

≈ SUMMARY ≈

RURAL ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION IN JAPAN THROUGH
“ECONOMIC GARDENING”

Takashi Yamamoto
Akita International University

Principal Topic

The “Economic Gardening” is a practical approach for local economic development first employed in Littleton, Colorado, USA in 1989. The approach emphasizes on economic development efforts on investing in local businesses rather than traditional approach of attracting big firms to the local community by offering incentives and tax breaks. The Economic Gardening program focuses on providing market information for local business to increase their competitiveness and the probability of success. Another pillar of the program is paying attention to infrastructure to create a city where entrepreneurs want to live and people want to do businesses. The third emphasis is to build connections among the businesses in the city by facilitating industry clusters and cross-marketing opportunities, and strengthening connections between industry and the higher education sector.

Ohgata Village in Akita Prefecture, one of the rural municipalities in Japan, has been employing similar strategy to the Economic Gardening. Having highly specialized in rice production, the village promoted a “produced locally, consumed locally” policy, public-private partnership in agriculture, developed infrastructure, and initiated internship and entrepreneurship programs in cooperation with personnel service firms in Tokyo. This is an innovative approach in rural Akita, where it is recognized as the least entrepreneurial in Japan.

Methodology

Personal interviews were conducted with key leaders in the village, officials in prefectural and municipality governments, and executives of firms that supported the entrepreneurship program to investigate the effectiveness of the “economic gardening-like” programs. Public records and statistical data were also utilized to assess the policy impacts of the programs. The interview transcripts, public records, and statistical data were examined in the following ways:

1. for the evidence of cognitive importance for local business promotion through local economic agents;
2. for the evidence of cognitive importance for promoting entrepreneurship;
3. for the evidence of the positive impact and other consequences of the programs.

Implications

The results will provide a refreshing perspective for the literature on local business development strategies because the effectiveness and the applicability of the “economic gardening-like” programs and the promotion of entrepreneurship at micro level is not widely recognized in rural villages in Japan. Furthermore, the results will constitute a case study of the programs initiated in the US, and can constitute a body for comparative analysis.

CONTACT: Takashi Yamamoto. Center for Entrepreneurship and Leadership Studies for Regional Economies, Akita International University, 193-2 Okutsuakidai, Yuwa, Akita 010-1211 JAPAN. Tel: +81-80-1844-2896, Email: yamamoto@aiu.ac.jp