「日本の棚田百選」の一つ、担い手不足などで存続が危ぶまれている山形県山辺町の「大蕨棚田」の再生に、サッカーＪ１のモンテディオ山形が乗り出す。モンテの環境・農業貢献事業の一環で、モンテ側と、棚田再生への人々の思いがつながった。米作りに参加する選手らとともに、地元有志やボランティア、町、農協が連携して、地域づくりにも取り組む。

The J1 soccer team Yamagata Montedio is starting a project to revive the Oowarabi terraced rice field in Yamanobemati, Yamagata prefecture. The future of this rice field, one of “Japan’s 100 Rice Fields”, has been cast into doubt because of the shortage of caretakers and other such reasons. As part of Monte’s project to contribute to the environment and to local agriculture, it is connected in their minds (???). The athletes who came to help with the rice-making will coordinate with locals, volunteers, the town, and agricultural groups to help boost local food production (???).

モンテの選手が田植えや稲刈りの時期に合わせて地区を訪れ、農作業に汗を流す。地区の若者や県内外のボランティアと一緒に収穫祭も開く計画だ。県スポーツ振興２１世紀協会の矢萩昭一事務局長は「なるべく多くの選手に参加してもらいたい。農業県だけに、選手の米作りへの関心も高い。長期的プロジェク トにしていきたい」と意気込む。

The Monte players will sweat while doing farm labor, during both the rice planting and rice harvesting seasons. They are also planning, along with local youth and volunteers (from both inside and outside the prefecture), to hold a harvest festival. “We would like to have as many athletes participate as possible”, said Yahagi Shouiti, general secretary of the 21st century sports promotion group, with enthusiasm. “Since this is a farming prefecture, the athletes are very interested in rice cultivation. We would like for them to make this into a long-term project.”

　今年は、昨年、引退を決めた７２歳の男性が耕作していた下段の一部計５０アールで米作りする。品種はユニホームにある「つや姫」を考えたが、耕作が県の認定農家などに限られているため断念。最上地方の中山間地で根強い人気があり、豪雪地のイメージに近い県産米「里のゆき」にした。

This year, a 72 year old man who retired recently was cultivating a lower plot with a size of 50 square meters. For crops, he thought about growing “tsuyahime” (type of rice), but this is restricted to farmers who are approved by the prefecture, so he gave up. Instead he decided on “Village Snow”, an simple type of rice that ??? image of mountainous snow, because it is very popular (???).

　来年からは、徐々に耕作面積を増やして、出来た米は試合などで売る考えだ。

Next year, he is planning to gradually increase the size of his plot, and sell the rice at sporting events and such.

　仕掛け人は、県農林水産部の元部長で、現在はフィデア総研理事長の細野武司さん（６７）だ。

The people in charge (??) are the chief of the state’s agriculture and fishing department, and the director of research at Fidea Corporation.

　「また棚田が減ってしまった。何とかできないかな」

The number of terrace rice fields has decreased again. I wonder if I can’t do something…?

　「私が何か企画を考えてみましょう」

“Let’s see if I can come up with a plan”

　山形市に住み南陽市で食品会社を経営する傍ら、大蕨棚田を一望できる実家で月２回、夫婦でそば店「六右衛門庵（あん）」を開く稲村和之さん（５８）とのそんな会話がきっかけだった。

I had a chance to talk about this subject with Inamura Kazuyuki, 58, who runs a food company in Yamagata (Nanyou??) and also, twice a month, opens a soba store near his parents’ house, from which a full view of Oowarabi can be seen.

　細野さんは、そば仲間と昨秋に開いた芋煮会で、モンテが参加する形の再生プランを提案。モンテの中井川茂敏ＧＭにかけ合って実現が決まった。細野さんは「モンテ、棚田、天日干し。最高においしい米ができるはず。棚田の最上段まで復活させたい」。

Hosona-san, along with his friends in the soba business (??), proposed the plan of Monte helping out with the revival of the field last fall at an outdoor stewed potato party. He talked to Monte’s GM, Nakaigawa, and they decided on a plan. “Monte, terrace fields, and sun drying. We should be able to make incredible rice. We want to revive the terrace field up to the highest step,” said Hosono.

稲村さんも、そば店の常連客を中心に県内外の６０人で「グループ農夫の会」をつくった。棚田での米作りのほか、ジャガイモやサトイモも栽培。地区の 歴史研究や、天体観測もする予定だ。稲村さんは「人々が集い、ともに汗を流し、語らう場にして地域の活気につなげたい」と話す。

Inamura-san, along with a group of 60 regular customers of his soba shop, formed a “group of farmers”. In addition to growing rice on the terrace field, they cultivate sweet potato and *sutoimo*. They plan to research the region’s history and conduct astronomical observations. “I want to make a place where people get together, sweat together, and talk together. I want to connect to the liveliness of the region,” Inamura said.

　地区の農家も期待する。近くの北山地区の農家と有志の会を立ち上げた稲村健さん（６６）は、モンテの米作りを水の管理など技術面から支える。稲村さんは「モンテと一緒に、幼いころ見た美しい景色を取り戻せたら、どんなにうれしいか。若者が集う起爆剤になってほしい」。

　山辺町も全面支援する構えだ。新年度予算に運営費５０万円を計上。活動拠点にと、棚田近くの公民館も修繕する予定だ。（西尾邦明）