

Sato-umi conservation as the core of regional revitalization

The fishing town of Hinase, which includes some nearby small islands, faces the Seto Inland Sea. Hinase suffered dwindling catches in coastal areas in the 1970s. At the time, the fishers thought that the cause of the decline was the decreased area of amamo seagrass (in English, common eelgrass), which grows naturally in the shallow areas along the coast. The fishers began replanting the amamo colony with the help of volunteers. This activity led to the idea of Sato-umi, which refers to appropriate development of the coastal environment and ecosystem as a whole. The fishery cooperative in Hinase Town acts as the nucleus of the regional economy, not only managing Sato-umi but also selling marine products directly to customers and operating a restaurant. The overseas trainees will apply what they learned about Sato-umi when they return home. They made comments such as, "I visited a community that is practicing Sato-umi and now I understand the mechanism of that," and, "Although the types of fish and the fishing methods are different there, I think the concept of Sato-umi can be shared around the world."

In front of Gomi market, where freshly caught seafood is sold. This market is the center of the economy for Hinase Town, since the main industry there is fisheries.



Japan shares its fishing know-how with the world

The seas surrounding Japan are a treasure trove of fisheries. A cold current and a warm current collide in the Pacific Ocean near Japan, and to the north lies the Sea of Okhotsk, rich in marine fauna including salmon, trout, and crabs. On the continental shelf in the Sea of Japan, great numbers of 'demersal fish,' or sea bottom dwellers, gather. There is also a wide variety of fish in the Seto Inland Sea. Japan, so rich in fish species, has developed unique fishing methods to match the variety of fish. JICA Trainees from all over the world come to Japanese fishing ports to learn some of these approaches.

Island seafood treasures in Tokyo school lunches

Hachijo-jima is an island located some 300 km south of Tokyo Bay. A wide range of fish are landed there. Luxury species are sent to the markets in Tokyo, but cheaper fish for everyday consumption, such as mackerel scad, often remain unsold. The women's division of the Hachijo-jima fishery cooperative noticed the situation and started processing those fish, mincing or chopping them, and shipping them to Tokyo for use in school lunches, working in cooperation with school lunch organizations. In addition, members from the women's division of the co-op visit elementary and junior high schools in Tokyo to deliver a dietary education program to introduce Hachijo-jima fish and give the pupils an opportunity to sample them. Trainees from overseas stayed on the island for a few days to observe this approach. The trainees were quite impressed; one of them commented, "Processing fish to add value and create markets and promoting educational programs are really a unique approach."



Processing fish to create added value is a great idea for coastal people in other countries.

Resources for the future: Grow your own

Fishery cooperatives in Iwate Prefecture are releasing fry of species such as salmon and flounder in an effort to stabilize the future of fishery resources. This is part of their efforts to promote the concept of creating and cultivating fisheries. The co-op members are also proactive about protecting existing resources: If the fish they catch are too small, they release them back into the sea. Trainees from French-speaking African countries visit the Kamaishi fishing port once a year to learn about landing fish from fixed nets and securing parent salmon for release in the wild. The trainees also observe the speedy selection and auction of fish, and the attention to hygiene and freshness control in the fish market. The trainees seem to have gained many insights. Their comments include, "I was encouraged by the activity and vibrance of the fishermen's cooperative despite the tsunami damage," and, "I would like to make the best use of what I learned here."



Freshness is the most important issue in the fish industry. Many trainees are interested in the mechanism for keeping fish fresh and in learning about approaches to prompt distribution.

Eco Label certification spurs earthquake reconstruction



Trainees learning to shuck oysters. They were impressed with the efforts of Minami-Sanriku people to turn disaster into opportunity.

The Tokura district of Minami-Sanriku Town, which used to cultivate oysters, scallops, seaweed, and coho salmon in the bay, suffered a devastating blow from the Great East Japan Earthquake. Aquaculture facilities were swept away. To rebuild their business, aquaculture companies formed a group and used the remaining fishing boats as fish farms. When they rebuilt their facilities in Tokura district, to reduce the burden on the environment and improve the quality of oysters, they decided to reduce the density of aquaculture rafts. Subsequently the group obtained Aquaculture Stewardship Council Eco Label certification from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Since the earthquake, trainees from all over the world have been visiting Tokura district three times a year to observe the aquaculture facilities and experience the harvest. The Tokura district's efforts seem to have a profound effect on the trainees. Their comments included, "It is very interesting to learn about this approach to working together, which is centered around the fishery cooperative," and, "Learning about the process of obtaining Eco Label certification is useful for us for both fishery promotion and market strategy."

The tradition of Edo-mae as a tourism resource

Tokyo Bay is rich in aquatic resources, and the term Edo-mae (Tokyo Bay and its style) has been used since the Edo period. Digging clams and cultivating laver in tidal flats have been thriving industries for hundreds of years, and the traditional ways continue to this day in towns such as Kisarazu City and Futtsu City in Chiba Prefecture. One important aspect of clam harvesting in this area is that the clams are still collected and screened by hand, in the interest of conservation. In addition, the farms where clams are cultivated in the winter are open from spring to summer to allow tourists to enjoy clam digging.

The trainees from overseas were initially a bit doubtful about the charm of clam digging as a combination of tourism and fishery, but when they actually experienced the digging, they could see its appeal. A frequent comment was, "It was surprisingly enjoyable when I tried digging clams myself." The trainees were also impressed by the local efforts to conserve resources by sorting clams by hand.



Clam digging, which is very familiar among the Japanese, was a new and unexpected fun experience for many of the trainees.