

What Is The Fukushima Organic Cotton Project?



The Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, was an unprecedented disaster. The combined disasters of earthquakes, a tsunami and a nuclear power plant accident as well as the misinformation surrounding it have left agriculture in Fukushima Prefecture in a grave situation.

Agriculture in Fukushima Prefecture had been playing an important role in supplying food to the Tokyo metropolitan area. However, the prefecture had been experiencing an increase in the amount of farmland abandoned due to the aging of farmers and land owners.

It was under these circumstances that the disaster



struck.

Since the disaster, concerns over radiation contamination have caused consumers to avoid buying agricultural products from Fukushima Prefecture. There is no end to cases of producers giving up on farming. Furthermore, the tsunami resulted in widespread farmland suffering from seawater damage in coastal areas.

Agriculture, which had been a pillar of Fukushima's economy, is experiencing drastically decreasing productivity and farmers have become disheartened. We are facing the danger of regional economic collapse. Furthermore, over 150 thousand people have been forced to evacuate their homes and continue to live hard lives to this day.

The Fukushima Organic Cotton Project was started in the 2012 fiscal year with the aim of overcoming this crisis little by little.

Cotton is considered to be both resistant to seawater

damage and a poor absorber of radioactive material. Moreover, cotton is not a food product. We have created a series of business models in which we harvest organically grown cotton that we then turn into commercial products. Our goal in doing so is to rejuvenate Fukushima Prefecture's farming industry, as well as to bring liveliness and jobs in the region.

Furthermore, this is a citizen participatory project, in which a wide array of people come together to participate and help revive Fukushima, while having fun and encouraging each other. This project was initiated under the cooperation of The People and a company that has been leading Japan's organic cotton industry.

Cotton is seldom cultivated nowadays in Japan. Farming methods that cause damage to the natural environment and human health through the use of agricultural chemicals such as



chemical fertilizers, herbicides and defoliants are still the mainstream in cotton producing areas around the world. In developed countries there has been a movement to improve this situation in recent years. Because of this, the demand for organic cotton products is increasing. However, in Japan there is still limited awareness of this issue. Not only is it uncommon to cultivate cotton these days, but organic cultivation requires laborious work. In order to overcome this great difficulty, we have received a wide variety of assistance from a great deal of people.

Since the 2012 fiscal year, over 10 thousand people from across the country have visited our plantations to lend a hand. This means that there are many people who have come to Fukushima Prefecture, learnt the real current situation of Fukushima, and have become friends who cheer us on.

Some of the products we make include T-shirts and handkerchiefs. One product produced from this project is called "Cotton Babes". These are dolls made from the organic cotton we harvest, and we encourage women from temporary housings to make them. There are cotton seeds contained within the Cotton



Babes. Owners can take out these seeds, cultivate them, and return the harvested cotton to us. This cotton is then used to make other products.

Since the 2013 fiscal year, cultivation has been carried out in cooperation with elementary

schools, junior high schools and agricultural high schools in Iwaki city. The children are learning many things through growing the cotton.

During the 2015 fiscal year in Iwaki city alone, 1,250 people from 19 elementary and junior high schools have been trying their hands at cultivating cotton. Cultivation activities have expanded to include children outside of the city and prefecture as well.

After receiving much support from everyone across the country, the seeds that were sown in 2012 have sprouted in a variety of ways. A new Fukushima is beginning.



For inquiries regarding the Fukushima Organic Cotton Project, please contact The People:
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