The Scramble for Food between People and Cars

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Sugar cane, sugar beets, corn, barley, potatoes, sweet potatoes―do you have an idea what they are? You may say, “They are ingredients for food, aren’t they?” In a way, it’s correct; however, this answer needs a little revision in this essay. They are not only ingredients for food which we eat, but also ingredients for cars’ food, called *bio-ethanol*. It is said that using bio-ethanol as a part of fuel could cut carbon dioxide emissions, so it has been recently introduced and spread gradually all over the world. It seems that this energy has begun to influence the world’s situation of food and agriculture because a strange scramble has been occurring. How is the influence of introducing bio-ethanol? Is it a good influence or a bad influence?

The first influence is that the price of wheat has risen. The prices of processed foods that are made from wheat also have risen: *udon*, bread, pasta, and instant noodles. One of the causes of this effect is related to bio-ethanol (“Rise in the price,” 2007). The main ingredients for bio-ethanol are sugar cane and corn, and the market prices of these have gone up because of the spread of this energy. Thus, many farmers have started to grow sugar cane and corn while they have stopped producing other crops, including wheat, in order to earn more. Consequently, the production of wheat has fallen, so the price of it has risen. Besides wheat, there are some crops whose prices have risen owing to farmers’ changing crops: oranges, soybeans, and rapeseed. People who eat processed food made from them are now in trouble. Ironically, they are losers who lost to cars in the scramble for food.

The second influence is that the prices of some livestock products have risen (JIWET, n.d.). As stated above, farmers recently tend to produce sugar cane and corn, which are the main ingredients of bio-ethanol. However, in spite of that tendency, the output of corn is insufficient, and the price of corn has gone up. It is because corn is the main ingredient for feed as well as bio-ethanol. After introducing bio-ethanol, livestock breeders have to pay more for feed, and the cost of breeding domestic animals has risen. As a result, the prices of some livestock products have gone up: ham, sausage, and milk. In addition, there are people who eat corn as a staple food. They are mainly poor people, so they cannot afford to buy such expensive corn. Unfortunately, some people may lose the scramble again.

The two influences mentioned above seem to be bad. However, there is a good influence of introducing bio-ethanol. The third influence is that in Japan, some regional communities are trying to promote their local agriculture by producing bio-ethanol. For example, in OkinawaPrefecture, there is an attempt to produce bio-ethanol from superfluous syrup which is made during the sugar extraction process (“Development,” 2006). In Okinawa, because growing sugar cane and producing sugar from them are prospering, this attempt is expected to work. Besides Okinawa, some communities are trying to make use of bio-ethanol to promote their region. Those effects may contribute to Japanese agriculture because they may raise the value of farm products and increase the employment of farmers and the food self-sufficiency rate. What’s more, in these cases, there is usually no scramble between people and cars.

In conclusion, introducing bio-ethanol has both good influences and bad influences. The prices of both wheat and livestock products have increased, yet some local communities have benefitted from the move to producing bio-ethanol. I don’t think it can be declared clearly that the either influence is greater. However, strange to say, it is obvious that we are now competing with cars to get food. I think that it is important to produce bio-ethanol without using “food” (the food we eat) from now on. This is especially important for a country like Japan, which has a low food self-sufficiency rate. If the technology for producing bio-ethanol without using “food” is developed, and local agricultural promotion by producing bio-ethanol without “food” spreads, solving food, agricultural, and environmental problems will advance in Japan at the same time. I hope this will be realized in the near future.

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