onion of Komatsu is called *kagashironegi* (加賀白ねぎ) and is the one of the main agricultural products in Komatsu. Its green onion can be seen in the pictures from the Edo period (Fig. 2). The green onion is used in Komatsu *udon*, a Japanese wheat noodle of Komatsu, which was sent to Bashou Matsuo (松尾芭蕉) in the early Edo period. Bashou Matsuo is a famous poet who created the *haiku*, a Japanese poem of 15 syllables.



Fig. 2. Green onion and Tang cai. Source: Minkakenrouzu (民家検勞図; Edo period), Ishikawa prefectural library.

In previous research, recognition of traditional vegetables by tourists was investigated in the Noto region in Ishikawa Prefecture [19]. Kohsaka et al [19] suggested that consulting related shops and media outlets such as TV and newspapers are elements that enhance the recognition of traditional vegetables. Another questionnaire survey to identify tourists' recognition of traditional vegetables was implemented at Kanazawa City, the central city of Ishikawa Prefecture [20]. The survey shows the different degrees of recognition of

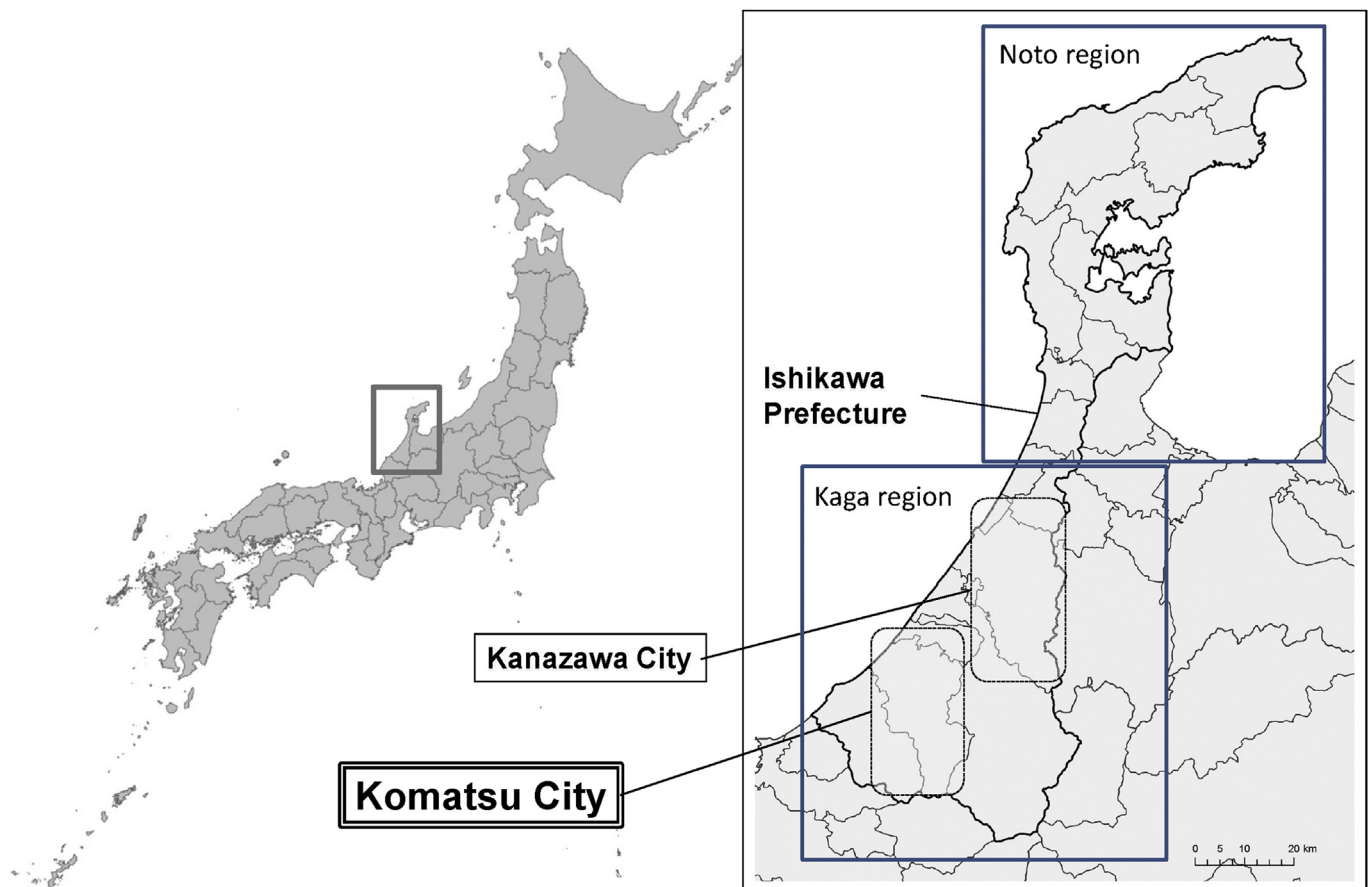


Fig. 1. Location of Komatsu City.

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