Census analysis series No.5

From an analysis of agricultural communities

Census analysis team of the project on the structure of the agricultural industry and rural regions

1. The rate of conservation of resources by communities in rural areas falls sharply when there are less than ten households.

In 2015, the number of rural communities was 138,256, a decrease of 0.7% compared to 2010. Thus far, the number of rural communities has not yet decreased as much as the number of farmers, and a certain tenacity has been recognized among rural communities in response to the decline in population and number of households. Conversely, in regard to the future prospects of rural communities, a "fragility" is also feared in the sense that many communities may well disappear through further population decline and aging due to the advance in "the limitation of rural communities."

This "fragility" of rural communities, and the relationship between rural communities' "conservation rate of resources in rural areas" (the number of communities preserving resources in rural areas divided by the number of communities with resources in rural areas) and the scale of such communities (total number of households) are illustrated in Figure 1. It is understood that once the total number of households falls below 10, the conservation rate of resources in rural areas declines rapidly. Once the number of households falls below the "critical point" of 10 households, the rural community's ability to maintain resources in rural areas weakens rapidly and comprehensively. In recent years, the decrease in the size of communities has accelerated in hilly and mountainous areas, particularly in the context of areas where agricultural and living conditions are disadvantageous. To that end, although local, it is assumed that the risk of a "collapse" occurring in which many communities reach the critical point at the same time will increase within the next 10–20 years.

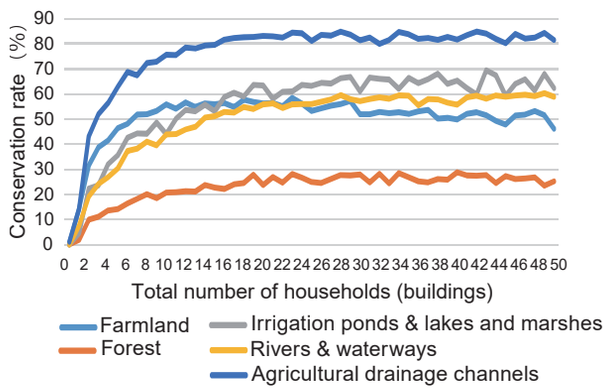

Figure 1. Community size and the conservation rate of resources in rural areas

Source: 2015 Agricultural Census.

2."Revitalization activities" have large differences depending on the content of those activities.

One of the items newly investigated in the 2015 agricultural census was "revitalization activities" by rural communities. Here "revitalization activities" are split into "offensive" and "defensive." "Offensive" activities include "green tourism efforts," "AFFrinnovation efforts," "efforts to promote residence," and "renewable energy efforts." These can be said to be efforts to halt the decline of rural communities. "Defensive" activities meanwhile are considered to be "preservation of traditional festivals, culture, and entertainment," "hosting various events," "welfare activities for older people," and "environmental beautification and preservation of the natural environment." These can be said to be efforts necessary to respond to the decline of rural communities. According to Figure 2, the activity rate of "offensive" activities is rather low compared to "defensive" activities, and the

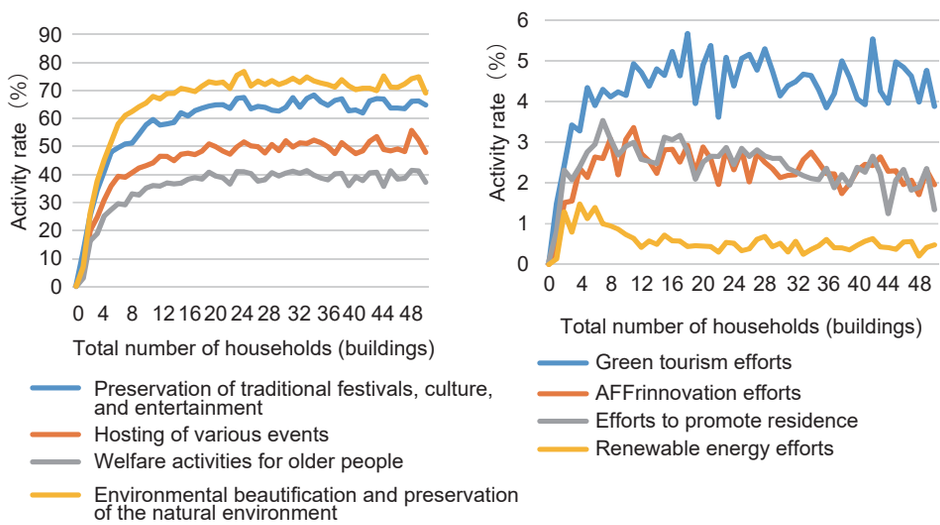

Figure 2. Community size and revitalization activities
(Left: "Defensive" activities, Right: "Offensive" activities)

Source: 2015 Agricultural Census.

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relationship with the scale of the communities is also weak. Moreover, when the total number of households of a community drops below 10, the “activity rate” (the number of communities carrying out these activities divided by the total number of communities) of the “defensive” activities declines sharply as it shrinks in size. The difference in “offensive” and “defensive” activity rates is that while “defensive” activities are often taken on through the participation of all households in principle, they are considered to be the opposite of “offensive” activities, which are often taken on independently and voluntarily by groups of residents. However, because the activity rate of “offensive” activities tends to increase as the number of hosted meetings increase, the “cohesion” of rural communities is strengthened by “offensive” efforts. Therefore, strengthening “defensive” activities can be expected to contribute towards preserving the local community.

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