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For National Cooperation in Increasing Food Self-Sufficiency Rate

Speeches at symposium for revitalization of agriculture

SHII Kazuo, JCP Executive Committee Chair
April 20, 2008

Urgent Change Needed in Agriculture Policy to Increase Nation's Food Self-Sufficiency Rate and Encourage Farmers to Continue Agriculture

JCP's Agriculture Revitalization Plan

March 7, 2008

For National Cooperation in Increasing Food Self-Sufficiency Rate

**Speeches at Symposium for revitalization of agriculture
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April 20, 2008**

A symposium to think about revitalization of Japan's agriculture was held by the Central Committee of the Japanese Communist Party on April 20 in Daisen City, Akita Prefecture, a major rice producing region. JCP Executive Committee Chairman Shii Kazuo took part in the discussion with other three panelists. Shii's remarks follow:

Good afternoon. Thank you very much for attending this symposium. I also express heartfelt thanks to Daisen Mayor Kuribayashi Tsugumi for his greetings of warm welcome, as well as to the three panelists.

On March 7, the JCP published its plan to revitalize Japan's agriculture. With this proposal, we have had talks with people of various quarters. The Central Committee decided to hold symposia at three places, the first of which is here in Daisen City, one of Japan's major rice-producing regions.

I've just visited the Mini Rice Center in Kawanome and learned of the community farming association's efforts and ingenuity. After that meeting, I was given a bagful of the popular variety of rice, "Akita Komachi". In reply to a preceding speaker's call for "eating rice more and more", I will regale myself with "Akita Komachi".

Today, I'd like to explain the main points of our plan of revitalizing agriculture, and look forward to receiving your comments.

Considering urgent task to increase self-sufficiency rate of food in relation to world situation

The central point of the JCP plan is how to revitalize Japan's agriculture, especially how to increase the food self-sufficiency rate which has fallen to 39% on a calorie basis and the self-sufficiency rate of grains on a weight basis to 27 percent in FY2006. This is an internationally abnormal level caused by the successive Liberal Democratic Party governments' agricultural policies. The JCP plan states: "To push the self-sufficiency rate to the 50% mark should be an immediate task of high priority in national politics, and every effort should be made to accomplish the goal."

I think that it is important for us to think of this problem in relation to the present world situation. The JCP plan points out that "upheavals in the international food situation call for drastic policy change," and stresses that it is an urgent task to increase our self-sufficiency rate, in the light of worldwide food shortages and increases in prices.

Food shortages and rising food prices could spark worldwide crisis

Reviewing the development of the world situation in the month since we published the plan, food shortages and rising food prices have become serious and may turn into a world crisis.

Since March, food riots and disturbances have taken place in many developing countries, including Egypt, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Indonesia, Philippines, Bangladesh and Haiti. Riots even caused some deaths in some of these countries. The World Food Program (WFP) warned that 30 countries are faced with food crises and 23 of them are in critical situations.

In the last three years, international cereal prices have increased sharply: wheat price increased 3.3 times; and soybean and corn 2.5 times. Price of rice also doubled only in three months. The world cereal stock-to-use ratio fell to 14.7 percent, the lowest level in these 40 years. The stock-to-use ratio thus dropped to the so-called dangerous level.

Three factors contributing to the crisis are commonly pointed out. The first factor is the increase in demand for food in developing countries. The second, the global demand for biofuels. The third, effects of global climate change, including a bad drought which hit Australia. These are not temporary factors, but structural ones. Without doubt, the world faces shortages of food. In addition, the influx of speculative money in the cereal markets is accelerating the soaring cereal prices. Some of these problems, including the global environment and speculative money, should be solved by international cooperation. But they also include unavoidable increases in food demand by developing nations.

As for rice, for example, major rice-producing countries like Vietnam and India decided to restrict their export of rice. It is quite a natural decision for any country to fill its own people's bellies first during a time of worldwide food shortages. As the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries admits, the world is now in a fierce battle for cereals.

Recently, an NHK TV program "Today's close-up" dealt with the world food crisis. It reported that the Philippines, the world's biggest importer of rice is now encountering serious difficulty. The Philippines depends for 20 percent of its rice

on imports from foreign countries. But since its neighbor Vietnam decided to restrict its export of rice, the Philippines has been facing an acute shortage of rice, causing political unrest. The daily *Nihon Nogyo Shinbun* (Japan Agricultural News) gave a large space to this issue. Its headlines read: "Philippines asks Vietnam to guarantee rice supply"; "Soaring prices urges the president to made an extraordinary request to the Vietnamese prime minister"; "Philippines' tightrope act of maintaining access to food". In reply to the request, the Vietnamese government reportedly said that it would do what little it could. But Vietnam had to also say that the first and foremost priority is to meet its own people's needs.

Japan would die of hunger -- Dependence on imports hardly guarantees food security

In this international situation, if Japan is content with the present self-sufficiency rates – 39 percent for food in general and 27 percent for cereals in specific, and lets things ride, what will happen? I think the situation will be serious.

There are eleven countries in the world with a population of more than 100 million. Among them, the food self-sufficiency rates of the United States, Pakistan and China are over 100 percent; Russia, India, Bangladesh and Brazil, over 90 percent; Indonesia and Nigeria, over 80 percent; and Mexico is over 60 percent. Only Japan's self-sufficiency rate is 27 percent. This is really abnormal. I want to declare that the situation admits of no delay.

There are two points I want to emphasize.

Firstly, as I have just said, there is no guarantee that we can stably get food if we depend on imports in the fierce global battle for food.

In the United States, for example, there is a major move toward converting corn to ethanol fuel. It was reported that a Japanese firm could buy only 5 percent of needed corn when U.S. ethanol producing corporations and Japanese cereal trading companies scrambled for corn. Japanese lost in the bidding. As for wheat, the situation is the same.

The *Weekly Economist* in its April 1 issue carried a shocking story saying that "although it is said that today is the age of gluttony, a 39% self-sufficiency rate would court danger of death from hunger." This is not a story full of exaggeration. Japan could become another Philippines.

U.S. President Bush said, "Can you imagine a country that was unable to grow enough food to feed its people? It would be a nation that would be subject to international pressure. It would be a nation at risk." (Speech to Future Farmers of

America, July 27, 2001) He also said, "It's in our national security interests that we be able to feed ourselves. Thank goodness we don't have to rely on somebody else's meat to make sure our people are healthy and well fed." (Remarks at the Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show, February 8, 2002)

How dare he say that? The United States coerced Japan over the decades into importing U.S. foodstuffs and decreased Japan's self-sufficiency rate. Such remarks by President Bush really make our blood boil. But it is true that securing enough food, together with military power and energy, is the basis of a nation's existence. The government of Japan, however, is interested only in military power, and takes no responsibility for securing food and energy. A drastic change in politics is necessary, isn't it?

Buying a large amount of food means "export of hunger"; Improving self-sufficiency contributes to international community

Secondly, I must say that Japan's buying a large amount of grains from abroad is contributing to hunger in the world.

In the last six years, the number of hungry people, or undernourished people increased by 4 million every year, from 829 million to 854 million.

In such a situation, buying a large amount of grains from abroad by Japan, which may be self-sufficient in food as long as it sets its mind to it, is nothing but an export of hunger worldwide. I want to point out that an increase in the self-sufficiency rate is not only in the Japanese people's interest, but also a contribution to the international community.

Japan's agriculture has excellent potential

Business circles and others often say that Japan's agriculture is "not competitive", belittling the efforts by farmers and other agriculture-concerned people. But our agriculture has excellent potential.

How many people can be fed by one hectare of farmland? It is 0.1 in Australia; the U.S., 0.8; Britain, 2.6; France, 2.9; Germany, 4.5. But in Japan 10.5 people can be fed. This is because the paddy field with its higher fertility is the major source of food in Japan, and because Japanese agriculture and farmers are excellent. If they think that "Japan's agriculture is not competitive," they have another thing coming. The Liberal Democratic Party politics must be held accountable for ruining an excellent agricultural system.

Now, it is an invalid argument that foods can always be purchased from foreign countries. Such a way of thinking must be fundamentally reviewed. It is high

time for us to exercise political responsibility to increase our food self-sufficiency rate. I'd like to promise you that the JCP will strive for this.

Price supports and direct payments for farmers to engage in agriculture free of anxieties

Well, how can we improve our self-sufficiency rate? A drastic change of the LDP agricultural administration is indispensable. Our revitalization plan makes four major proposals. I believe that all of them are essential and are reasonable demands of the Japanese people in view of the present world situation.

The first proposal is to improve drastically the system of price supports and direct payments aiming at a sustainable agriculture management system.

Producer rice price of more than 17,000 yen per bale (60 kg) to save farm households faltering on the edge of the abyss

As I travel throughout the country, I really feel that Japanese farm households are on the edge of the abyss.

As for rice produced in 2006, the producer price was 14,826 yen per bale, or 60 kilograms, about 2,000 yen lower than the average cost of production, 16,824 yen. It has become an overriding problem that the remuneration for the labor of farmers is only 256 yen per hour. But the price of rice produced in 2007 is said to drop even further, to some 13,500 yen. The cost of production may have exceeded the income from the crop -- the remuneration for the labor may be zero or less than zero. Members of the Kawanome community farming union that I visited before coming to this symposium explained that they have experienced a deficit in spite of their efforts. Mr. Takahashi Yasuo, head of the Yokote city farming union, who have just spoken before I, also said that his union is working hard though it is in the red.

In order to deal with this situation you have to spend what little income from pension you have or you have to supplement your income with off-farm income. All of you are enduring a producer rice price that falls below the cost of production, in a courageous endeavor to not abandon your ancestral paddy fields. But I think however hard you try, such efforts cannot continue indefinitely. It is crystal clear that the present state of Japanese agriculture is unsustainable with the present producer rice price below the cost of production.

Well then, what must be done? In the JCP agricultural revitalization plan, we propose to establish a price support system to cover the production cost. With

this as the base, together with the direct payment system, farm management can be sustained.

Speaking about rice, Japan's staple, the JCP proposes to introduce a deficiency payment system to fill the gap between the producer price and the average production cost. As for the 2007 harvest, the producer rice price of at least 17,000 yen or more shall be guaranteed. In addition to the price support, evaluating agriculture's function of preserving the land and environment, as an immediate direct payment, about 10,000 yen per 10 ares shall be paid. This means an addition of 1,000 yen to the rice price per bale, and a total of about 18,000 yen per bale shall be guaranteed. At least this amount is necessary for you to continue agriculture. Would you agree with this?

Half of agricultural income in Europe is from price supports and direct payments

What policies do European countries and the United States adopt? When we claim the need for price supports or direct payments, the government always replies nonchalantly, "It's out-of-date." But this is a false notion, ignoring reality. The United States and the EU adopt policies of generous price support and income support.

Let me refer to rice in the United States, for example. The U.S. government specifies a target price to guarantee production costs, and the difference between the target price and selling price is covered by price supports, counter-cyclical payments, direct payments and other programs. If this system is applied to Japan, assuming that a target price is 18,000 yen per 60 kg, and the selling price on the international market is 4,000 yen, the difference, 14,000 yen would be paid by the government. With such generous assistance, the United States is a big rice exporting country.

What measures does the EU adopt? According to information that the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries submitted to the House of Representatives Budget Committee this year, 49 percent of agricultural income in the EU in 2003 was from direct payments. Almost half that amount was in the form of government subsidies. As comparison, it was only 22 percent in Japan. How evident it is that the Japanese government uses less tax revenue than European countries for agricultural price supports and direct payments.

The JCP's proposal for price supports and direct payments requires a budget of 900 billion yen. In the FY2008 national budget for agriculture, price and income support budgets total 540 billion yen. We propose to add some 400 billion yen to this. If our proposal is put into practice, the ratio of direct payments in agricultural income will increase to 30 percent, which is still lower than Europe.

Our proposal is a minimal, realistic, and urgent demand, compared with the world trend. I'd like to call on you for cooperation to realize this demand.

Sustainer of Agriculture: To assist all who want to continue or begin to engage in agriculture, drawing no distinctions according to acreage

The second proposal is to maintain the family farming system, to support and encourage farmers, including large-scale farmers, and to preserve agricultural lands.

Three quarters of all rice paddies would be abandoned under the "farm management stability measures" or "paddy field and upland field management income stability measures"

The government policy of "non-product specific farm management stability measures", -- recently called "paddy field and upland field management income stability measures*" -- discriminates farm households according to farmland acreage. This system must be discontinued. The JCP proposes to cherish various forms of family farms as the player in agriculture, and to support all who want to continue to engage in agriculture, including large scale family farms and community farming groups.

* In its translation, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries calls this system "direct payment for land-extensive farming."

The "paddy field and upland field management income stability measures" is intended to cover individual farms holding more than 4 hectares of farmland and community farming groups with more than 20 hectares. But they are only a small portion of those who are engaged in agriculture. In particular, part-time farm households who cannot hold a sunnier view of their future and small-scale family farms who are making desperate efforts in hilly and mountainous areas will all be abandoned.

I asked the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries about the amount of paddy land to be abandoned. According to the ministry's report on applications in the last year for participation in the project, the rice planted area is 437,000 hectares. This accounts for only 26% of the 1,673,000 hectares of paddy fields of the country. Thus, three quarters of the rice paddy are not covered by this project. This method of discrimination of farmers based on total acreage in the name of "support" must be ended.

Large-scale family farmers and community farming groups are also in dead-end situation

What then is the situation of large-scale family farm households and community farming collectives which are the targets of reduced government support? They are also in a dead-end situation though they make every effort to advance under this policy. I've just heard about various efforts made by the Kawanome Community Farming Association. They have tried growing different crops like melon and soybeans, but they said that it is very difficult to get out of the red.

I also interviewed farmers of Ogata Village about their situation. As you know, the village consists of large-scale farms on the reclaimed Hachirogata Lake. It is said that the cost of rice production is lowest in paddy fields ranging from 10 to 15 or 16 hectares. The average acreage of farm households in Ogata Village is 15 hectares, which ought to be the most efficient acreage. But the annual income of a farm family of two was only 6 million yen for rice production in 2006. It will fall further for rice produced in 2007. They say, "We can hardly advise our son to take over the family business of agriculture." This is the actual situation in Ogata Village where supposedly the most efficient rice production is possible.

What a nerve they have in calling it "management stability measures"! I must say it is "management devastation measures."

If we create a policy of sustainable agriculture, it must support all who want to continue or begin to engage in agriculture, family farms of various forms as well as large-scale family farm systems and production organizations that can assume important roles in local agriculture systems. Special support should be given to those who newly enter farming. This is the basis of a responsible agricultural policy.

To maintain and strengthen tariff and other border measures based on food sovereignty

The third proposal is to maintain and strengthen border measures, including tariffs, so as to establish trade rules that guarantee "food sovereignty."

No country other than Japan is conducting all-out liberalization of imports

There is no country among major countries other than Japan that have drastically liberalized imports. The average of tariffs charged for agricultural products is 20% by the EU, 33% by Argentina, 35% by Brazil and 43% by Mexico, all of

which are agricultural products exporting countries. But with only a 12% tariff rate, Japan has become the most liberalized market for agricultural products.

In addition, there are forces aiming at further liberalization. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in February 2007 gave an estimate for complete liberalization in reply to the request by the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy. According to the estimate, Japan's food self-sufficiency rate would fall to 12% from the present 39%. Domestic rice production would sharply drop to 10% of the present level. But a member of the council, who is a university professor, said, "Domestic production will be sustained at a rate higher than I expected." This is a revealing statement, isn't it? We must not leave Japan's economic management to such persons.

European countries and the United States: basic foodstuffs protected by high tariffs and minimum access opportunities unimplemented

Well then, what border measures are taken by the United States and European countries? Mr. Suzuki Nobuhiro, professor at University of Tokyo, made the following comment in the *Weekly Economist*.

"In the United States and European countries, milk and other dairy products are fundamental foodstuffs like rice is for Japan. Dairy farming is compared to the public utility industry like electric power or gas, and it is thought that they must not depend on imports for dairy products... Since the international competitive power for dairy products of Australia and New Zealand is outstanding, other developed countries cannot maintain self-sufficiency rates without safeguards, or measures to limit imports from those countries. Therefore, the European Union and the United States maintain high tariff rates, and minimum access opportunities are held down to some 5 percent of domestic consumption. Minimum access is often translated into Japanese as 'minimum import obligation.' But it is originally meant to provide import opportunities through low tariffs and is not an obligation. So, minimum access opportunities are not necessarily implemented in Europe and the United States."

For the most fundamental foodstuffs in the United States and European countries, border measures are taken to protect their own products. I want to stress that tariff and other border measures are maintained and strengthened as a matter of course in those countries.

Japan totally fulfills minimum access opportunities, importing rice amounting 7.2 percent of domestic consumption. This is a major cause of the fall of the rice price in Japan. Do the United States and European countries max out minimum

access opportunities? NO, they don't. In 2000, the United States imported only 0.03 percent of domestic consumption in chicken and the EU 0.4 percent of its domestic consumption of pork. As for cheese, the U.S. imports 4.5 percent and the EU 2.6 percent of domestic consumption. As Mr. Suzuki points out, they do not fully implemented minimum access opportunities. There are not a few foodstuffs that are kept at a near zero import rate by these countries.

Minimum access does not mean "compulsory import". It only means that an import opportunity will be provided. Few other countries interpret what the WTO agriculture agreement states as an absolute must, and import the full quantity designated as "minimum access opportunity". Our rehabilitation plan proposes that such a way of increasing imports should be stopped and the minimum access system should be reviewed fundamentally.

To establish trade rules guaranteeing food sovereignty

With the evil of severe negative effects of the free market WTO food policy revealing itself, global trend for trade rules respecting each nation's food sovereignty is developing. Food sovereignty is the right of each country to decide independently its own food and agriculture policy, including effective import restrictions and price supports, and giving priority to food production for its own people. Based on this position, let's do our best to have the WTO agriculture agreement reviewed and stop the limitless liberalization of imports.

Cooperation between farmers and consumers for food safety and development of agriculture

Our plan's fourth proposal is to ensure food safety and revitalization of local agriculture through farmer-consumer cooperation.

This includes people's pressing demands for food safety, including the strengthening of imported food inspection system and enforcement of complete labeling requirements of origins, the strengthening of the monitoring system for farm products and processed food, restoration of compulsory labeling of date of manufacture, and maintaining the blanket testing system as measures to prevent BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy). We want call for never allowing the issue of our people's health and life to be sacrificed to our government's subservience to U.S. interests.

At the same time, as Mr. Kato Yoshimasa, chairman of Iwate Prefectural Consumers Cooperatives Union, stressed, "local production for local consumption" and other local activities are now being further developed through various forms of farmer-consumer cooperation. The state and local governments should give more support to these movements. A variety of initiatives have been

taken in many places throughout the country. It is important for the state to support them.

The problem of food and agriculture does not concern merely farmers and others concerned with agriculture. It is an issue on which the existence of the Japanese people is at stake. I hope the cooperation between farmers and others concerned with agriculture and consumers be encouraged to be further developed and the food self-sufficiency rate increased. I close my speech with the hope that our agriculture rebirth plan will be used as the basis for forming a national consensus. Thank you for listening.

In Reply to questions

From the floor, 12 persons expressed their opinions and questions. In reply to them, at the end of the symposium, JCP Chair Shii said as follows:

Thank you very much.

Frank dialogue with leaders of agricultural cooperatives to be promoted

First, on the question concerning the activities of agricultural cooperatives. It is the members themselves who decide what activity agricultural cooperatives should engage in. So, as a political party head, I must refrain from advocating one thing or another. But I am pleased that Mr. Odajima Hiroshi, section chief of the local Akita Obako Agricultural Cooperative Association, joined this symposium and reported on its activities.

I visited the Central Union of Agricultural Co-operatives (JA-ZENCHU) on March 14 and talked with Vice-president Hirose Takezo and others about our agriculture rebirth plan. It was the first time for the JCP to visit JA-ZENCHU headquarters, with the party's policy proposal. Mr. Hirose said that with this plan, they are now able to exchange opinions with us in detail on a possible national consensus about agriculture. It was encouraging. I felt that we managed to open relationship of frank dialogue with leaders in agricultural cooperatives.

Today, I am very happy that we could hold this symposium with panelists that include an agricultural cooperatives leader. I hope that this kind of discussion will be held, irrespective of differences in political affiliation in other parts of the country.

A basis for forming national consensus on increasing self-sufficiency

There were some opinions regarding the need to supplement our agriculture revitalization plan. They include the functions of agriculture supporting the local economy and local community, preserving environment and national land, and protecting Japanese people's health. All are excellent suggestion.

From a consumers' standpoint, it was requested that the order of the proposals be changed: proposals 3 and 4 should be 1 and 2. But the order of the proposals is not the order of importance. It does not mean that the last proposal is less important. We think that every proposal is important. Please order them as you like.

We proposed the plan as a basis, or a working draft, to hammer out a national consensus on the rebirth of Japanese agriculture and the need to increase the food self-sufficiency rate. So please hammer out the detail to make it better.

WTO agricultural agreement: a new framework replacing present agreement is needed

On the WTO agricultural agreement. There was a question if the Japanese Communist Party thinks its policies will work within the framework of the WTO agreement.

Our agriculture rebirth plan includes many feasible proposals under the existing WTO agricultural agreement. But we also think that the WTO agreement should be revised to resolve the agricultural problem worldwide. Under the present WTO agricultural agreement, major exporting countries are enjoying advantages. This is now incompatible with the world food and agriculture situations. It cannot stand as it is.

This is also being taken up in international politics. I have mentioned that the concept of "food sovereignty" has become a major world trend. In his report submitted on April 9, 2004 to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Jean Ziegler, Special Rapporteur on the right to food, said:

"The Special Rapporteur urges Governments to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food in accordance with their human rights obligations. Imbalances and inequities in the global trading system that can have profound negative effects on the right to food should be urgently addressed. It is time to examine new and alternative models for agriculture and trade, such as that provided by the vision of food sovereignty, which places priority on food security and the right to food, for all people at all times. "(E/CN.4/2004/10)

The commission adopted a resolution on the right to food. Its paragraph 8 says that it "[t]akes note with interest of the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food (E/CN.4/2004/10 and Add.1 and 2) and commends the Special Rapporteur for his valuable work in the promotion of the right to food in all parts of the world." Only the United States voted against the resolution. Australia abstained. The Japanese government voted for it. So long as our government supported the resolution, we demand that the government should not regard the WTO framework as gospel truth, but make efforts to revise the WTO agreement on agriculture so that food sovereignty of each country may be respected.

Financial resources to implement agriculture revitalization plan

A question was asked about financial resources to implement our plan. In terms of budget scale, the budget for price supports and income guarantee, or direct payments is 540 billion yen in the government FY2008 budget. The JCP plan can be realized with about 900 billion yen. It is possible with an additional 400 billion yen.

The point of your question is: What is the source of the 400 billion yen? Will it be covered by recompiling the existing agricultural budget or by increasing total amount of the agricultural budget?

The existing agriculture-related budget is 2 trillion yen in total. The agricultural engineering budget is 667.7 billion yen, one third of which is for state-run irrigation and drainage projects. A major portion of this is spent on construction of dams, which are either unnecessary or can wait. Therefore, nearly one third of the agricultural engineering budget can be available for price and income support measures. About 200 billion yen can be secured by recompiling the existing agricultural budget. Then, the remaining shortfall is about 200 billion yen.

We have to consider increase in the agricultural budget to fill the rest. The agricultural budget was more than 2.8 trillion yen before the "structural reform" was started by the Koizumi Jun'ichiro cabinet. But now it has been reduced to 2 trillion yen, and our urgent demand is to restore about 200 billion yen. From our perspectives, one sets one's mind to it, it is realistic and feasible, isn't it?

Some said that they couldn't actually imagine or feel what 400 billion yen is. However, as an example, 400 billion yen is equivalent to three Aegis ships. Priority should be given to revitalization of agriculture, not to such military ships.

I'll give another example. Japan's state budget is about 50 trillion yen a year. 400 billion yen is about 1 percent of that amount. For a family whose monthly budget is 300 thousand yen, it is not difficult to manage to save 1 percent, or 3,000 yen from that amount, is it? It depends on political initiative to earmark 400 billion

yen for agricultural revitalization. I want to emphasize that as for the financial resource, our agriculture rebirth plan is a reasonable and affordable proposal.

State support for newcomers in agriculture

Support for those who newly start farming was also mentioned in your comments. I think it is a matter of great concern to all of you. There are very few enviable farm households which have successors.

The JCP proposes to establish a "new farmer assistance system" to provide newcomers in agriculture with 150,000 yen a month for three years. This is nothing extraordinary.

In France, for example, when youths begin farming, the state subsidizes those who meet certain requirement. Subsidizes to a single farmer is from 2,160,000 yen to 4,700,000 yen in mountainous area, and from 1,040,000 yen to 2,270,000 yen in flatland. It is rather generous assistance. About 9,000 persons were thus subsidized and started farming. Therefore, the age group from 45 to 54 is the leading force of the agricultural population in France.

When young people begin farming, it may take three years or so for them to acquire the needed skill and knowledge to continue. It is the responsibility of governments to give enough assistance and support to them so that they can pave the way for a future in agriculture, free of anxieties.

However much the price supports, agriculture cannot be kept going unless there are successor, or people who want to undertake it. I do want to increase government support for newcomers in agriculture.

Almost all of the 47 prefectures of the country provide aid to newcomers. 17 prefectures provide subsidies amounting to several tens of thousands of yen every month for 1-3 years. But the national government support to young farmers is only interest-free loans at most. Even local governments are struggling to support young farmers. Why doesn't the national government do so?

Production adjustment: to establish conditions favorable for farmer's independent crop changeover

There was a question about the reduction of rice acreage. Our position in the rehabilitation plan is that production adjustment is necessary. But when the production is adjusted, generous supports to producing alternative crops is required. The speaker who raised the question said that he tried growing soybeans instead of rice, but the producer price of soybeans is 45 yen per

kilogram. That price is unrealistically low. Under such a condition, crop changeover has no future.

We propose in the rebirth plan that the conditions for crop changeover should be advantageous to farmers. Price supports and direct payments, or an income guarantee are necessary. Our proposal is that price and income support measures are adopted for wheat, soybeans, livestock, vegetables, and fruits, in addition to rice. With these favorable conditions, farmers may independently and voluntarily decide on crop changeovers. This is what we aim at.

It is an undesirable to cut subsidies to those farmers and districts that have not achieved the assigned reduction goal. To what extent has the enforcement of rice reduction left a wound in the hearts of farmers, and discouraged them? It is immeasurable. Further, it must not be allowed to impose reduction of rice acreage while importing rice and removing the framework of supporting the rice price.

**Who would be upset by increasing Japan's food self-sufficiency?
Categorically, they are Japanese business circles and the United States
agribusiness interests**

On the question if there are any forces that would be upset by a higher self-sufficiency rate, I would like to say categorically that they are Japanese business circles and the United States agribusiness interests.

Japanese business circles are now enjoying unprecedented huge profits by utilizing unstable employment represented by temporary workers, long working hours leading to *karoshi*, or death from overwork, and other cruel ways of exploitation of workers, something like slave labor, and by cost cutting schemes for export. In order to obtain the huge profits from selling goods overseas, agriculture is offered as a sacrifice. Therefore, further "liberalization of the agricultural market" has been called for.

I've quoted a professor who is a member of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy as saying, "Domestic production will be sustained more than I expected", when he read that Japan's food self-sufficiency rate would fall to 12% after complete liberalization. This is the firm belief of Japanese business leaders. They would be content with the disappearance of agriculture, feel that the owning and utilizing of farmlands by business corporations should be liberalized, it's OK to turn farmland into factory sites, and that cheap agricultural products can continue to be bought from abroad. But as I've said at the beginning of my speech, such an idea is now unpopular and does not work in the real world. But business circles do not understand this, and in pursuit of immediate profits they are destroying the very foundation of Japanese agriculture without a secondary thought.

I mentioned President Bush's remarks concerning the importance of food self-sufficiency earlier. After the enforcement of imports of U.S. agricultural surplus on Japan again and again, he disparaged country such as Japan that cannot grow its own supply of food. Underlying his remarks is the interests of American big agribusiness firms. An increase in Japan's self-sufficiency means their losses. By maintaining huge military forces worldwide and by controlling the flow of world grains and food, the U.S. ruling circles intend to hold hegemony over the world. This puts heavy pressure on Japan to increase its food imports.

These are the roots of the problem facing Japan's agriculture. Our opponents are the Japanese business circles and the United States. We are locked in confrontation with these forces. To solve the problem, a drastic change in politics is needed.

Let's develop cooperation and solidarity to rejuvenate Japanese agriculture

Starting with this symposium, the Japanese Communist Party will hold many more symposia to encourage further debates and dialogues throughout the country.

Of course, the problem is not limited to one political party or group. Nor is it a problem only for farmers and those who are connected in some way with agriculture. This is a problem affecting the survival of the Japanese people. With this in mind, the JCP is firmly determined to tackle the issue full force. Please help us in the attempt to revitalize Japanese agriculture by joining us in the struggle ahead. Thank you.

Akahata, April 23, 2008

Urgent Change Needed in Agriculture Policy to Increase Nation's Food Self-Sufficiency Rate and Encourage Farmers to Continue Agriculture

JCP's Agriculture Rehabilitation Plan

March 7, 2008

Japan is faced with a serious crisis in food and agriculture. Japan's food self-sufficiency rate has dropped to 39 percent, an extraordinarily low level in the world, while the average for other 11 advanced capitalist countries is 103 percent. Nearly 10 percent of cultivated land, equivalent to the entire area of Saitama Prefecture (38 thousand hectares), has been abandoned. The agricultural population is aging, with forty-five percent of those who are engaged in agriculture over 75 years old. Even large-scale farm households can't survive with collapsing prices for agricultural products.

LDP administration is responsible for decline of Japan's agriculture and collapse of rural communities

The present difficulties of Japan's agriculture have been caused by successive Liberal Democratic government agricultural policies since the end of World War II.

Their major "crime" among others is the policy priority of liberalizing food imports and reducing domestic production, leading to a dependence on the supply of agricultural products from abroad to meet the expectations of U.S. and Japanese business circles. Their policy of regarding agriculture as an albatross lowered the self-sufficiency rate of food without parallel among advanced capitalist countries. The total output of agriculture declined by 20% in ten years, or from 10.3 trillion yen in 1996 to 8.3 trillion yen in 2006. Although 100% self-sufficiency in rice is possible, a large quantity of rice has been imported since 1995 while the rice acreage reduction of set aside policy has been imposed on farm households.

Destroying small and medium-sized farm households, the LDP agricultural policy has been undermining the very base of agriculture. Alleging that "Japanese agriculture is uncompetitive because of its small size", the government has pushed ahead with the uniform scale expansion of farming management, and abandoned policies helpful to family farm management and living conditions such as price supports and subsidies for stable management on which every other

country puts emphasis. The rice price decreased by more than 40%, from 22,000 yen in 1994 to 13,000 yen in 2007 per 60 kilograms. But alleging that it is because of overproduction, the government is now about to impose on all farmhouses further rice acreage reduction. In addition, the so-called policy of "Direct Payment for Land-extensive Farming" promotes an unrealistic scale of expansion and "incorporation of farm management", excluding a large number of farm households that do not fulfill certain conditions. The budget for agriculture has been cut year after year. In the FY 2008 budget, it was reduced by 870 billion yen, compared with the FY2000 budget. The percentage of the agricultural budget in the general expenditures also decreased to 4% in the FY2007 from 8% in the FY1995.

Because of these policies, many farm households, including those which have expanded their acreage, are having difficulty continuing their farm management. With the number of persons engaged in agriculture having dropped by half in just 20 years, Japan's agriculture is now faced with a serious lack of successors as well as an acute shortage of farmers. There is also the problem of abandoned agricultural land being left in state of neglect. Such a situation points to an "agriculture policy ruinous to our country".

Upheavals in international food situation call for drastic policy change

In addition, things have worsened with the recent upheavals in the international situation in relation to food. In the past several months, prices for food and feed, made from imported raw materials including corn, soybean and wheat, have been rising. Underlying this are the destabilization of production caused by global climate change, the rapid increase in demand because of the economic growth of developing countries and the increase in world population, and the skyrocketing demand for corn with the world move towards biofuels. The influx of hedge funds and other speculative money into grain markets also causes the abnormal price increase. This has caused concern over the insufficient amount of feed grains coming to Japan.

The agricultural base of a country is the foundation of a stable supply of food to support the lives of its inhabitants. It also plays an indispensable role in the conservation of land and the preservation of the natural environment. According to an estimate by the Science Council of Japan, the multi-functional benefits of Japan's agriculture are evaluated at 8.2 trillion yen a year, almost equal to the output of agriculture. If the policy of placing less importance on agriculture is continued, it is as clear as day that Japan cannot cope with the pressing food problem and that the destruction of the land and natural environment will be further accelerated. Now that the condition of food and agriculture is changing drastically at home and abroad, it is necessary to review the existing agricultural administration which is based on the notion that "food may be bought at lower

prices from abroad" and that "it is a waste of taxpayers' money to use it for an inefficient agriculture." It is now required to seek and implement earnestly a policy to rehabilitate our agriculture.

The Japanese Communist Party is making every effort to overcome the Liberal Democratic Party's agricultural policy which has precipitated this crisis in agriculture and rural communities and deepened people's anxiety about food. As the Party Program stipulates, the JCP aims to change fundamentally the agricultural policy to one that gives priority to increasing self-sufficiency of food and promoting agriculture as a key productive sector.

Efforts to increase food self-sufficiency rate as a key and to give top priority to the task of restoring a 50% level

It is an urgent task for Japan to overcome this critical situation, and the 39 % self-sufficiency rate. Many public opinion polls show that an overwhelming majority of the public wish for an increase in the self-sufficiency rate of food.

To push the self-sufficiency rate to the 50% mark should be an immediate task of high priority in national politics, and every effort should be made to reach this goal.

This must be the principle of agricultural administration. If Japan takes this step, it will provide a great contribution toward solving the panhuman problem in the 21st century – environmental destruction and the food problem, including global warming and the tightening food supply.

There are sufficient conditions in Japan for development of agriculture – temperate, rainy, and other natural conditions conducive to agriculture, superior agricultural technologies, being one of the world's leading economic powers, and consumers' needs for food safety and security. A drastic change in politics toward full utilization of these conditions is called for.

The government in 2005 formulated the "Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas" setting the goal of increasing the food self-sufficiency rate to 45% by FY2015. But in fact, the self-sufficiency rate has been decreasing. In the government plan, "efforts" by producers and consumers are emphasized, but no concrete measures or responsibility for improving self-sufficiency is referred to. The "improvement of self-sufficiency" will inevitably end up as a mere slogan.

Such a stance should be corrected, and a mid- and long-term program to restore the food self-sufficiency rate of 50% as soon as possible should be made and implemented by the government. For that goal, the agricultural policy should be immediately revised towards the following course:

- 1) Improve price supports, income guarantees (direct payment) and other systems necessary to raise self-sufficiency;
- 2) In light of the rapidly aging agricultural population, enhance measures to increase and support those who engage in agriculture, in addition to the existing farm households;
- 3) Considering the natural and social conditions and multi-functions of Japanese agriculture, establish trade rules that respect each country's "food sovereignty" and maintain and strengthen necessary border measures, including tariff and import restrictions;
- 4) Extend cooperation between farmers and consumers, aiming at safe food and rehabilitation of local agriculture.

Taking account of these points, the Japanese Communist Party puts forward the following proposals for new agricultural policies, and will make every effort to realize them.

Proposal I

For sustainable agricultural operation: drastic enhancement of the system of price supports and direct payments

For a revitalization of Japanese agriculture, it is imperative to develop and improve the system to guarantee conditions for stable and sustainable agricultural operations.

While the producer rice price has been declining ceaselessly and other producer prices of agricultural and livestock products are also falling, costs for fuel, materials and feed are mounting. Business conditions of farmhouses are going from bad to worse. A drastic improvement of this situation is needed for the future prospective of securing a source of farm families, regaining abandoned agricultural land, and promoting a vibrant local agriculture.

The price support system to cover the producer cost of agricultural products is essential. Agriculture in Japan is greatly restricted under natural conditions and the scale of most farmhouses is small. Therefore, reproduction is not possible unless the producer prices of agricultural products are officially supported by government policy. The price support policy to maintain a certain level of agricultural product prices is a decisive factor in boosting farmers' zeal for production because increases in sales are linked to increases in income. As Great Britain restored and increased its food self-sufficiency rate with a strong price

support policy, an enriched price support system should be established now in Japan where the self-sufficiency rate is extremely low.

In addition, the price support system should be supplemented with the direct payment system. This is a system to guarantee farm income based on a certain criterion, irrespective of the amount of production or volume of sales. This is a system necessary to maintain the multi-functional dimensions of agriculture, including preservation of land and environment, to ensure agricultural production in hilly and mountainous areas and other disadvantageous areas where the production cost is high, and to promote organic agriculture as a means of paying attention to food safety and environmental concerns.

The Japanese Communist Party aims to establish conditions for a sustainable development of agriculture, on the basis of a price support system and an appropriate direct payment system.

I-1 Deficiency payment system to stabilize rice supply-and-demand, and producer rice price

Rice is the staple food of the Japanese people. While the overall food self-sufficiency rate is decreasing, rice production has been self-sufficient and is the leading product of agricultural operations. Rice is the central pillar of Japanese agriculture. As the price support system to sustain rice production, the JCP introduces the "deficiency payment system" to fill the gap when the farmers' sales price is below the average cost of production. As for rice produced in 2006, the producer price was 14,826 yen per bale, or 60 kilograms (average for contract prices of all brands at the Rice Price Center), about 2,000 yen lower than the average of production cost, 16,824 yen. The reward for labor of farmhouses is only 256 yen per hour, far less than the average for poor minimum wages in Japan, 683 yen. The price of rice produced in 2007 will drop even further.

I-1-1 To realize producer rice price of more than 17,000 yen

The JCP establishes a deficiency payment system to fill the gap between the producer price of a year and the average of production cost in the previous three years. The average of cost in 2004, 2005 and 2006 is 17,000 yen. Based on this system, as for the 2007 harvest, the producer rice price of at least 17,000 yen or more shall be guaranteed. This system does not mean a revival of the former food control system under which the government purchased all quantities and controlled fully the distribution of rice, which was discontinued in FY1994. But the proposed system is, in view of the established distribution by private sectors, to guarantee farmers' production costs by considering the quality, production locality and other factors. The deficiency payment system in the United States was once abolished in the middle of 1990s in line with the WTO agreement, but

was revived (in the name of counter-cyclical payments) in 2002 because of falling prices. This proves that protection of agriculture is impossible by the market-fundamentalism-first policy.

Together with the deficiency payment, based on the evaluation of the rice paddy's function of preserving the land and the environment, the direct payment coverage area shall be extended to flatlands in addition to hilly and mountainous areas. As an immediate direct payment, about 10,000 yen per 10 ares shall be paid. This means an addition of 1,000 yen to the rice price per bale, and about 18,000 yen per bale of rice produced in 2007 shall be guaranteed.

I-1-2 The government must assume the responsibility for supply and demand, and stable distribution of rice

Sufficient supply-and-demand program for improving rice reserve system

The government must take the responsibility for the stabilization of rice supply and demand, and the rice price. At least 1,500,000 tons shall be reserved to prevent a shortfall in domestically grown rice even if the index number of the yield of rice is 90 points for consecutive two years. Rice reserves shall not be sold except at the time of rice shortages. Stocks which have been stored for more than 3 years can be sold for other than human consumption. In line with this, about 500,000 tons more than the demand forecast is planned into the rice production plan.

To control a beating down of the rice price, create subsidy measures for planned distribution

The rule shall be established to control disorders in the distribution of rice, including major distributors' attempts to beat down the price, and deceptive labeling of origins, brands or quality which causes the fall in rice prices and the trend of consumers eating less rice. Subsidy measures such as interest subsidies and warehouse fee subsidies are given to distributors and organizations which make planned shipments and sales throughout the year.

Rice production adjustment shall be implemented in parallel with generous crop changeover encouragement

When adjustment of rice supply and demand is made, priority shall be given to boosting the demand for rice, which declined in 2005 to 52% of the peak in 1962. The adjustment of rice production shall not be enforced in a high-handed way of cutting subsidies to those farmhouses and districts that have not achieved the assigned reduction goal, but advantageous conditions shall be created for crop

changeovers in order that farmhouses can choose any crop to cultivate independently and voluntarily.

Utilizing Japan's conditions suitable to wet paddy rice growing, efforts shall be made to realize practical use of the rice whole crop silage system, in which the whole rice plant, including the culm and leaves can be used as feed for livestock, and rice used as forage. Production in abandoned agricultural lands and fallowed fields shall be increased immediately, guaranteeing income equal to that for rice for food per unit area.

I-1-3 To stop the obligatory import of rice as minimum access

Japan now imports 770,000 tons of rice every year. This represents 8.4% of annual consumption. The stock of large amounts of imported rice (as minimum access rice) is strangling domestically produced rice and is a major cause of the decline in the rice price. The Japanese government regards the import of rice as if it were an obligation imposed by the WTO agreement on agriculture. But the import of rice is originally not an obligation but the WTO agreement means "to give opportunity of import to those who want to import" (government reply in November 1999). The obligatory import be stopped.

I-2 To increase production of wheat, soybean and other crops by price support and direct payment

The internationally tight supply makes it an urgent task for Japan to increase production of wheat, soybean and feed crops, the self-sufficiency rates of which are extremely low. In particular, to continue and increase production of such crops in paddy fields is important for the multi-purpose use of paddies and to promote the stable supply and demand for rice.

As for price supports for wheat and soybean, subsidies to make up the difference between the production cost and sales price shall be revived and improved. In addition, in order to establish the crop change from rice to others in the paddy, a changeover encouragement subsidy of 50,000 yen per 10 ares shall be granted as direct payment to guarantee income.

I-3 To increase production of livestock, vegetables, fruits and nuts by generous supports

Policies to stabilize the prices of livestock, fruits, nuts, vegetables and crops of sweet source materials and the subsidy system for these crops shall be improved and enriched, and unregulated imports of such shall be controlled. To avoid livestock farmers' business failures caused by the rise of feed prices, the

government's support for existing feed supply stabilization funds shall be increased and a new fund to stabilize feed prices shall be established.

Price supports and direct payments as the major pillar of agricultural budget

The budget needed for the above mentioned policies is 900 billion yen based on the present amount of distribution, production costs and product prices. In the FY2008 national budget for agriculture, price and income support budget is 540 billion yen. The JCP plan is possible to implement if 400 billion is added. The agriculture-related budget of FY2008 includes an agricultural engineering budget of 670 billion yen. Price supports and direct payments to stabilize farm operations should be the key to the agricultural budget, and budgets for unessential and non-urgent works should be reexamined and cut drastically. The agricultural budget, as a whole, which has been reduced by the so-called structural reform by former Prime Minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi, shall be restored to secure the budget suitable for one of main industries of Japan. By these policies, an early achievement of a 50 percent food self-sufficiency rate will be pursued.

Proposal 2

Support family farmers in maintaining their farming operations and conserving farm land by training and developing successors including those of large-scale farmers

To raise the food self-sufficiency rate, it is vital to conserve farm land so that there will be no further abandonment of agricultural land, as well as to secure and increase successors to farm households. If we leave the abandoned land untouched, it will have negative effects on the farmland of the region such as difficulties in water management, and control of disease, harmful insects, and weeds. As many aged farmers are going to “retire,” the question of who will succeed farm management, food production and rural community life is a challenge not only for farm families but for Japanese society in general.

- 1) Maintain and develop various forms of family farming – Japan’s agriculture is actually run by family farmers, varying in size and forms; there are full-time as well as multiple or part-time farming households. Farming households are also making joint efforts in many ways, organizing collective production and village-wide farming associations. Above all, a wide range of farming families, small or large in management scale, are cooperating in water management, mowing grass on ridges, and management of farm roads and irrigation channels.

Farming families will continue to be key players in Japan's agriculture, so maintaining various forms of family farming should be placed at the core of the measures for developing successor farmers. The present farm management income stabilization measures (non-product specific farm business stabilization measures*), which discriminates farm families according to acreage, should be abolished and support will be given to all those who are willing to continue farming. Measures to improve farming conditions including a price support system should be taken for securing successor farmers and helping them to stay on the farm. The JCP strives to maintain farming households, by assisting in shared use of machinery, entrusting of farm work, and collective farming as efforts to overcome difficulties facing rural communities due to the aging farming population and small-scale of family farmers.

* The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' translation of the system is "Direct Payment for Land-extensive Farming."

- 2) Support large-scale farmers and agricultural production cooperative groups playing an important role in local agriculture – Many rural communities are facing the need to reorganize the use of farmland for large-scale farmers and village-based production organizations that are supporting the maintenance of and the work on the farmland whose owners have given up farming. The role these large-scale farmers and production organizations are playing on the ground to sustain local agriculture should be highly valued and strongly supported. To reduce the investment cost for purchasing and repurchasing large machinery necessary for scale expansion, the state should subsidize the purchase and renewal of machinery and facilities, extend low-interest loans, reduce the debt interest charge, and ease the burden of land improvement expenses.

Assistance to the production organizations should be strengthened through local governments and agricultural cooperatives, respecting the community's own initiatives and in the way that the communities are not overloaded with complicated fund management and business routine.

- 3) Support new farmers joining and settling into farming – A “new farmer assistance system” should be established to provide newcomers to farming with 150,000 yen a month for three years. A support system for those starting farming after retirement should also be established.
- 4) Oppose the lifting of the ban on business corporations acquiring farming land – Liberalization of possession and use of farmland by joint-stock companies will raise concerns about local agriculture facing a danger from the companies abandoning farming or diverting the farmland for more profitable

business on the ground that farming is “not paying.” It will also trample on the principle of the present farmland system that “recognizes the right to farmland acquisition for those who do the farming.” It could cause conflicts with neighboring family farmers about communal management of local agriculture-related properties. The JCP opposes the removal of the ban on private companies from acquiring farmland.

Proposal 3

Make efforts to establish trade rules that secure “food sovereignty” by maintaining and strengthening safeguards on borders, including tariffs

In the world today, as the negative effects of subjecting food to market principles have become apparent, the call for the establishment of trade rules that will ensure the “food sovereignty” of every nation is growing. “Food sovereignty” is the right of each country to decide its own food and agricultural policies, including effective import regulations and price support systems, and giving top priority to food production not for export but for its own people. In his report to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 2004, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food said: “the Special Rapporteur urges Governments to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food in accordance with their human rights obligations. Imbalances and inequities in the global trading system that can have profound negative effects on the right to food should be urgently addressed. It is time to examine new and alternative models for agriculture and trade, such as that provided by the vision of food sovereignty.”

The commission adopted a resolution which says, “[The Human Rights Commission] takes note with interest of the report of the Special Rapporteur.” The Japanese government voted for this resolution. The WTO agreement on agriculture should be overhauled from the viewpoint of respecting “food sovereignty” of all nations.

Taking into account differences in natural and social conditions around agriculture and the multiple functions of agriculture in each country, tariffs, import regulations and other safeguards on borders are adopted in each country to make up for disadvantages due to the gap in production conditions. In fact, the average tariff rates on agricultural imports of agricultural-exporting countries are much higher than that of Japan (12%), such as 20% of EU, 33% of Argentina, and 43% of Mexico. It is only natural to maintain and strengthen safeguards at border entry points, including tariffs.

For example, Australia's average farming area per management unit is 3,285 hectares, while Japan's is 1.8 hectares. In view of the characteristic of Japanese agriculture that historically family farmers have worked the land in this country where flatland is scarce, it is unreasonable from the beginning to compete against other countries of different conditions without various regulations including safeguards on borders.

Facing the increased demand, unstable production due to climate change, and speculation-induced price rises, crop exporters such as India, Viet Nam, Ukraine, Argentina, Russia and China, have taken steps of regulating and restraining exports, placing priority on domestic supply. If Japan discontinues the necessary safeguards and leaves the reduction of domestic production unaddressed, Japanese society and economy will undoubtedly face serious crisis for sure.

In East Asia where Japan is located, the food self-sufficiency rate of many countries is decreasing due to population increase, economic growth, and market openings. As U.S. multinational agribusiness corporations have strengthened their position under the WTO regime, these countries have drastically increased food imports. The challenge now for East Asian nations is to take collective measures for food shortages with a view to achieving the coexistence of the agriculture of all the countries in the region. It is important to strengthen cooperation in stabilizing family farming and the rural economy with wet-paddy rice cultivation as the axis, preserving national land and environment, and raising food self-sufficiency rates. There are many common tasks to be tackled through regional efforts such as to give support to small- and medium-scale farmers in production technology and agricultural infrastructure development, to create a collective stockpile of food against disaster and climate change, to establish common rules and assistance concerning hygiene maintenance and food safety against bird flu or hazardous substances, and to improve living conditions in farming communities by expanding the use of natural energy. The JCP will help to advance all these united efforts.

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) Japan concludes with different countries should, with regard to agriculture, be beneficial to the agricultural production of all parties. The JCP will examine the contents of each agreement and oppose the conclusion of any agreement that would seriously undermine Japan's agriculture, food, and other interests of the Japanese people.

Proposal 4

Ensure “food safety” and revitalization of local agriculture through farmer-consumer cooperation

Including the recent case of Chinese-made poisoned meat dumplings, there have been a series of incidents since last year that put food safety and security at great risk; falsified labeling of the origins and quality of food, illegal labeling of additives, and altering of expiration dates. There are mounting problems to be addressed concerning food safety, including residual pesticides detected in imported food products, genetically-modified food widely sold without consumers realizing it, and anxiety over BSE-infected beef. These are the issues that should be resolved by drastically increasing Japan’s food self-sufficiency rate. At the same time, the JCP strives to enhance confidence in food and to develop cooperation between farmers and consumers by developing production and distribution with a view to achieve food safety and the revitalization of local farming.

- 1) Strengthen imported food inspection system and enforce complete labeling of country of origin – Of the vast amounts of imported food products, only 10% are being inspected at the port and the airport. The rate of inspection at the water’s edge should be raised to more than 50%, and strict quarantine and inspection procedures should be implemented to prevent imported food products from entering the market until the inspection result is obtained. The country of origin of all imported food products should be labeled without exception. Genetically modified food products should be subject to strict inspection for authorization, and rigorous investigation, verification and labeling of hereditary, chronic toxicity as well as the impact on the environment of genetically modified food products should be carried out.
- 2) Strengthen the monitoring system for farm products and processed food, restore the obligation of labeling of the date of manufacture – In order to root out the “profit goes before everything” way of practice, as seen in the falsified labeling of broken-rice blended rice packages as “polished,” or selling domestic rice, blended with foreign rice or produced in different places, under a false place of origin, the JCP calls for a stricter monitoring system with strengthened penalties on violators. It also demands a unified labeling system on food, with the obligation of labeling the date of manufacture back in place.

The JCP promotes the fair management of wholesale markets, and aims to establish fair distribution rules, including the setting up of a council where a major supermarket, local producers and small- and medium-scale retailers can negotiate on equal footing, including on direct dealings, a way of transaction which is becoming prevalent.

- 3) Maintain the blanket testing as measures to fight BSW – There has been no improvement in the U.S. slipshod measures against BSE. Without yielding to the U.S. pressure, the JCP stands firm in maintaining Japan’s own measures. The import of U.S. beef should be stopped unless the U.S. establishes safety measures on its part. The JCP urges the government to continue subsidizing municipalities to carry out blanket testing from 2008 onward.

The monitoring system for bird flu and other infectious diseases should be strengthened so that in case of outbreak of such diseases, the impact can be limited to a minimum. Farm families and traders who would be affected by the culling or movement restriction of the infected chickens and other livestock should be compensated fully. The JCP strives to drastically strengthen the preparedness for explosive outbreaks of infection, including pharmaceutical stockpiles and emergency vaccine production.

- 4) Promote community development putting weight on local production for local consumption and food safety – Some local governments have declared themselves as “a city for food safety,” or “city for local production for local consumption.” Direct sales stores and direct-from-the-farm systems have become popular, and exchanges between farmers and urban consumers are developing. Efforts for supplying local farm products to local school lunches are spreading, encouraging in some areas elderly or women members of farming families and part-time farmers to take active part in the efforts. Local governments and the state will actively support these local initiatives.

Agricultural products processing and sales by using local specialties and resources are effective for expanding demand for farm products as well as for increasing local employment. Efforts to increase the use of bread and other processed food made from homegrown wheat or rice flour for school lunches will be encouraged, which will help to expand demand for domestically produced wheat and soybeans. The state subsidizes the local governments’ support measures for farm products processing.

The present efficiency-oriented way of agricultural production which excessively depends on pesticides and chemical fertilizers shall be reviewed, and supports shall be given to efforts for organic farming and other types of environmentally sound and eco-friendly and sustainable agriculture, local production for local consumption, and slow food, and the maintenance and development of a sound dietary culture.

Akahata, March 8, 2008

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