REVISITING JAPANESE FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

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Introduction

Japanese food consumption pattern has been undergoing dramatic changes over the last 40 years. There have been increasing consumption of meats, bread, other cereals and beverages, and decreasing consumption of rice, noodles, fish and shellfish, dairy products, oil and fats, cakes and candies, juices, alcohol, fresh fruits, as well as fresh vegetables in Japan. Many economists have attributed these changes to such factors as higher household income, aging population, and more westernization in lifestyle. However, Japanese household income has been decreasing after 1993 that makes most of the food consumption declining.\(^1\) Undoubtedly, many factors have influenced Japanese food consumption pattern. Understanding of these factors is very important for market assessment of agricultural products in Japan.

Since Japan is one of the largest agricultural importing countries, its changing food consumption pattern would directly affect the world agricultural trade. The question such as whether rice is an inferior good is important as a main key in evaluating the significance of Japanese domestic agricultural policy in the WTO negotiation that also affected other agriculture products; with our interest more on fresh fruits. This study attempts to provide econometric evidence for answering such questions, using a cross-sectional data analysis. The objectives of this study are to analyze the food consumption patterns and to conduct econometric analyses of food demand structure in Japan by special analyses on rice and meat as key determinant factors. The analysis on food consumption pattern is very important in order to understand the consumption of different kind of foods consumed by Japanese household.

Materials and Methods

Specifically, we use the household data from several issues of the Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) from 1976-2010 obtained from the Statistics Bureau, Management and Coordination Agency under the collaboration with the National Research Institute of Agricultural Economics (NRIAE) in Tokyo. This study is relatively unique because it is based on household level data while most of the literature on food demand analysis in Japan used aggregate data at the national level or by aggregate demographic groups. The use of household data enables us to analyze the impacts of important demographic variables affecting food consumption patterns in Japan.