

研究ノート

Initiatives for the Use and Presentation of Local Resources in Rural Restaurants: A Case Study of Northern Ibaraki City

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Abstract

Restaurants that serve local food, including those owned by farmers, can communicate the appeal of local food resources and respond to urban people's interest in rural life by preparing and serving local agricultural products, including their own productions, to their visitors. In this paper, we focus on restaurants in the northern part of Ibaraki City and examine how each restaurant uses its own resources to present the appeal of its food. The three restaurants used as case studies in this paper focus on connecting with people, not on increasing profits. The objectives of a restaurant business can be summarized as attempting to figure out how to make customers want to dine in the restaurant again, and all three restaurants have achieved stable customer acquisition by responding to customer needs. To sustain such connections, they work on presenting and disseminating information about the food resources, stores, and surrounding environments.

Keywords: Farmhouse Restaurant; Food Procurement; Menu; Local Productions for Local Consumption; Staging; Information Dissemination

1. Introduction

In Japan, measures have been taken to promote agricultural products from each region by providing and cooking processed products. Specifically, businesses have been developed in the form of the direct sales of agricultural products, farmhouse restaurants, and farmhouse inns. This is due to the growing interest of urban residents in farming, mountain, and fishing villages and the need to address the decline of vitality in rural areas due to the concentration of the population in urban areas. These efforts have been expected to fulfill the demands of tourists and residents, both inside and outside the region. In this context, restaurants that serve local food, including those owned by farmers, cook locally produced agricultural products, including their own productions, and serve them to their visitors, thereby communicating the appeal of local food resources and responding to urban interest in rural life. Although cooked food can be transported within a certain range, as with take-out and food delivery, which have attracted attention with the spread of the new coronavirus infection (COVID-19), it is necessary to visit the local area and its restaurants to eat the food, except in cases where the food is served at events held in other areas. Therefore, while agricultural and processed products are local resources that can be moved, cuisine can be regarded as a local resource that cannot be moved, like the natural environment and architecture of the local area. From this point of view, restaurants that serve food made from locally produced ingredients may contribute to an increase in the number of people in the region. Therefore, when each restaurant prepares local food based on its own policy, the added value of the local food will lead to the revitalization of urban-rural exchanges.

What should be kept in mind here, however, is whether the services provided by the restaurant match the demands of the customers. To have a stable customer base, it is necessary that the restaurant operator's policy and the customers' preferences match or that the former changes the food offered to suit the latter. Among the previous studies examining the services provided by restaurants and the impact of restaurants on the local community, the works of Otomo (2014), Otomo (2020), and Saito et al. (2016) focused on farmhouse restaurants. Otomo (2014) focused on the process of utilizing local resources in farmhouse restaurants and pointed out that managers who strategically position and utilize local resources are already striving to understand the needs of consumers through engaging in dialogue with them before opening their restaurants and continuing to discover and produce local resources even after opening. The local resources that are important for the sustainable management of a farmhouse restaurant include not only the food and the menu, but also the interiors, the surrounding environment, and the information disseminated. Otomo (2020) focused on the menu, categorized it into traditional and non-traditional types, and then divided the role of farmhouse restaurants in the region into non-economic aspects, such as transmitting local lifestyles and culture, and economic aspects, such as agricultural management. Furthermore, Saito et

al. (2016) compared two farmhouse restaurants in different locations, one in a rural village and the other in a residential area, and clarified the impact of farmhouse restaurants on residents' awareness. However, these results are not immediately applicable to other regions. Each of the previous studies was based on the actual situation of the specific region used as the case study. Given the differences in the agricultural and marine products produced in each region and the policies of the operator, it is necessary to examine the actual situations of other regions separately. This paper will thus focus on restaurants in the northern part of Ibaraki City and examine how each restaurant uses its resources to present the appeal of its food.

This paper approaches the issue in the following way. First, in section 2, I will provide an overview of the restaurants in Ibaraki City, including the background of their opening, and in section 3, based on interviews with each restaurant's owner, I will clarify the characteristics of the food that they serve, as well as the presentation and communication of the restaurants and their surrounding environments.¹⁾ In section 4, I will discuss the background of each restaurant's efforts based on the results of section 3, and in section 5, I will present the prospects and remaining issues.

2. Definition of Farmhouse Restaurant and an Overview of the Case Studies

2.1. Definition of Farmhouse Restaurant

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), in its "Comprehensive Survey on Six-Tiered Industrialization," defined "farmhouse restaurant" as "a business in which an agricultural business entity or an agricultural cooperative, etc. obtains a license to operate a restaurant or coffee shop under the Food Sanitation Law, and serves food to unspecified persons using agricultural products or local ingredients produced by the entity or its members (cooperatives), regardless of the percentage used." In terms of the results of the 2019 survey by business, of the total profit of 2,077.25 billion yen from agricultural production-related businesses, the annual sales value of each business was 946.84 billion yen in agro-processing, 1,053.37 billion yen in the direct sales of agricultural products, 35.94 billion yen in tourist farms, 5.41 billion yen in farmhouses, and 35.70 billion yen in farmhouse restaurants. Farmhouse restaurants did not account for a particularly large share of agricultural production-related businesses.²⁾ In contrast to this definition, Otomo (2020) defined farmhouse restaurants as "those that are actually called farmhouse restaurants by the government or the local community (not limited to farmers but operated by chefs or the government)" since these restaurants are diversified in terms of their main body, menu, location, and management method.³⁾ In addition, the Organization for Urban-Rural Interchange Revitalization (2007) defined farmhouse restaurants as "restaurants located in the area where the farmers themselves, or in close collaboration with them, prepare and serve food using ingredients produced by the farmers or local ingredients," and the same result did not limit the actors to farmers. Based on this

diversification of the definition, the farmhouse restaurants mentioned in this paper are not necessarily limited to farmers.

2.2. Selection of the Case Study Subjects

In this paper, three restaurants operating in Ibaraki City, that is, Yumesaki-Chaya, Ichimuso, and Amagaeru-Saien, are used as the case studies. The outline of each restaurant is shown in Table 1. Ibaraki City has the geographical characteristics of an urban area in the south and a rural area in the north. In this environment, it has become an important issue for the latter to promote the various local resources, including food, to revitalize the area. In the northern part of Ibaraki City, there are several restaurants and eateries, including the De-Ai-Hokkori “Miyama-no-Sato” (hereinafter referred to as “Miyama-no-Sato”) of the Miyama-no-Sato Exchange Facility Association, which sells agricultural and processed products produced in the area and offers dishes using these products. The three restaurants used as the case studies in this paper are all located in the northern part of Ibaraki City and were selected from among the restaurants in the northern part of the city that fit the definition of a farmhouse restaurant as described above.

2.2.1. Overview of Yumesaki-Chaya

Yumesaki-Chaya is a restaurant operating in Zenihara District, Ibaraki City. The owner has lived in the northern part of Ibaraki City since she was a student and was initially engaged in a business different from the food service industry. However, when an old house was put up for sale as a vacant property and a friend of the owner purchased it, she rented the property and opened Yumesaki-Chaya in 2013. She chose to work in the restaurant business because she had a cooking license from her previous business experience. She did not have an established goal to open a restaurant before opening the business but was able to rent a property in the northern part of Ibaraki City and meet the requirements for opening a restaurant, including obtaining her own license.

In the beginning, the restaurant was open irregularly on weekdays, but now it is open only on Saturdays and Sundays because there are relatively few customers on weekdays and because she has decided to return to the work that she was doing before opening the restaurant. Not only the manager but also relatives and friends are engaged in serving customers; including the manager, there are two to three people handling the business. More than half of the customers who visit the restaurant are residents of the neighborhood or acquaintances of the owner, and it is thought that good relationships with these frequent customers would be important for the sustainable management of the restaurant.

2.2.2. Overview of Ichimuso

Ichimuso is a restaurant that was opened in 2005 by an owner from the northern part of Ibaraki City. The owner had been involved in the operation of a restaurant in Miyama-no-Sato and later opened a restaurant in her renovated old house with the aim of serving food at her own pace with her family. She had also produced rice and vegetables with her family before she became involved in the food service industry, which she either consumed on her own or gave away to other relatives and friends.⁴⁾ However, as will be explained later, since opening Ichimuso, the agricultural products that they produce have also been used as ingredients for the restaurant.

Most of the customers come from outside the northern part of Ibaraki City, and there are a relatively large number of female customers and repeat customers with families. Ichimuso has only eight seats and requires customers to make reservations. In addition to the policy of cooking at one's own pace, the restaurant also places importance on communication with customers and aims to increase the satisfaction of each customer while limiting the number of customers, thereby attracting repeat customers. Based on this, Ichimuso's main goal is not to increase profits further, but to maintain relationships with the customers.

2.2.3. Overview of Amagaeru-Saien

Amagaeru-Saien is a farm that the owner opened in Zenihara District, Ibaraki City, after retiring from his previous job. In 2011, he purchased the land where Amagaeru-Saien is currently located, bought chicks, and raised them as egg-laying hens before opening the business in 2013. Later, he started running a café in 2018, as he had always wanted to offer food and beverage services. In the beginning, the business was run by the owner and his wife, but now it is run by three people, including a relative. They have been producing agricultural products using natural farming methods and selling them in stores,⁵⁾ but in recent years, they have been consolidating their business to focus on poultry farming.

They only open the store on Sundays to sell eggs and provide food services within their own means. To continue their business, they do not focus on attracting more customers; rather, they focus on enhancing communication with customers and creating a cycle where customers who fit their business policy will come back to the store. As of 2021, 30% of the café's customers are repeat customers, and most of them come from outside the northern part of Ibaraki City.

Table 1: Overview of each restaurant

Restaurant	Yumesaki-Chaya	Ichimuso	Amagaeru-Saien
Year of Opening	2013	2005	2018
Location	Zenihara District, Ibaraki City	Kamiotowa District, Ibaraki City	Zenihara District, Ibaraki City
Number of Employees Excluding Managers	1 or 2 people (Relatives or Friends of the Owner)	1 person (Relatives of the Owner)	2 persons (Relatives of the Owner)
Menu	Curry and Rice, Udon (Thick Japanese Wheat Noodles), Set Lunch, Fried Rice, Sweet Red-Bean Soup, Chiffon Cake, etc.	Monthly Course (Aperitif, Appetizer, Handmade Tofu, Pumpkin Soup, Tempura, Grilled Pacific Saury, Rice with Egg, Miso Soup, Pickles, Dessert) Mackerel Sushi (take-out only)	Chiffon Cake, Chicken Ramen Noodle, Toasted Muffins, etc.
Unit Price of the Menu	450 - 1,500 yen	3,850 yen (mid-April to October) 4,180 yen (during periods other than the above)	880 yen
Number of Customers per Day	2~20 persons/day	4~5 persons/day	10~30 persons/day
Days and Hours of Operation	Open Saturday and Sunday only 10am - 4pm	Closed Tuesdays, beginning of the month, O- bon and New Year holidays (reservations required) 11:30am - 3pm	Open Sundays only 8:30am - 3pm
Number of Seats	20 Seats	8 Seats	10 seats

Note: Ichimuso's monthly menu is for October 2021; the unit price differs between mid-April to October and the rest of the year because the latter includes heating costs.

Source: Based on interviews at Yumesaki-Chaya, Ichimuso, and Amagaeru-Saien.

3. Production of Local Resources in the Northern Region

3.1. Yumesaki-Chaya

3.1.1. Providing Dishes Using Local Ingredients

Curry rice and chiffon cakes are served all year round, while the contents of the whimsical lunches are changed every month.⁶⁾ Although the owner is not engaged in farming herself, her family grows rice and vegetables, such as sweet potatoes, radishes, and Chinese cabbage, in the northern part of Ibaraki City, which are used as ingredients for the dishes served at Yumesaki-Chaya.⁷⁾ In addition, Ryuoh-Miso,⁸⁾ a specialty of the region, is used in the dishes at Yumesaki-Chaya. The menu mainly consists of dishes that can be prepared with home-produced ingredients as much as possible, but those that cannot be produced by the owner are procured from the nearby Miyama-no-Sato, open-air markets, and other retail stores.

However, when the owner does procure food, she mainly procures fresh products, which are processed and cooked at Yumesaki-Chaya. She tries to use ingredients produced in Ibaraki City, mainly from the northern part of the city. The reason for this is that Yumesaki-Chaya places importance on conveying the deliciousness of agricultural products from the northern part of the city, including homegrown vegetables.

3.1.2. Creating an Atmosphere in the Store with Customer Participation

What is unique about Yumesaki-Chaya is that not only the management but also the local residents, including the customers, have been involved in the interior design. As mentioned earlier, Yumesaki-Chaya is an old private house that has been renovated into a store, and the furniture has been arranged to maximize the space. During this process, regular customers and the owner's relatives voluntarily brought items that they thought would fit the atmosphere of the old house.⁹⁾ In this way, Yumesaki-Chaya no longer needed to be furnished by the owner alone; the store has thus been able to create an atmosphere that matches the sensibilities of its regular customers. It can be said that the interior design of Yumesaki-Chaya has been shaped by the management and customers together. This is one of the factors that have made it possible for the store to attract regular customers.

On the other hand, many customers come to Yumesaki-Chaya for the first time from outside the northern part of Ibaraki City, and it is important to inform these prospective customers about the restaurant's menu and the surrounding environment. To address this issue, Yumesaki-Chaya operates a blog where it posts information about its business days, life in the northern part of Ibaraki City, events,¹⁰⁾ and its lunch menu. It is important to note that the blog started in 2012, before the opening of Yumesaki-Chaya, when the old house was being renovated. Considering the fact that the blog was set up for the business of Yumesaki-Chaya, it can be observed that the management has been publicizing the store from an early stage. Some of the visitors to the restaurant order from the menu displayed on the blog, and it can be assumed that the blog is attracting customers to a certain extent.

3.2. Ichimuso

3.2.1. Consideration of Monthly Menus

The only menu available at Ichimuso is a course meal. As mentioned earlier, the owner of Ichimuso grows her own rice and vegetables in her vegetable garden, and although she sometimes procures some of the ingredients from Miyama-no-Sato or other retailers, she decides the menu based on the produce harvested from her garden at that time of the year. The owner has been involved in the management of the restaurant in Miyama-no-Sato and has experience in considering ingredients for set meals, but even before that, she participated in activities related to cooking in the local community and was elected as a leader of these activities. Since she has thought about the menu for a long time, it can be inferred that the food served

at Ichimuso is largely based on the experiences and qualities of the owner.

Since the menu changes monthly, many repeat customers visit the restaurant less than once a month. For example, the restaurant offers seasonal menus, such as Osechi (New Year's Eve) dishes in January and wild vegetable dishes in April. In addition, through communication with customers at the time of serving food, the owner is able to understand customers' requests regarding food and when to serve it and reflects the requests in the menu for each month as much as possible. This may be due in part to the fact that the restaurant uses a reservation system to keep the number of customers to a small number, which allows the restaurant to spend more time communicating with repeat customers.

3.2.2. Staging the Store through Seasonal Events

To date, Ichimuso has not sent out any information with the aim of increasing awareness of the restaurant. This is because the restaurant has not aimed to increase its revenue since its opening. To maintain the policy of providing food and beverage services at a reasonable cost, the owner sees no incentive to promote Ichimuso actively to an unspecified number of people outside the area. As a result, when the restaurant first opened, the number of customers did not increase for a period of time, but the number of customers gradually increased as word of mouth spread through the owner's relatives and friends. In addition, some customers have been posting about Ichimuso on their own blogs and social networking sites, and those who have seen these blogs sometimes come to Ichimuso. This has a lot to do with Ichimuso's renovated old house. For example, in March, the store is decorated with many Hina dolls to celebrate the Peach Festival, and in May, the store is decorated with helmets to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival. During this time of the year, many families come to the store to eat while looking at the dolls and helmets on display. The dolls displayed in the restaurant are not only those originally owned by the owner, but also those brought in by customers. Although the time of the year is limited, it can be said that Ichimuso has been working together with customers to create an atmosphere in the restaurant that allows them to be aware of the traditional culture.

Ichimuso also places importance on the view of the garden from the eating space and asks a landscaper to take care of it every year, as well as cultivate a variety of flowers so that customers can see them at any time of the year.¹¹⁾ The owner maintains the garden in harmony with the old house so that customers can enjoy not only the menu but also the scenery.

3.3. Amagaeru-Saien

3.3.1. The Characteristics of Food Made from Homegrown Chicken Eggs

Amagaeru-Saien's main business is poultry farming, and as of October 2021, it has about 40 chickens. The eggs produced are sold on the premises and also served as chiffon cakes, chicken noodle soup, and

toasted muffins.¹²⁾ All of the dishes available at Amagaeru-Saien are limited to these three types of food that use chicken eggs. Initially, the restaurant was run by a husband-and-wife team, but they lacked the food and beverage know-how and skills to offer the above menu while running a poultry business, so they partnered with restaurants in the northern part of Ibaraki City, such as Yumesaki-Chaya, to develop products jointly and outsource the cooking. Later, however, a relative who had newly acquired skills as a pastry chef joined the management and was able to provide the entire menu for the café. The menu has not changed since the opening of the restaurant, and no new menu items have been added to attract customers.¹³⁾ This is because, as mentioned earlier, the main purpose of the restaurant is not to increase the number of customers or revenue.

3.3.2. Integration with the Poultry Farming Business and Information Dissemination Using Social Networking Platforms

Unlike Yumesaki-Chaya and Ichimuso, Amagaeru-Saien has an outdoor eating space.¹⁴⁾ This is because the land of Amagaeru-Saien is designated as an urbanization control area, which meant that buildings for eating and cooking could not be built. Therefore, a kitchen car was brought onto the site to serve food and drinks. Since the main business of Amagaeru-Saien is poultry farming, the owner has created an environment where visitors can come in close contact with the chickens that are being raised. Some of the chickens are allowed to roam free on the premises, including the eating space, and visitors can experience feeding the chickens for a fee upon request. In particular, the latter is often requested by customers with their families.

In addition to running Amagaeru-Saien, the owner is also a photographer. In recent years, he has been posting photos of the natural environments of the northern part of Ibaraki City and Amagaeru-Saien to help people understand the surrounding environment and the business policy of the store.¹⁵⁾ In addition, on Sundays, when the restaurant is usually open for business, it also announces whether it will be able to open on that day. This is because the restaurant has an outdoor eating space, and it may be difficult to open as usual due to rain or snow.¹⁶⁾

4. Factors of Business Continuity in the Case Studies

4.1. Connection with Customers

The three restaurants used as case studies in this paper all focus on human relationships rather than on increasing profits. The objectives of a restaurant business can be summarized as attempting to figure out how to make customers want to dine in the restaurant again, and all three restaurants have achieved stable customer acquisition by responding to customer needs. As a means of achieving this, Yumesaki-Chaya has

been staging its restaurant with the participation of its customers, Ichimuso has been staging its restaurant and offering dishes according to each season, and Amagaeru-Saien has been integrating its poultry farming business on the same premises. In addition, Yumesaki-Chaya and Amagaeru-Saien use their own blogs and social networking platforms to provide information on whether they are open on a given day, the menu that they offer, and the environment around the restaurant.

4.2. Necessity of Using Other Entities in the Community for Business Continuity

Yumesaki-Chaya and Ichimuso each serve food made mainly from the products produced in their own vegetable gardens, while Amagaeru-Saien runs a poultry business on its premises and serves food made from the eggs produced there. Needless to say, not all of the ingredients can be produced in their own vegetable gardens; those that cannot be produced must be procured from other entities. Yumesaki-Chaya and Ichimuso obtain some of their ingredients from Miyama-no-Sato, and they also use the nearby open-air market and retail stores. In the early stages of its operation, Amagaeru-Saien worked with other restaurants to develop the food that it serves. The garden also uses rice as feed for the chickens that it raises, most of which is given by or purchased from nearby farmers. They post information about such transfers and purchases on social networking platforms. While Amagaeru-Saien develops its food products independently, it cooperates with local farmers to acquire the feed necessary for poultry farming. Since the food served at Amagaeru-Saien is made from home-produced eggs, the relationships with local farmers must be emphasized to sustain the café's business.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I use the efforts of three restaurants operating in the northern part of Ibaraki City as case studies to examine how they utilize and produce local resources. All of the restaurants place great importance on their connections with other local entities and customers who provide them with the supplies that they need to operate. To sustain these connections, they produce and disseminate information about their food resources, stores, and surrounding environments. They not only provide local food, including their own productions, but also encourage customers to come to their restaurants by making use of their own local resources or those of the surrounding environments.

However, this paper has not been able to clarify the evaluation of the productions of these restaurants by customers. To achieve sustainable management, it is necessary to provide the food resources that customers want and the places that offer them. While some of the initiatives identified in this paper involve the creation of interiors with the participation of customers, this is only the case for some customers, and it will be necessary to identify the attitudes of other customers to examine long-term sustainability. In addition,

in the northern part of Ibaraki City, there are other restaurants besides the three used as case studies in this paper, but I was not able to organize and incorporate them fully in this paper. In the future, it will be important to look at the actual utilization of food resources in the region after cooperation with entities in the region has been organized. These points will be discussed separately in future surveys.

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Notes

- 1) The description of the actual situation of each case study in this report is based on the contents of an interview survey conducted for each case study in October 2021.
- 2) According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries’ “Comprehensive Survey on the Sixth Industrialization,” the figures for Osaka Prefecture are confidential.
- 3) According to Otomo (2020), if the restaurant is run by a chef, the chef must have his or her own farm and be engaged in agriculture, and if the restaurant is run by a third sector organization, such as a government agency, the purpose of the restaurant is to use ingredients from the area where the restaurant is located, and farmers must be involved.
- 4) The owner of Ichimuso has been considering diversifying her sales channels and has been shipping some of her produce and flowers to Miyama-no-Sato since 2020.
- 5) The owner runs a group for practicing natural farming on fallow land, which had ten members at first, but since then, the group has been open to those who are interested, rather than having a fixed membership.
- 6) However, the side dishes change more often than the main dishes because they use ingredients that are available at the time. The chiffon cakes are also made and served at Yumesaki-Chaya.
- 7) According to Yumesaki-Chaya, some of the produce is shipped to agricultural cooperatives or distributed to relatives, but this is relatively rare.
- 8) Ryuo-h-Miso is based on the traditional miso production in the Miyama area in the northern part of Ibaraki City and has been commercialized mainly by women farmers.
- 9) Items brought to Yumesaki-Chaya include tea containers, chests, and black telephones.
- 10) Some of the events held at Yumesaki-Chaya include a mochi-pounding contest and an apple vinegar-making workshop. The mochi-tsuki (rice cake-pounding) event is organized by Yumesaki-Chaya and has been held every year since 2013. They procure glutinous rice not only from their own production but also from neighboring farmers, and about 20 people participate in the event every year. On the other hand, other events, such as the apple vinegar-making workshops, are held based on the requests of customers. All of these events are held in the store, so participants must order food. In both cases, the participants refrained from doing so until the time of the survey due to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.
- 11) Some flowers, such as dahlias, are sometimes cut and offered to visitors as a service.
- 12) While most of the visitors to the café are relatively young families, many of the egg buyers are elderly.
- 13) For drinks, they offer cider made from plums and shiso harvested from their own vegetable garden.
- 14) There is a prefabricated hut on the premises, but it is not used for eating but as a reading space for the town library.

- 15) The owner is also a member of the Ibaraki-Hokuchi-no-Kai, which aims to revitalize the northern part of Ibaraki City, and is in charge of taking photos for the group's activities.
- 16) The same applies to Yumesaki-Chaya, where customers may not be able to visit the store due to weather conditions, etc. If the store is unable to open on the day of the event, it uses its blog to announce it.

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