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SUMMARIES OF ARTICLES

The Subject of the Agricultural Cooperative Association Reform in Hokkaido

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Japanese agricultural cooperatives were established driven by postwar government policy, and have now become a system. In recent years, however, the definition is about to change significantly. The study group installed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in 2003 stated that agricultural cooperatives should not be given special treatment in future administrative management. This symbolizes a transformation from the complementary administrative organization.

A policy for improvement must be taken for those agricultural cooperatives whose farming-related services – including sales, procurement and farming guidance services – are in the red. These farming-related deficits are covered by profits from credit and mutual aid services in many agricultural cooperatives. By doing so, their services have continued to exist, and the agricultural cooperatives have continued to provide services to the members. There is a possibility that comprehensive services like these will not be able to be maintained in the future. Although strictly calculating profits and losses in business is important for management, it may dissolve comprehensive Japanese agricultural cooperatives into agricultural cooperatives specializing only in credit and mutual aid. Comprehensiveness is targeted for restructuring. Should this occur, problems will come to the fore regarding who will be responsible for sales and procurement services for farm households. In addition, there is an increasing number of farm households that have become large in scale, incorporated, and withdrawn from the agricultural cooperatives. And they started independently conducting sales and procurement activities. Under these circumstances, the system of agricultural cooperatives' sales and procurement services is about to be forced to undergo restructuring. This is tantamount to a shift from the all-encompassing principles.

As mentioned above, characteristics of Japanese agricultural cooperatives, such as a function to complement government's policy, comprehensiveness, and multifunctionality are now at stake. In order to protect food and agriculture in Japan, it is necessary to establish a new system and business activities based on the principle of the agricultural cooperatives.