

What I Want to Try in Japan

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The Visit

After participating in the exchange program last October, I was convinced that the divide between producers and consumers is a global issue. Prior to the trip, I was looking at data and had a feeling that the U.S. faced issues similar to Japan. To witness firsthand what was happening in rural areas in the U.S. had a tremendous impact on me. I was also struck by the gap between West Virginia—I read *Hillbilly Elegy* before the visit—and New York. I could see that rural areas are neglected. I came home thinking that *Taberu Journal*, a food subscription service that connects producers with consumers, could be an effective tool in resolving issues faced by rural areas in the U.S.



My Learning

In Lyons, Nebraska, I learned that there is an emphasis on U-turns (bringing back people who moved away from their hometowns) rather than I-turns (getting new people, particularly urbanites, to move to rural communities). It's rare to have someone with no existing connection move to Lyons. Compared to the U.S., Japan is smaller and it's common for people to move to areas where they didn't grow up. There are people who choose to move to certain parts of Japan to pursue their hobbies and dreams. Local governments invest in luring people to their communities. Because Japan's population is decreasing, we advocate for building relations between urbanites and rural communities and find ways to increase the influx of visitors to rural areas. In terms of increasing the number of people who move to rural areas as full time residents, U-turns are more realistic than I-turns.



I learned about outreach efforts undertaken by U.S. residents, who will reach out by phone to former residents who moved away for college and/or work and organize festivals to bring them back to their hometowns and their roots. We can certainly learn from this practice and apply their methods to engage visitors and to build a network of residents and potential residents.

Useful Concept, Thoughts, and Tools

I learned about useful concepts/tools such as network weaving, which visualizes your existing network, like a spider web, to help you identify your assets and any missing components, new ways to keep track of residents who move in and out, and celebrating successes, among others.

I think the Americans are more advanced than the Japanese when it comes to using tools effectively and having systematic approaches to solving issues.

I also think we could learn how to use data more effectively for analysis and quantification. The organizations we met were good at visualizing their work. They came up with simple yet clever names for their work such as “30 Mile Meals” and “Buy



Local First.” Some of the organizations we visited have been around for 35 to 40 years. I learned about how Boards of Directors recruit new CEOs to sustain the vision and mission of the organization. It shows the importance of having a proactive Board who can help organizations think beyond their existing resources.

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I would like my organization to use network weaving to help us visualize our networks. I think it would be helpful to create a diagram of our individual connections and ascertain whether the relationships are reciprocal. To strengthen our collective impact, network weaving will help us identify what is missing along with our weaknesses.

Suggestions for the Americans

I would like to see if an American version of *Taberu Journal*, food subscription service that connects producers with consumers, is feasible in the U.S. There are 37 journals in Japan and four in Taiwan. If there are any organizations that are interested in starting *Taberu Journal* in the U.S., I would be happy to hear from them, as I can share our knowledge on how to launch the service.