

# Lifeworlds of Natural Farming Practitioners in Japan

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# Abstract

Alternative agriculture should not be narrowly defined as a chemical-free farming system that simply excludes prohibited inputs. Rather, it represents a comprehensive philosophical and ideological framework incorporating political and social dimensions. Both alternative and conventional agriculture are rooted in ideological orientations that reflect agriculture's societal role. However, the farmers' motivations for adopting specific practices extend beyond social or ideological factors. An examination of individual farmers' lives and worldviews reveals that the meaning they derive from agricultural practices often transcends socioeconomic considerations. This paper employs Schutz's concept of the 'Lifeworld' to examine the underlying motivations and practices of natural farming. This study conducted interviews with five natural farming practitioners. First, it elucidated their perceptions of the reasons why agricultural practitioners refrain from using fertilizers. Subsequently, it revealed observational records of their off-farm activities and living environments to examine their relevance to agricultural practices. The results revealed that farmers adopt natural farming according to their lifeworlds, which are based on supra-scientific thought systems such as religion and spiritual cosmologies; that lifeworld dynamically coexists with the modern world within agricultural contexts; and that living spaces and off-farm leisure activities provide insights into the construction and expression of farmers' lifeworlds. In conclusion, analysing farmers' practices through their lifeworlds offers an approach to aligning their self-identity and self-realization with agricultural practices or rural lifestyles in modernised societies.

Keywords: Alternative agriculture; Lifeworld; Natural farming

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## Introduction

To achieve sustainable food and agriculture systems, it is imperative to transition away from conventional agriculture, which is energy-intensive and reliant on chemical inputs. In the production sector, "regenerative agriculture", which enhances environmental quality through the modification of agricultural practices, has gained considerable attention. Alternative agricultural approaches, such as organic farming, natural farming, and agroecology, offer viable alternatives to modern farming methods and are increasingly recognised as effective strategies for promoting sustainability.

However, it should be noted that alternative agriculture extends beyond mere farming methods; it represents an agricultural movement grounded in a distinct philosophy. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) identifies health, ecology, fairness, and care as the foundational principles of organic agriculture (IFOAM 2021). The principles of fairness and care promote equitable relationships among all living beings while improving the quality of life and livelihoods. Gliessman (2014), a pioneer in the systematisation of agroecology, posits that the goal of sustainable agriculture within agroecology is to address the injustices and inequalities stemming from the commodification and industrialisation of food. This includes ensuring food security for all, protecting smallscale farming, and resisting corporate control. Gliessman (2014) further asserts that agroecology is not only an academic discipline but also a social movement. Therefore, alternative agriculture cannot be reduced to chemical-free cultivation or the mere avoidance of "prohibited" inputs, such as pesticides and chemical fertilisers. Instead, it embodies ideological and movement-oriented elements, encompassing political economy, social ideals, and broader societal directions.

Nonetheless, ideology is embedded in all agricultural activities, not just in alternative farming. Thompson (2015) identifies two distinct philosophical orientations in agriculture. The first orientation views food as a commodity hence agriculture as a sector within the broader industrial economy. This perspective aligns with result-oriented consequentialism, which prioritises productivity through efficiency gains that now underpins modern

agriculture's ideological framework. Thompson refers to this agricultural philosophy as the Industrial Philosophy of Agriculture (IPA). The second orientation considers agriculture uniquely embedded in the natural environment, society, and culture. Agriculture is valued for its cultural and environmental significance, including its role in sustainability. This perspective on alternative agricultural practices, such as organic agriculture, is referred to as the Agrarian Philosophy of Agriculture (APA) (Thomson, 2015). Arguably, modern agriculture has evolved as a dialectical response to the tension between these opposing philosophical orientations (Akitsu, 2016). Consequently, all agricultural systems and practices, whether industrial or subsistence, inherently embody a certain philosophical orientation.

Despite these differences—whether they align with conventional, status quo perspectives within the mainstream political and economic structure or represent alternatives seeking change—neither is solely driven by personal motives. Rather, both philosophical perspectives are grounded in a shared sense of direction and purpose concerning agriculture's role in society. However, the motivations behind farmers' engagement in agricultural practices extend beyond the broader societal direction underlying these philosophies. Examining farmers' lives and worldviews should reveal the meanings behind their actions and practices, which may differ significantly from social and economic dimensions.

Moreover, a farmer's life is not solely defined by farming. If off-farm activities, hobbies, and other pursuits contribute to self-realisation, then the farmer's thoughts and values are also shaped by spaces and experiences beyond the farm. In other words, farmers' lives are multifaceted, so examining their lives from multiple angles is necessary to gain a holistic understanding of their identity and decision-making in agriculture.

Thus, this study focuses on farmers' lifeworlds underlying their agricultural practices. With modernisation, de-agrarianisation is emerging, marked by the declining significance of agriculture and rural areas. Small-scale agriculture, once sustained by familial inheritance, is becoming increasingly capital-intensive and commercialised. Consequently, the surplus population is migrating to urban centres in search of modern employment opportunities. In



this era of high modernity, agriculture must integrate personal motivations and self-identity with on-site agricultural practices. In agriculture, aligning individual work motives and selfidentity with farming practices and rural life ensures that agriculture is not only a livelihood but also a reflection of personal values and aspirations within the community. Achieving this requires a rural social system that supports farmers' self-actualisation in all aspects of life, including farming, off-farm employment, and overall livelihood. Such respect for farmers' self-identity and their agricultural and livelihood practices, backgrounds and contexts will help promote agricultural transitions and adoption of alternative farming methods.

Considering the background described above, this paper aims to examine the lifeworld of farmers and the factors that influence their choices, practices, and identities. The findings should inform the creation of systems that align with the aspirations and realities of farmers and other stakeholders in agriculture.

## **History of Japanese Alternative Agriculture**

This study examines natural farming as a case study, beginning with a review of past research on organic agriculture in Japan to trace its historical development and trajectory.

The modernisation and industrialisation of Japanese agriculture began in the 1960s with the use of chemicals, mechanisation, and large-scale mono-crop farming, which led to negative impacts, such as pesticide poisoning, food pollution, and environmental destruction. Organic farming in Japan, which gradually took shape around the 1970s, gave birth to a social reform movement known as the "*Teikei*". In this case, producers worked directly with consumers, with the former seeking to protect themselves from pesticide damage and the latter seeking food safety. In the late 1980s, the demand for organic agricultural products gradually expanded due to growing worldwide interest in health, safety, and environmental issues. Specialised distributors with home delivery systems for organic production emerged, making organic farming a viable business. In the late 1990s, organic agriculture became institutionalised with the introduction of policies promoting environmentally friendly farming and the establishment of organic product labelling for market distribution (Masugata 1995; Matsumura 1995).

By the 2000s, organic farming was recognised as a form of regional agriculture, valued for its social and multifunctional benefits, including nature conservation, the establishment of distinctive local food cultures, integration with school lunches and nutritional education, health promotion, urban-rural exchange initiatives, conservation of traditional culture, encouragement of rural migration, creation of regional brands, environmental and wildlife protection, and the formation of locally self-sufficient zones (Nakajima 2017; Taniguchi 2023a).

In 2021, Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries unveiled the Green Food System Strategy, which aimed to expand organic farming to 1 million hectares—25% of the total agricultural area—by 2050, a target 40 times the current scale. Motivated local governments spearheaded efforts to create "organic villages" as part of this initiative (MAFF 2024).

The above provides a review of the development of organic agriculture in Japan. Organic farming in Japan began as a grassroots movement focused on pollution control and cooperation between producers and consumers. With the entry of major distribution companies into the market, organic farming and organic agricultural products became institutionalised. In recent years, organic farming has also seen regional development. In sum, the evolution of organic agriculture has been shaped by shifting societal trends, local needs, market dynamics, and state policies, with its challenges and objectives changing across different eras and contexts.

#### History of Natural Farming in Japan

Natural farming is a method that does not use synthetic chemicals such as pesticides and chemical fertilisers and does not use any organic fertilizers from outside the field, but only the natural powers inside the field. According to the National Association for the Promotion of Natural Farming, natural farming is a permanent and systematic method of agriculture that draws on the full power of nature. It is an agricultural method that adheres to the laws of nature, drawing lessons from the natural world and respecting its processes, with nature itself as the guide.



Natural farming is fertiliser-free, meaning no external inputs are used for fertilisation. However, there are no standardised methods or materials, leading to diverse farming approaches. Practitioners range from those following established schools of thought to those adopting independent methods. Techniques such as no-till, shallow tillage, no weeding, and in-house seed production may be incorporated, but each farmer determines their approach based on personal principles and experience.

This article introduces four pioneering natural farmers whose work laid the foundation for distinct schools of natural farming. Their methods have been passed down through disciples, who have continued to teach and adapt these practices, incorporating regional variations. As a result, each region has its practitioners—though less widely recognised—who actively contribute to the transmission of natural farming. While organic farming in Japan started in the 1970s, natural farming in Japan started in 1935, which means that it has a long history before World War II. However, because of its unique ideology and immature farming techniques, it had less recognition than organic farming before Kimura Akinori, described below, appeared in the media. In academia, a strong stereotype persists that crop cultivation without fertilizers and pesticides is unfeasible. Consequently, natural farming has received far less academic attention than organic farming, leading to a limited body of research. However, in recent years, scientific investigations into natural farming have emerged in fields such as soil science and microbiology, alongside efforts by farmers themselves to clarify its agricultural chemistry (e.g., Sugiyama 2022; Kasubuchi and Arao 2021; Okamoto 2021a; Okamoto 2021b).

[Representative natural farming practitioners]

This section introduces four influential figures in natural farming: Okada Mokichi, Fukuoka Masanobu, Kawaguchi Yoshikazu, and Kimura Akinori. Okada and Fukuoka were pioneers who laid the foundation for natural farming, while Kawaguchi and Kimura developed and refined their methods independently. Each of them has published extensively, contributing to the doctrinalisation and systematisation of their philosophies and agricultural methods. They coined unique terms for their farming methods, such as *Shizen-nō*, *Shizen-nō*, and, *Shizen-Saibai*, which have inspired various schools of thought in natural farming.

#### • Okada Mokichi (1882–1955)

Okada Mokichi, founder of *Sekai-Kyusei-Kyo* (*Church of World Messianity*; the Shintobased new religion) and a pioneer of natural farming, developed his methods based on religious principles. In his book, "*Shizen noho kaisetsusho*" (Natural Farming Manual), he emphasises the importance of allowing the soil to demonstrate its natural power. He listed manure, horse manure, chicken manure, fish meal, and wood ash as matters that inhibit the power of the soil, arguing that they are "anti-natural" because they are carried by humans. He also prohibited the use of fertilisers in principle because they are poison. He also stated that the three elements of fire, water, and soil are the driving forces behind the growth of crops and that when crops are cultivated in clean soil with adequate water and sunlight, they have the potential to yield unprecedented results (Okada 1953).

Okada's criticism of fertilisers is based on his religious and medical doctrines. Okada's view of medical treatment and life included the purification of the soul, and he refrained from administering pharmaceuticals, viewing them as a means of defiling the human body, analogous to the act of applying fertiliser to farmland. Rooted in the pathological theory that pharmaceuticals are poisons that weaken the human body, natural farming methods emerged by applying this perspective to agriculture. External inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides are considered harmful to the soil and ultimately damage the soil's natural vitality (Sugioka 2018).

#### • Fukuoka Masanobu (1913–2008)

After the end of World War II, Fukuoka Masanobu created his natural farming, which combines the fertilizer-free and pesticide-free methods of Okada Mokichi with no-weed and no-tillage. Fukuoka's natural farming method eliminates the role of humans as much as possible, based on the philosophy that "man's work is meaningless and nature is God".



Fukuoka's philosophy includes Lao Zhuang philosophy, Yin-Yang Tao, Buddhism and Christianity. Fukuoka's (1983) book, "*One Straw Revolution*", introduces the technology of continuous no-till direct seeding of rice and wheat, and describes his profound philosophy of life and environment toward nature and human beings. "Clay dumplings", a characteristic of Fukuoka's natural farming method, in which seeds of vegetables, fruits, and grains are mixed with soil and rolled into several centimetres, are used in desert greening techniques in many parts of the world. Fukuoka is also a well-known supporter of greening (Kimura 2012; Obara and Akiyama 2014).

#### • Kawaguchi Yoshikazu (1939–2023)

Kawaguchi Yoshikazu was born into a family that practised conventional agriculture. He was affected by chemical fertilisers and pesticides, which destroyed his body, and he began to question conventional agriculture. In the mid-1970s, he read *"Hukugo Osen"* (Combined Pollution) by Ariyoshi Sawako (1979), a book that reported the reality of environmental pollution caused by chemical substances. He then realised that his unexplained poor health was caused by the use of deleterious chemicals such as holidol, which was used in large quantities at the time. Influenced by Fukuoka's natural farming methods, Kawaguchi tried natural farming in his fields. First, he tried direct seeding of rice paddies like Fukuoka did, but after two years of direct seeding, he could hardly harvest any rice. He experimented with starting a nursery in a dry field in spring, sowing seeds there, and then hand-planting the two-month-old seedlings individually into a no-tilled field, which successfully produced a harvest. Based on this experience, Kawaguchi, while accepting Fukuoka's methods of natural farming, concluded that crops do not grow well when left to their own devices, but that they need to be given the right treatment at the right time.

Kawaguchi's natural farming is characterised by its simplicity and low cost. Once rows are made, they are used semi-permanently. The land is neither tilled nor fertilised, grass is promptly cut with a sickle without uprooting it, and the cut grass is used as mulch. No plastic materials are used, and seeds are produced in-house (Obara and Akiyama 2014). He also emphasises handwork and recommends not using agricultural machinery that wastes petroleum resources. He recommends using only farm implements that can be moved by hand, such as sickles, hoes, ploughs, foot-pedal threshers, and windows, because only by working with one's own hands and engaging physically can one truly grasp the essence of life (Arai 2014). This farming method is suitable for subsistence farming from the aspect of minimising the use of modern materials as well as fertilisers. However, rice bran, oil cake, vegetable scraps, and rice husks from daily life are used as supplemental fertilisers.

## • Kimura Akinori (1987–)

In 1987, Kimura Akinori succeeded in the natural farming of apples for the first time in the world and gained fame as a "*miracle apple*". Kimura was also a son-in-law of a conventional apple farmer. Kimura's wife was hypersensitive to pesticides and fell asleep for a week after each pesticide application. After knowing Fukuoka's natural farming method, Kimura decided to grow apples without fertilisers or pesticides. After 10 years of no harvest, he finally succeeded in farming apples naturally in 1987 (Ishikawa 2008:44-50). The four basic principles of Kimura's natural farming are: (1) farming following the natural ecosystem, (2) not using chemically synthesised products, (3) utilising the inherent power of plants to improve production, and (4) making the most of the soil. Following these principles, Kimura's apple orchard avoids cutting weeds, prunes based on the natural patterns of leaf veins, and restricts the use of heavy agricultural machinery in the fields (Kimura 2011). Depending on the situation, he occasionally uses agricultural machinery and plastic materials. Unlike Kawaguchi's approach, this farming method is more suited to commercial farmers.

Kimura's natural farming interweaves cosmological views of nature and mystical experiences such as dragons and UFOs. Kimura described in his book an abduction experience in which he once was abducted by aliens and boarded a UFO (Kimura 2011).

Kimura's success story attracted the attention of the mass media, and since 2007, it has been published, screened, and broadcast as a book, movie, and TV program titled "*Kiseki no Ringo*" (The Miracle Apple). This has quickly made natural farming known to the public as a form of alternative agriculture.



#### **Theoretical Framework**

The ideals and values of organic agriculture can be analysed within a multifaceted framework encompassing safety, public interest, social well-being, sustainability, economics, and locality. These movements range from advocating for systemic socio-economic transformation to seeking incremental changes within existing systems. However, natural farming incorporates a distinct spiritual worldview that goes beyond scientific perspectives, integrating elements of religion, occultism, and a philosophy of care. This spiritual dimension introduces a layer of meaning that extends beyond modern rational thought frameworks.

Farmers engaged in alternative agricultural practices often have motivations that extend beyond widely recognised social values. Their choices are frequently driven by personal ideologies and aspirations for self-actualisation. However, little research has explored their lifeworld—the subjective meanings behind their actions and agricultural practices—separate from broader agricultural movements and societal structures.

This study seeks to address this gap through an ethnographic exploration of Japanese natural farming practitioners. The focus is on understanding the spirit and philosophy underpinning their agricultural methods. To guide this inquiry, the research draws upon Alfred Schutz's sociological concept of the lifeworld—the subjective, lived experiences and worldviews that shape individuals' actions and perceptions.

Schutz (1974) noted that when scientists describe the actions of their research subjects, they often articulate these actions from a subjective perspective using objective terms. However, Schutz's concept of the "lifeworld" does not refer to the objective reality examined by the natural sciences; rather, it pertains to the subjective reality that individuals experience in their daily lives. Furthermore, while natural sciences aim to measure objective facts, social sciences should focus on understanding the subjective interpretations of everyday actors.

This study utilises the perspective of Schutz's "lifeworld" to represent people's subjective perceptions and experiences in agricultural practices that are not represented in previous discussions of alternative agriculture. Using Japanese natural farming practitioners

as a case, this study collects farmers' reasons and explanations for their fertiliser-free and under what perceptions and worldviews they practice natural farming.

This study also aims to approach the lifeworld of farmers from the perspective of their off-farm leisure activities and living spaces. Off-farm life and spaces are included in the analysis to clarify how the fragmented statements obtained from the interviews relate to the lifeworld of farmers' lives and experiences. By incorporating these dimensions into the analysis, this research aims to reveal how the fragmented narratives gathered from interviews interconnect with the lived experiences of farmers.

Using these analytical frameworks, this study clarifies the diverse lifeworld of natural farming practitioners.

## Methods

The study area is situated in the Kuchitamba region, encompassing Kameoka and Nantan Cities in Kyoto Prefecture, Japan (**Figure 1**). This region is recognized as one of the largest rice paddy fields in Kyoto Prefecture, with the Hozu River (the Oi River) flowing centrally through the Kameoka Basin. The basin undergoes considerable temperature fluctuations between day and night and is frequently enveloped in dense fog, known as "Tanba Fog", from late autumn to early spring. Located adjacent to the western outskirts of Kyoto City, the area is referred to as the "kitchen of Kyoto" owing to the widely grown Kyoto rice and vegetables. Horticultural agriculture thrives in the area, benefiting from its



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## Figure 1: Overview of the research area

Source: Created by author from GSI Maps

proximity to cities like Kyoto and Osaka. These geographical conditions have contributed to a significant presence of organic and natural farming practitioners.

This study employs semi-structured interviews with five natural farming practitioners in the region. Additionally, participant observation was employed to foster deeper engagement with the research subjects. This involved working as a farming assistant, carrying out the same agricultural tasks as the informants, living with them for several days, and attending a study group alongside other farmers. The reason for using participant observation was to build a rapport with the research subjects and to experience natural farming from their perspective. This approach successfully elicited the research subjects' lifeworld through candid narratives of their daily lives, which would not have emerged in a formal interview. The observation also captured the off-farm activities, daily routines, and living spaces of the farmers.

**Table 1** presents the details of the informants. The study was conducted intermittently from 2021 to 2023. Interview data were recorded using an IC recorder, following the acquisition of consent for the recording. This research also used field notes to record the observations.

	Age	Years of farming	Сгор	Planted area
A (Male)	41	16	Rice and vegetables	Paddy fields 30a
				Vegetables fields 15a
B (Male)	35	2	Vegetables	1ha
C (Male)	41	8	Rice	4.5ha
D(Female)	38	3	Vegetables	18a
E (Male)	42	3	Vegetables	40a

## **Table 1: Overview of the informants**

Source: Primary data

In this study, recorded data and field notes were used to present findings in the form of oral statements. This approach is commonly employed in life history surveys and ethnographic studies in qualitative research. This method enables the researcher to articulate the thought processes of the subjects as part of their lived experience, without translating them into scientific terminology. Consequently, the analysis in this study did not rely on qualitative research software for coding or summarising the interview data; instead, the oral data were preserved in their original form and presented as the findings.

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# Results

## 1) Farmers' Narratives of Their Lifeworlds

This section describes the insights gained from the interviews regarding the reasons why farmers practice chemical-free agriculture, i.e., no fertilisers. It presents the farmers' perspectives on their lifeworlds, the motivations, and values that inform their farming practices.

## [Case A]

Mr A, born in 1979, began practising natural farming at the age of 25. Since then, he has been deeply involved in the spiritual world. One day, he adopted a new religion, 'Omoto,' which significantly influenced the philosophy of the Church of World Messianity, as advocated by Okada Mokichi. He subsequently incorporated Omoto's doctrines into his farming practices.

I don't have a sense of fertiliser. Even without fertilisers, the sun, the moon and the earth grow with their energy alone. The energy of the earth, the sun, the moon. But the fertiliser layer marginalises the soil energy. So, if using fertiliser, the energy from the earth cannot pass through. That's why we have to sow rye or wheat to penetrate the fertiliser-poisoning layer and then grow it.

Mr A expressed that crops can thrive without fertilisers, relying instead on the three energies: the sun (fire element), the moon (water element), and the earth (earth element). He believes that the use of fertilisers would prevent the earth's elemental energies from fully reaching the crops. This reflects Mr A's religious and everyday worldview. This perspective contrasts with the scientific approach, which primarily analyzes crops based on their nutritional composition. [Case B]

Mr B initially worked as a businessman in an industry unrelated to agriculture. During this time, he attended an organic home garden school, where he discovered the joys of farming. This experience led him to quit his job and pursue a career in farming. Although Mr B had been trained in organic farming techniques, he ultimately chose to adopt the natural farming method. He described this transition process as follows.

> At first, I was thinking of organic farming. At school for organic farming, I learnt that they only use a small amount of plantbased fertilisers, but they still have to put in quite a lot of fertilisers. I realised that I had to put in that much fertiliser, and then I thought if I actually started farming and converted it into an area that would be enough to eat from, how much fertiliser would I need to prepare?

> When it came to farming on a large scale, I felt that it would not be possible to procure that much organic fertiliser and that farming without a stable source of fertiliser would not be sustainable. I thought that I would like to do farming that is not dependent on something else, but that I can complete everything on my own, and that's how I came to natural farming.

Mr B considered the sourcing of organic fertilisers to be impractical for maintaining a stable farming business, which led him to choose natural farming. Organic farming can be practised in environments that depend on secondary nature, utilising resources such as adjacent *satoyama* (traditional rural landscapes) and thatch. Interest in natural farming tends to be greater in regions where obtaining organic materials such as plants, trees, and compost locally has become increasingly difficult. This suggests that the choice of farming methods is



influenced by factors such as whether the approach is self-sufficient, even concerning fertilisers and materials, or dependent on external inputs.

[Case C]

Mr C began his life course into farming eight years ago, at the age of 33, choosing to pursue natural farming from the outset. Prior to this, he travelled to France as a floral artist, where he discovered the concept of circular agriculture. However, rather than adopting the integrated organic farming methods that included livestock, commonly seen in Europe, Mr C was inspired by the Japanese style of natural farming as advocated by Fukuoka Masanobu.

> A Frenchman on the farm asked me if I knew Fukuoka Masanobu, and I was surprised because I didn't know who that was. Then I read Mr. Fukuoka's book, and I came to the idea that it is not organic farming. I think what Mr. Fukuoka is saying is something like insects are attracted to excessive water and fertiliser content. So, everything starts with fertilisers, and because we fertilise excessively, the insects are attracted, the vegetables become soft, they get sick, and then we have to use pesticides. So, I think all problems start from the act of fertilising.

From reading Fukuoka Masanobu's work, Mr C understood that fertilisers are often the source of pests and diseases, leading to a vicious cycle in farming. However, Mr C had additional reasons for choosing not to use fertilisers. I think that crops such as vegetables and rice are the energy value of the soil. Even with vegetables, the vibrations produced are clearly different when fertilisers are not used. As I was thinking about how to supply nitrogen more efficiently without fertilisers, I felt that my sensitivity to energy and vibrations was refined. The same vegetables, without fertilisers or pesticides, obviously have more vitality. We get energy from food to live tomorrow. So, I think that food with a high energy value is good.

For Mr C, "food with high energy value" refers to food that is nutritious and beneficial for the body. He perceives that crops grown without fertilisers have a relatively higher energy value compared to those grown with fertilisers. This perception is part of Mr. C's lifeworld, distinct from his scientific understanding.

[Case D]

Ms D originally worked in the nursing care sector but became interested in an agricultural lifestyle through farm work at her workplace. She now maintains a lifestyle that combines farming with other activities ("Half Farmer, Half X"). When asked why she practices farming without fertilisers, she explained:

I don't want to tire plants out, just like people do. I think that's the best. Vegetables should grow when they want to, and that's nature. Only humans grow slowly, and only vegetables are forced to eat nutrients and grow quickly. I think it's selfish. So, I don't need to use fertilisers.

Ms D's perspective reflects a profound respect for the natural rhythms of life. By forgoing fertilisers, she underscores the significance of allowing plants to grow naturally, aligning her farming practices with the environment rather than inducing artificial growth.



This de-anthropocentric view acknowledges the interconnectedness of all living things and promotes a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. This deep respect for life shapes the lifeworld of Ms. D's agricultural practice.

[Case E]

Mr E had over ten years of experience in the 3DCG industry in Tokyo. However, after his company underwent a merger, he transitioned to agriculture, a field in which he had long held an interest. As a newcomer to farming, he explored various agricultural methods and ultimately chose to practise natural farming.

> At first, I didn't care about natural farming or organic farming, I just went to see various farmers. I went to organic farming and conventional farming. Then I was introduced to natural farming, went to see it, experienced it, and ate the vegetables, which were very tasty. And I felt that natural farming seemed the easiest. I didn't need to know about pesticides; I didn't need to know about fertilisers, and when I saw the natural farming land, the vegetables were very well done, so I thought this farming method was good. Also, I thought the food tasted good. I wanted to produce delicious food, and it just so happened that it was natural farming.

For Mr E, the pursuit of natural farming was initially motivated by his curiosity about producing flavourful food and his belief that this method would be the most straightforward and enjoyable approach to agriculture. In an interview, he stated, "I do not possess the spiritual beliefs commonly associated with many natural farming practitioners, nor do I have the food safety awareness that organic farmers tend to have."

#### 2) Connection between Off-farm Activities and Lifeworlds

In this section, the lifeworlds of natural farming practitioners are re-examined by connecting direct observation data from interactions in off-farm activities with previously described interview results. This section focuses on Mr A and Mr C.

## [Case A]

I assisted Mr. A with his farm work for several days, during which time I lived, stayed over, and ate at his home. In Mr A's home, there was a ritual prayer offering from the "Omoto" religion, which is the doctrinal source of natural farming, and his affinity for religion was evident in his living space.

After returning home for dinner, Mr A and I watched videos of conspiracy theories and the spiritual world over drinks. From the videos, we shared matters such as "there is a world that science cannot understand" and "there is a conspiracy at work in the world". In the occult magazine "*moo*", Mr A's favourite, there is an article about Kimura Akinori, who realised the natural farming of apples. We read Kimura's article together and strongly agreed with the author that "natural farming and UFOs are both true".

From this, I learned that Mr A is highly sceptical of modern science and does not trust the scientific agronomic system based on nutrient cycles and that his "no sense of fertiliser" lifeworld is also embedded in his daily life, which embraces religion, conspiracy theories, and the occult.

## [Case C]

I attended a study group with Mr C for six months, during which we took turns reading a book titled "*Kojiki to Kototama*". According to the book's author, Shimada Masamichi (2020), "Kototama" is described as the smallest unit of language and the fundamental essence of the human spirit. It simultaneously represents both the mind and the word—the word that embodies the mind and the mind that manifests as the word. The human spirit is composed of fifty elements, each corresponding to one of the fifty sounds in



Jurnal Pemikiran Sosiologi Volume 11, Issue 2, 2024 (55-81) the Japanese syllabary (aiueo). Each of these elements is referred to as "*kototama*," or the spirit of words.

Shimada states "*Kojiki*", Japan's oldest historical text, describes the secrets of the spirit of speech. The names of the gods featured in that book are interpreted as the names of individual spirits of speech, the building blocks of the human spirit, and the laws that govern them.

While engaging in this study, Mr C shared, "I began to understand the relationship between natural farming and *kototama*". For example, the sound " $\dot{\pi}$ "("*ne*"), which represents life " $\mathcal{A}$ "("*i*"), embodies the creative will to live, and this transforms into " $\mathcal{A}$ "("*ine*"; rice). Similarly, the sound " $\dot{\mathcal{P}}$ "("*u*"), which signifies a beginning, is seen in " $\dot{\mathcal{P}}$ "("*ueru*"; planting), representing the initiation of conscious movement.

From this, it is evident that Mr C's understanding of natural farming, particularly his focus on the energetic value of crops, is intertwined with his exploration of the philosophy of words. In addition, his preference for natural farming methods of Japanese origin—rather than Western organic approaches that integrate livestock and animals—is reflected in the philosophical exploration underlying his extra-farming activities.

#### Different Lifeworld from the Scientific Perspective

From the aforementioned five case studies, I have constructed a representation of the lifeworld associated with natural farming. As seen in the narratives of Mr A, Mr C, and Ms D, they were in a cognitive world where "fertiliser is poison and is completed by the power of soil(earth), fire (sun), and moon (water)", "the energy value increases by not using fertiliser", and "fertiliser makes the speed of plant growth unnatural". These perceptions, however, cannot be quantified using the metrics of natural science. They also reflect a worldview distinct from the organic agricultural paradigm, which primarily emphasises eliminating chemical fertilisers and pesticides deemed harmful to human health and the environment. The choice to eschew fertilisers is rooted in a lifeworld informed by a super-scientific framework of thought, which is characterised as possessing religious or spiritual dimensions. Consequently, to fully comprehend the motivations underlying farmers'

agricultural practices, it is essential to contextualise contemporary scientific frameworks and indicators while engaging with the lifeworlds of farmers' everyday experiences.

#### The Coexistence of the Modern World in the Lifeworld

In contrast, Mr B's "It is difficult to procure organic fertilisers, and using no fertilisers is less labour-intensive and more stable for farming", and Mr E's "The taste of food is better with no fertilisers than with fertilisers", and "I thought it was less labour-intensive because it did not require knowledge and skills in fertilisers and pesticides". These "no-fertiliser" reasons are interpreted by modern rational thought systems. These viewpoints reflect practical considerations and managerial advantages associated with natural farming that align with contemporary agricultural practices. Consequently, farmers' motivations for these practices vary, from those based on modern rationality to perspectives that go beyond conventional scientific understanding, reflecting a broad range of thought processes.

Alternative agriculture, including natural and organic farming, is often regarded as embodying a rationality distinct from modern rationality, as well as featuring elements of environmental and social activism. However, the narratives presented in this study indicate that practitioners of alternative agriculture may also be categorised as "weak thinkers." It is the "weakly ideological" frameworks that constitute their lifeworld. Consequently, there are two pathways through which farmers opt for alternative agriculture: philosophical motivations and practical farming methods. This duality suggests that the choice to engage in alternative agriculture can be influenced by both philosophical convictions and pragmatic considerations.

This paper highlights that these systems of thought are coterminous. Agriculture encompasses a variety of practices that reflect diverse subjectivities, indicating that farmers' underlying lifeworld may differ significantly, even when their farming methods and practices appear similar. The contemporary farming system can thus be understood as a mosaic of diverse farmers' lifeworlds. The interviewees in this study had organized a joint shipping group, wherein each member contributed their produce to deliver vegetable sets to urban areas. This initiative demonstrates how alternative agriculture fosters a community



that bridges diverse values, facilitating joint distribution and sales. Through these collaborative efforts, a shared agricultural community takes shape, integrating various perspectives and practices.

#### Methodology for Approaching the Lifeworlds of Farmers

Farmers' lives are not solely made up by their agricultural practices. This is particularly true in the context of alternative agriculture, where many farmers engage in side jobs or hold multiple occupations to mitigate low profitability and diversify management risks. Consequently, the lifeworld of these farmers is shaped not only by their farming activities but also by off-farm employment, livelihoods, hobbies, and leisure pursuits. When analysing the significance and context of a farmer's lifeworld, a comprehensive analysis should include both agricultural and off-farm activities, including social life, leisure activities, and other aspects of their personal life.

In this study, the farmers' lifeworlds are examined in relation to their unique perspectives, which differ from the scientific worldview. The research highlights their life spaces, including off-farm activities, and acknowledges that alternative agriculture, as a means of self-realisation and a lifestyle choice, extends beyond the farm. Thus, understanding the farmer's lifeworld requires capturing their life as a whole person, rather than merely focusing on their role as a farmer. This approach serves as a methodology for comprehensively understanding the lived experiences of the farmers.

However, analysing an informant's entire life requires prolonged engagement, which may raise privacy concerns and impose a significant burden on the participant. Such an approach depends on establishing close intimacy and rapport between the researcher and the informant, which limits the volume of research output that can be produced.

# Conclusion

This study demonstrates that agricultural practices are deeply rooted in the customary everyday thoughts of individuals involved in diverse farming methods. In the context of alternative agriculture, while each agricultural method or movement is guided by its philosophy, this is not the sole motivation driving farmers. Fully understanding the motivations behind agricultural practices requires examining them through the lens of farmers' everyday lifeworlds.

Identifying the farmers' lifeworld is crucial for respecting their identities and facilitating their self-realisation as they engage in agricultural practices in the future. In light of the current shortage of farmers in Japan, local rural communities seek to attract new entrants to the agricultural sector. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that these farmers may have personal motivations that are not necessarily aligned with prevailing social systems.

To fully understand the lifeworld of farmers, surveys should extend beyond the confines of agricultural practices and encompass all aspects of their lives as persons. Similar to the concept of "Half Farmer, Half X," employment and lifestyles outside of farming play a crucial role in farmers' self-realisation and form integral components of their overall lifeworld. Accumulating unexpected discoveries—where seemingly unrelated aspects of life connect to agricultural practices—offers a deeper qualitative understanding of the diverse lifeworlds of farmers.

The research focuses on the lifeworlds of those practising natural farming, which can also imply why conventional farmers may not opt for natural farming or other forms of alternative agriculture. While the transition to a sustainable agricultural system is often framed in terms of changes in farming methods—focusing on challenges such as profitability and inadequate agricultural technology—qualitative factors also warrant consideration. Specifically, the differences in lifeworld between conventional and alternative farmers may explain why conventional farmers are less inclined to shift to alternative agriculture.



The analytical perspective presented in this study applies not only to alternative farming but also to discussions surrounding the conduct of agricultural practices in traditional contexts, framed through the everyday knowledge and experiences of practitioners. For instance, imposing standardised behavioural principles on farmers—rooted in the implicit Western modern rationality of the researcher—raises concerns, particularly when traditional societies are evaluated or critiqued with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper seeks to articulate the diverse, everyday subjective practices of various cultural backgrounds from a bare, life-sized perspective, rather than through a singular, homogenised lens.

Taniguchi (2023b) posits that sociological and agronomic knowledge are inherently complementary, highlighting the need to establish research fields that facilitate collaboration between these two disciplines and extend their findings to broader societal contexts. In agrochemistry within agricultural sciences, efforts are underway to advance a scientific understanding of organic and natural farming practices. However, research should integrate not only quantitative data but also the lived experiences and voices of farmers. Future agricultural research must prioritise interdisciplinary collaboration between sociologists and agronomists to create a more comprehensive understanding of agricultural practices.

Regarding the off-farm aspects of the lifeworlds discussed in Discussion 3, it is important to note that the lifeworlds observed in this study are limited to the supra-scientific daily experiences of the farmers without yet incorporating the perspective of individuals within general society. Furthermore, background information concerning family structures, sales activities, and the relationship between these factors and the farmers' lifeworlds have not been addressed in this study. These areas could be directions for future studies.

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