

THE ROLE OF THE BUSINESS SECTOR FOR THE CONSERVATION AND WISE USE OF WETLANDS -ALEPH'S ACTIVITY ON RICE PADDIES-

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1. Company Profile

Aleph Inc. was established in 1968. We manage about 300 restaurants (Hamburger steak restaurant “*Bikkuri Donkey*” etc.) all over Japan. Annual sales were 36.3 billion yen (2010 fiscal year). Average rice consumption amounts to 5,000 ton in annual base. Aiming to provide customers with high quality meals, we launched an experimental farm in 1988 and started to work on sustainable agriculture. Since 2006, we have served “Less Agrichemical Rice (our private-label rice)”, which is produced with only one application of herbicide, and no other chemicals, based on Aleph’s strict specifications, in all of our restaurants. In 2008, on the COP9 to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Business and Biodiversity Initiative was established. This initiative aims to intensify the engagement of the private sector in achieving the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. As a company committed to conserving biological diversity and fighting climate change, Aleph was invited to sign the Leadership Declaration, which 42 companies around the world had already signed.

2. Starting point for Wetland Conservation

Among our contracted rice farmers, there were some farmers whose paddies located in the “Kabukuri-numa and the surrounding rice paddies”, which were designated as the Wetland of international importance in 2005. This fact was actual trigger for us to get to know the “*Fuyumizu-tambo*”(winter-flooded rice paddies) activity through some of them and to be involved in it. Then in 2005, we participated in the Ramsar COP9 in Uganda, where we were deeply impressed by the Kabukuri-numa’s activity. Actually we recognized the *fuyumizu-tambo* method should lead to promotion of agriculture not only to preservation of biodiversity. As we thought it our mission to evangelize this agricultural method to public, we have launched *fuyumizu-tambo* project with the collaboration with Mr. Inaba (NPO Japanese non-governmental rice research institute), Mr. Iwabuchi (NPO Rice Paddy Japan) and so on since 2006.

3. Activities of “*fuyumizu-tambo*” project

There are 3 main subjects in our activity.

(1) Demonstration Rice Paddy (in Eniwa city)

For the purpose of positive demonstration, we have made 1,000 square meters’ paddy in Eniwa city, Hokkaido. No agricultural chemicals have been used there. Monitoring of living things has been continued on regular base there. As citizens and the company employees have frequently experienced this monitoring and farm working like seeding, transplanting and harvesting, they also experienced the richness of rice paddies and meaning of wise use of wetlands. Totally over 3,500 people have

experienced the monitoring and the working for these 6 years. We believe that we could offer the chance of valuable experience of CEPA on rice paddies. As for the results of monitoring of living things, distinctive feature of our rice paddy and the surrounding area is observation of 24 species of dragonflies.

(2) Hokkaido project (with farmers)

With the collaboration of some farmers, we have examined whether the *fuyumizu-tambo* type method (longer flooding time than conventional method) is really possible in Hokkaido, which is the most northern area in Japan. No other area in Japan has shown such remarkable decrease of wetlands both in the terms of rate and quantity than Hokkaido in the past 100 years. *Fuyumizu-tambo* project has important purpose that farmlands in Hokkaido could be recovered with this method involving wetlands type usage in it, and the agriculture in Hokkaido could be profitable independently.

For the last 6 years, in the organic rice paddies of the particular 4 farmers, we have done the growth investigation of rice plant, and the monitoring of living things regularly. We have studied all data with the farmers and relative experts (ex. Mr. Inaba & Mr. Iwabuchi), and the results have been reported to public at the forum meeting held annually, which were utilized as the precious guideline for the next years' cultivation. As the door to the investigations has been widely opened, various people, such as municipal government, university (professor and students), research institution, local NPO, enterprises, school official and farmers have been participated so far. This process shall be also evaluated in the terms of CEPA. From the accumulation of the investigations, we have gained some remarkable results such as the live comparison between the *fuyumizu-tambo* method and the conventional farming method, the discovery of rare species of fish in the surrounding channel.

(3) The Living-Things-Friendly Rice Paddies project (with contracted farmers)

The third subject is the activity with the collaboration of the contracted farmers who supply the rice consumed in our restaurants. In 2009, we launched the Living-Things-Friendly Rice Paddies project, which was derived from the less agrichemical rice project and *fuyumizu-tambo* project. By serving rice from this new project at our restaurants, we aim to protect the things that live in the rice paddies and their habitat. The key guidelines of the project are to ensure “production with environmental concerns about rice paddies and living things: such as irrigation in winter, biotopes, passages for fish”, “the monitoring of living things” and “production without agrichemicals and chemical fertilizers”. We set our first goal of the project to expand the farming area up to 100 hectares (10% of our current procurement volume) in 2011, which we are doing by talking with our contracted producers.

In April 2010, we started serving rice produced on 10 hectares of the project in 2009 at some of our restaurants. In 2011, the farming area was expanded to 100 hectares and we achieved our first goal. The number of the restaurants where we serve Living-Things-Friendly Rice has been increased to twenty-two. We are committed to continuing our efforts to contribute to the sustainability of biological diversity through purchasing raw materials for our restaurants.