Kuromatsunai Town

Northernmost forest of Japanese beeches in Japan, a symbol of revitalization

Because of the great difference between high and low temperatures and heavy snow in winter, the environment in Kuromatsunai is severe for agriculture, the main industry of the town. However, it has natural beauty, which is symbolized by the northernmost forest of Japanese beeches nationally designated as protected plants. Kuromatsunai publicizes the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches" – local precious resources. The town also develops its specialties and appeal to citizens in and outside the town about the human-friendly environment and its brand of Japanese beeches through the development of facilities and events to promote interaction between large cities and farming villages.

1. Overview of Kuromatsunai

(1) Natural conditions

Located in the southernmost part of Shiribeshi Subprefecture, about halfway between Sapporo and Hakodate, Kuromatsunai is adjacent to Shimamaki Village, Suttsu Town, Rankoshi Town, Oshamambe Town and Toyoura Town. It stretches 29.3 km from east to west and 19.7 km from north to south, with a total area of 345.7 km^2. The annual mean temperature is 7 to 8℃, and the difference between high and low temperatures is great with the highest temperature exceeding 30℃ and the lowest temperature below –20℃. The annual rainfall is approximately 1,300 – 1400 mm, and the snow fall period is from November to March, with the maximum depth of snow cover of 120 – 130 cm.

The area from Oshamambe through Kuromatsunai and on to Suttsu is called the Kuromatsunai Lowland Area, and the Oshamambe and Shubuto rivers run through the area to flow into Uchiura Bay. The lowland belongs to the northern part of the temperate zone (subarctic zone) and holds a very important position as a boundary line for plant distribution. The area has the northernmost natural habitat of Japanese beeches, Japanese witch hazels and Redvein Enkianthus (*Enkianthus campanulatus*), and on the other hand, it has the southernmost habitat of Glehn's spruces. In other words, the area is a boundary line between deciduous broad-leaved forests (Japanese beech forests) and mixed forests of coniferous and deciduous trees in the subarctic zone.

Based on these natural conditions, Kuromatsunai finally found community improvement centering on its local resources (Japanese beeches) after many trials and errors.

(2) Social and economic conditions

After the headman's office was established in Kuromatsunai Village in 1879, Kuromatsunai Village, Neppu Village and a part of Tarukishi Village were merged into Sanwa Village in 1955. It became Kuromatsunai Town when the town system was established there in 1959.

Although Kuromatsunai has always been a town of agriculture, it was known as a town of agriculture and railroads when it had roundhouses and a railroad maintenance office in the heyday of steam locomotives. In the term of the industrial structure, it is a town of agriculture and social welfare, whose facilities include a special nursing home for the aged, a nursing home for the elderly and a school for the disabled.

The population was 7,438 in 1955, which came to decrease after that. It was 5,429 in 1970, 4,532 in 1980, 3,927 in 1990 and 3,638 in 1998. The degree of decrease, however, has begun to shrink. For the age composition of the population, people at the age of 60 or older was 863 (19.0%) in 1980, which increased to 1,226 (31.6%), showing that the aging of the town is advancing very rapidly. On the other hand, the number of households, which has been above or below 1,300 until 1990, has been at the level of 1,500 since then.

(3) Structures of the industry and agriculture

The total workforce population, which was 2,114 in 1980, gradually decreased to 1,836 by 1990. In 1995, it

increased again to 1976, showing a different trend from the total population. For changes in the workforce by industries, the workforce in agriculture decreased (350 in 1995) expectedly, those in the construction industry (472 in 1995) and in the service industry (655 in 1995) increased.

For the workforce in agriculture, the number of farming households was 249 in 1990 and 161, with seven other types of agricultural units, in 1998. The number of full-time farming households rapidly decreased from 110 to 69 during the same period. The cultivated area under management was 113 ha for rice paddies, and 1,943 ha for dry fields, including pastures of 1,434 ha (1998), indicating the much larger proportion of pastures.

In Kuromatsunai, both the management type and gross output show that much more weight is given to stock farming. The gross agricultural output in 1997 consisted of ¥980 million for milk cows, ¥787 million for pigs and ¥359 million for beef cattle. The number of delivered cows was 1,512 in 1998, showing a great decrease compared with 1,917 in 1985. Production of raw milk, however, did not decrease so greatly. Accordingly, production of raw milk per delivered cow, which was 5,493 kg in 1985, increased by 1,400 kg to 6,382 kg in 1998. The number of beef cattle, which was 728 in 1998, has decreased and increased repeatedly since 1985. The number of cattle raised by one farming household is also the same. However, the number of beef cattle, which was around the same as that of milk cows before 1990, increased greatly after that year. The number of pigs, which are raised by four farming households, is 764, and 191 per farming household.

Farmers in Kuromatsunai grow "Hakucho-mai," a variety of glutinous rice resistant to cold weather, in all paddy fields and the area is designated as a glutinous rice production center. Field crops include seed potatoes, adzuki beans, sugar beets and Japanese radishes. Recently, growing grapes as wine material has begun.

2. Project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches" as a precondition for the development of local industries

As mentioned above, weather conditions in Kuromatsunai have greatly influenced the development of local industries, especially agriculture. Since the temperatures in summer do not rise enough for rice to grow sufficiently, rice-growing farmers in the town were forced to specialize in growing cold-resistant glutinous rice when the national rice acreage reduction policy was strengthened, and they had to produce rice of higher quality. This is closely related to the fact that there are no specialties in crops worthy of special mention.

With such conditions, local industries in Kuromatsunai, especially agriculture and agricultural product processing industries have been developed under the regional development project with the mainstay of the protected plant, Japanese beeches – "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches."

Kuromatsunai suffered from agricultural declines and population outflows in the 1980s, which produced a sense of impending crisis among its citizens. This resulted in the enactment of the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches." In 1985, the municipal government prepared the first comprehensive plan, and the following year, private groups made proposals for community improvement.

Through discussions, many people came to be aware of a Japanese beech forest which had been preserved as a protected plant. A forest of Japanese beeches, with an area of more than 90 ha, is located on the northeastern slopes of the hilly area at the left shore of the Shubuto River, in Utasai, Kuromatsunai. In 1923, Yoshinao Niijima from Sapporo Agricultural College, who visited the forest as a member of the survey committee on protected plants, esteemed the fact that the forest of Japanese beeches, which are ordinarily native to the temperate zone, had remained in Kuromatsunai, as a miracle. Based on the visit, the forest in Utasai was nationally designated in 1928 as a natural monument representing the northernmost habitat of Japanese beeches.

Forest of Japanese beeches (protected plant)

During World War II, there was a plan to cancel the

designation and fell trees to use them as material for wooden fighter plane propellers. The forest was also on the verge of crisis even after the war because of financial problems of the town. Yet the forest survived all this thanks to united efforts of researchers who knew the scientific value of the forest in Utasai and local citizens who carried on a campaign to preserve its primitive appearance.

After defining the basic policy to make the Japanese beech forest as the core of community improvement in Kuromatsunai, the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches" was formulated in 1988. The project was intended to promote spontaneous community improvement utilizing local resources and develop community building based on exchanges between large cities and farming villages.

Improvements in the vicinity of Utasai were first planned as the center of the plan. Specifically, the plan included development of the Utasai forest as a forest park; construction of the Utasai Nature Center, facility for learning about nature through hands-on experience; construction of the Kuromatsunai Buna Center; and improvement of the Utasai auto campsite. In 1988, a forum on Japanese beeches was held in Kuromatsunai on a nationwide scale, attracting attention from the press.

Around the same time, the national and prefectural governments suggested a project for creating a resort in the area around Niseko-Yotei, which included Kuromatsunai in the southernmost part of the area. Community improvement through the development of resorts was very attractive to citizens of Kuromatsunai, and many of them had great hopes for it. In fact, however, there were no private resort-related enterprises which made inroads into Kuromatsunai under the project, unlike Niseko.

Many citizens then came to realize that they needed to conduct community improvement fitting their size and making the use of local resources, instead of getting themselves incorporated into the resort project for the area around Niseko-Yotei, which featured the nature of Hokkaido as a selling point and depended on major enterprises.

Concurrently, Japanese beech-related facilities mentioned above were being improved through the use of national governmental subsidies, among other financial aids. The town held two international forums: the International Forum on the Waterside Environment in 1991, and the International Japanese Beech Forum in 1993. Based on such activities for the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches," the second ten-year comprehensive plan from fiscal 1995 to 2004 was formulated.

3. Facilities related to the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches"

The following facilities around the Japanese beech forest in Utasai serves as a base for exchanges between large cities and farming villages, and tourism based on the facilities is beginning to be an important industry in Kuromatsunai.

(1) Kuromatsunai Buna Center

The key part of the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches" is the improvement of the Utasai district, including the establishment of the Kuromatsunai Buna Center. Opened in June 1993, the center is a Scandinavian-style building with a pointed roof. Its main roles include introducing the history and nature of the town centering on the Japanese beeches, provision of information on nature observation methods and nature-related information, and providing workrooms for experiencing cooking, chinaware making and woodworking.

One characteristic of the center is that it has full-time instructors who guide visitors to the forest and interpreters (who serve as bridges between people and nature). With such leaders, the Buna-no-mori Nature School was established, and outdoor activities, such as the beech forest observation, early-morning bird listening, fossil shell gathering and playing in a river, have been actively conducted during weekends and summer vacations. In the workrooms, participants can experience making Buna ware in the ceramic art course, as well as dyeing with vegetable dyes and cooking tofu (bean curd) in each class.

Mr. A, a staff member at the center, is from Tokyo. He is learning about nature at Hokkaido University and has begun to sketch plants. Moving to Kuromatsunai in 1992 to become a new citizen of the town, he works for the center as a part-time instructor. He is mainly in charge of beech observation, nature games (e.g., cards made of leaves for learning the names of trees; "Camouflage" in which participants search for stuffed dolls and pencils hidden in the forest). Mr. A hopes that leaders who preserve nature in the next generation will come from the great number of children who have visited the center.

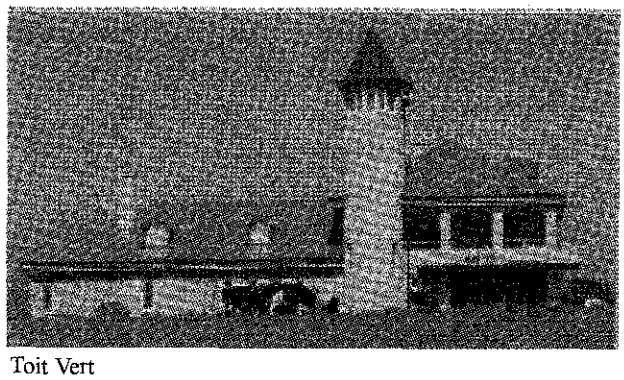
(2) Utasai Nature House (facility with accommodations for hands-on experience in nature) and the Utasai auto campsite (L' pic)

Utasai Nature House is a facility with accommodations for hands-on experience in nature, adjacent to Utasai Forest Park. It is known for its magnificent building featuring wood grain texture. It houses a restaurant where you can have beef produced in the town, a large public bathhouse and rooms for group study, which are all popular among visitors. Moreover, since it is adjacent to an athletic park, visitors can readily enjoy playing baseball, tennis, park golfs and swimming.

Located near the house is the Utasai auto campsite "L'pic (a French word meaning woodpecker)." The 2.2-ha campsite has 24 tent sites standing in orderly lines, which are completely equipped with parking spaces, as well as electric and water supply facilities. Other equipment includes bungalows, free spaces for tents and flushing toilets. On every weekend, many families visit this site to enjoy fishing and walking in the woods (forest bathing).

(3) "Toit Vert," a processing center for hand-made specialties of Kuromatsunai

"Toit Vert," which means "green roof" in French, is a town-run processing center for hand-made specialties of Kuromatsunai. It was constructed in June 1993 on a hill at the Mena district located on the opposite side of the JR station between the Utasai district and the Mena district. The center uses materials produced in Kuromatsunai without using any expanding or antiseptic agents, with a motto "making safe foods." Foods processed by Toit Vert are classified into ham and sausages, and dairy products.



Toit Vert

Ham and sausages are manufactured by effectively using spices, such as rosemary, nutmeg and thyme, and smoking them with aromatic chips made of cherry trees, not using any expanding, antiseptic, binding agents or chemical seasonings.

The dairy products manufactured in the center are cheese and ice cream. The cheese is "White Blue Cheese," an original cheese produced only in Kuromatsunai, which is made by mixing Camembert and blue cheese. For ice cream, there are many kinds of flavors: vanilla, milk, cheese, sesame seed, green tea, and hascup berry. In addition, Toit Vert houses a research room on the second floor, where you can purchase products while observing work in the factory through the windows and sample fresh cheese and sausages. The facility stands on a hill commanding an excellent view.

Toit Vert purchases all its materials exclusively from farmers in the town: 150 pigs from four hog farming households per year for ham; and milk from one dairy farming household for ice cream.

The sales amount of the center, which was ¥110 million in 1999, has remained in the range of ± ¥5 million from that figure on average recently. The breakdown is: ¥55 million for dairy products; ¥45 million for ham and sausages; and the rest for other products sold at the research room in Toit Vert.

For the distribution channels of the products, sales at Toit Vert II (roadside station) account for 30% of the total amount of shipped products, sales to Heisei Foods, a restaurant specialized in health foods in the Kanto region, for 25%, sales at various facilities in the town for 4 to 5%, small-lot sales for 10%, and mail-order sales for the rest. The staff includes the head of the processing facility, who concurrently serves as the chief of the specialty development section of the industrial division of the town government, as well as five employees for the business and sales section and eight for the manufacturing section. Toit Vert is profitable if the salary for the head of the facility is excluded.

Toit Vert also has a fresh and young person as the Kuromatsunai Buna Center does. After graduating from Rakuno Gakuen University, Mr. W, engineer, found a job in a dairy company but quit the job because he could not consent to the policies of the company. Then the person went abroad to the home place of cheese,

where all of the experiences he had, including many kinds of cheese, traditional methods and the position of cheese on the table, highly motivated him to make cheese. After coming back to Japan, he found a position at Toit Vert to realize his dream nurtured in the home place of cheese.

Mr. W. endeavors to make safe cheese with the highest quality. It is the "White and Blue Cheese," mixed Camembert and blue cheese, that he finally achieved after making many trial products. The cheese is now a main product of Toit Vert.

4. The second comprehensive plan for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches"

The Kuromatsunai Buna Center, Utasai Nature House, the Utasai auto campsite and Toit Vert were the first results from the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches." In 1995, the second comprehensive plan started to conduct new measures.

(1) Kuromatsunai second comprehensive plan

Data 1 shows the outline of the Kuromatsunai second comprehensive plan. With the key words of the plan, such as education, environment/landscape, health and exchanges, the basic concept of the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches" is to conduct spontaneous community improvement through the use of local resources, not through dependence on big capital, and to revitalize the town through exchanges between large cities and farming villages.

Data 1 Kuromatsunai second comprehensive plan and its visions for the future

Period of the plan: 1996 to 1995 (ten years)

Key words: 1) education 2) environment/scenery 3) health 4) exchanges

Basic directions:
1) Development of human resources for improvement of the rural area
2) Community improvement friendly to people
3) Improvement of an environment friendly to nature
4) Creation of industries friendly to nature
5) Community improvement by all citizens

Symbolic theme: "Creation of the Northern Home to Japanese Beeches," which is friendly to nature and provides relaxation for people

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The basic concept of the project for "Creation of the Northern Home to Japanese Beeches"

Aiming to conduct spontaneous community improvement through the use of local resources, not through dependence on big capital, and revitalize the town through exchanges between large cities and farming villages

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Emphasized policies in the comprehensive plan

(1) Implementation of the landscape guide plan
(2) Formulation of the plan for managing the environment to create a hometown of Japanese beeches
(3) Promotion of the public sewage system and septic tank for combined treatment
(4) Gradual shift to sustainable agriculture
(5) Creation of an environment friendly to the elderly and disabled
(6) Development of hot springs and parks for improving the natural environment
(7) Improvement of quality of studies on the hometown environment and local culture
(8) Promotion of "Holidays in a Farming Town of Japanese Beaches"
(9) Construction of facilities to exhibit and sell specialties
(10) Improvement of the pavement of the walking paths in Teranosawa-gawa Seseragi Park
(11) Improvement of facilities to produce drinking milk
(12) Measures regarding successors in agriculture
(13) Creation of a project for promoting natural science in Kuromatsunai

Expansion of fields for exchanges

Japanese beech forests in Soebetsu and along the Shiraigawa River, Mt. Kuromatsunai-dake, Utasai Marshland, etc.

Increasing economic and social effects of exchanges

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1) Guiding to the downtown area
2) Development of "Farm In"
3) Sales of organically grown vegetables
4) Establishment of a brand of products from the town of Japanese beeches

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Visions for the future

Aiming to be a town which citizens can talk about with pride and that many people in Japan support

The comprehensive plan has 13 important policies, and some of them provide opportunities for local industries to develop: (4) Gradual shift to sustainable agriculture; (6) Development of hot springs and parks for improving the natural environment; (9) Construction of facilities to exhibit and sell specialties; (11) Improvement of facilities to produce drinking milk. In addition, (1) Implementation of the landscape guide plan and (2) Formulation of the plan for managing the environment to create a hometown of Japanese beeches are also challenges which are closely linked with local industries, from the viewpoint of exchanges with citizens in large cities.

Based on the development of the important policies, the strategies for the development of local industries aim to expand fields for exchange (Japanese beech forests in Soebetsu and along the Shiraigawa River, Mt. Kuromatsunai-dake, the Utasai Marshland, etc.) and increase economic and social effects: 1) Guiding to the downtown area; 2) Development of "Farm In"; 3) Sales of organically-grown vegetables; 4) Establishment of a brand of products from the town of Japanese beeches).

(2) "Toit Vert II," a facility to exhibit and sell specialties of Kuromatsunai

"Toit Vert II" is located approximately 500 m from JR Neppu Station along National Route 5. It has multiple functions: 1) a facility to sell products manufactured by itself; 2) a facility to sell local agricultural products; 3) a bread baking workroom and a corner to sell it; 4) a bakery restaurant; 5) an information center; and 6) "roadside station" with the functions mentioned above. While the main activity of Toit Vert is manufacturing handmade products by processing meat, Toit Vert II centers on bread. In its workroom, they bake bread using only materials produced in the town, with no emulsifiers, preservatives, coloring agents or aroma chemicals. Visitors can observe bread-making processes through the windows.

(3) Kuromatsunai Hot Spring Resort "Buna no Mori"

Kuromatsunai Hot Spring Resort "Buna no Mori" is a result of "development of hot springs and parks for improving the natural environment" in the second comprehensive plan. Citizens of Kuromatsunai have long awaited having a spa because they had to go out of the town to have a hot spring bath. The resort features a spacious main bath, a white cedar bath, an open-air bath, a sauna and a resting place, providing a roomy place for relaxation and attracting many people not only from Kuromatsunai but also outside the town.

5. Private management bodies

(1) Manufacturing alcoholic beverages using glutinous rice and grapes produced in Kuromatsunai

Cold winds blowing through the Kuromatsunai Lowland Area forced rice-growing farmers in Kuromatsunai to specialize in producing glutinous rice. However, they succeeded in linking glutinous rice growing with the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches." They addressed sake manufacturing with glutinous rice as its material, which is very rare in Japan. The types of sake include: glutinous rice Ginjo/Junmai sake "Buna no Seseragi," glutinous rice white distilled liquor "Buna-shizuku," glutinous rice Junmai/pure/unrefined sake "Bunano-seseragi/Mai-hakucho," and glutinous rice Junmai unrefined sake "Yukimaru." Moreover, Kuromatsunai has been growing wine grapes (Sable) since they decided to manufacture wine. The efforts are attaining some results, including "Buna no Sasayaki (Sable red and white wine)." [Ginjo sake: Sake brewed with rice milled so that no more than 60% of the grain remains; Junmai sake: Sake brewed with only rice, water, and koji – no additives]

Kuromatsunai has successfully linked these sake and wine with the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches," with the concept "we deliver spirits, clean air and aromatic blessings from the land, which are made from select glutinous rice or grapes with high sugar content nurtured by pure streams running from the northernmost forest of Japanese beeches."

The town does not have their own breweries to manufacture these alcoholic beverages; manufacturing and sales of glutinous rice sake is commissioned to Biho Shurui and Takasago Shuzo, and that of wine to Hakodate Winery Ltd.

(2) Other efforts

Since the establishment of Toit Vert, Kuromatsunai has actively addressed food processing, in addition to the alcoholic beverages mentioned above.

One example is "Kazekaoru," milk pasteurized at a low temperature. It is delivered from door to door mainly in the town by a local milk seller who is stubborn about pasteurization at a low temperature in order to preserve original, natural flavors of milk as much as possible. The product with light flavors and the refreshing name of the product is loved by many people inside and outside the town. Another example is "Suisai no Mori," natural alkali ion water that gushes out in the Toyohoro District near the Utasai forest. It is sold by a private company "Kuromatsunai Meisui Co., Ltd." Demand for the natural water has rapidly increased, and production cannot meet the demand. In addition to the trend for many brands of water from various areas to be sold in department stores, supermarkets and convenience stores, one factor behind the rapidly increasing demand for "Suisai no Mori" may be an image of Japanese beeches as watershed protection trees. The same is true in "Milk Manju (a steamed bun with bean jam in it)" and "Bunabayashi Monaka (bean-jam-filled wafers)," which have been manufactured by a sweet shop using only milk and adzuki beans produced in the town. In Kuromatsunai, citizens challenge themselves to engage in new activities in various places.

6. Development of Local Industries and the Citizens' Organizations

Kuromatsunai makes "stable production of livestock products," "sustainable development of agriculture" and "development as a rural area" the mainstays of the "basic directions of the development of agriculture and rural areas and the development directions of policies." The latter two of the mainstays are closely linked with the project for community improvement. For "sustainable development of agriculture," basic directions of the "utilization of natural recycling functions of agriculture" and "promotion of environmental conservation and resource recycling" were formulated. For "development as a rural area," basic directions of "utilization of the multiple functions of agriculture and a rural area," "creation of a rural area which is beautiful and comfortable to live in," and "promotion of exchanges between large cities and rural areas" are stated. In particular, for "promotion exchanges between large cities and rural areas," efforts are being made to revitalize the region in harmony with the natural environment and landscape through implementation of the landscape guide plan, an emphasized policy for the Kuromatsunai second comprehensive plan.

(1) Efforts made by the agricultural cooperative and other farmers' organizations

When excluding governmental organizations, the agricultural cooperative is the largest organization in a farming area. Also in Kuromatsunai, the agricultural cooperative plays an important role in several matters.

First, in the very severe environment, the association has completely shifted rice growing to glutinous rice growing, maintained production of field crops, including beans, potatoes and sugar beets, and formed a dairy production center, which ranks highest in Shiribeshi subprefecture. It was the power of the association that enabled citizens to address processing agricultural products to produce new products, change the area to a glutinous rice production center and produce glutinous rice Ginjo sake, glutinous rice Junmai sake, glutinous rice white distilled liquor and other types of glutinous rice sake.

Accordingly, the "2001 Kuromatsunai Agricultural Promotion Plan" has contained the efforts of the association to address "harmonization with the natural environment/environmental conservation," a basic concept of the project for community improvement.

(2) Efforts made by people involved in forestry and the forest owners' association

Forests account for approximately half of the total area of Kuromatsunai, and forestry has played a considerable part from the beginning. Recently, the forestry workforce has decreased under the influence of imported woods. Nevertheless, when addressing community improvement with the Japanese beech forest as its core, people involved in forestry and the forest owners' association play a very important role. They are beginning to play a major role in the new project for community improvement as the agricultural cooperative does.

After the establishment of the Kuromatsunai Buna Center, Utasai Nature House and the auto campsite,

many people began to visit the Utasai Japanese beech forest. The protection of the forest therefore became a problem for the town. This led to a plan to improve a secondary forest of Japanese beeches in the Soebetsu district west of the town which was once deforested approximately 70 years ago, as a farming community's natural forest park of Japanese beeches in Soebetsu. Concurrently, it was decided to establish a mini visitors' center (accommodations) as a "place for educating young people who will be leaders in the recycling-oriented society coexisting with the natural environment through activities for practical studies on the environment, as well as for the exchanges among them" (from the pamphlet). Management of the center is to be conducted by an independent organization of citizens, the "Project Promotion Association for Preservation and Utilization of the Natural Environment of Japanese Beech Forests." Such development could not occur without the cooperation of people involved in forestry.

(3) People and groups that understand and support the efforts made by Kuromatsunai

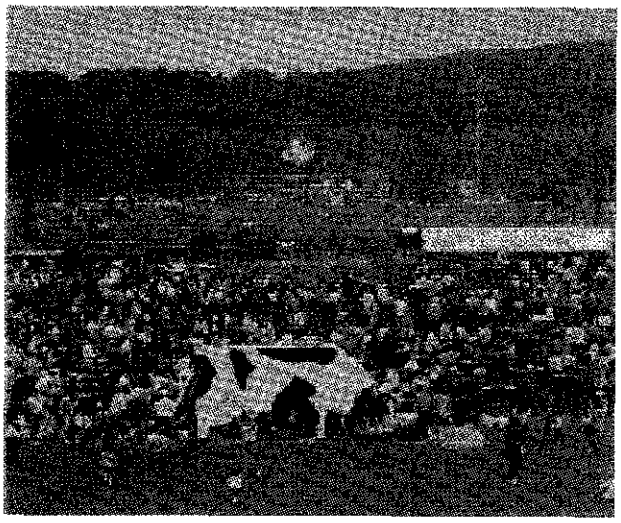
It is not only citizens of the town who played an important role in planning and implementing the project for community improvement based on the Japanese beech forest in Kuromatsunai. There are many others who contributed to efforts of the town, including people from the town who live in other regions, university professors, geological scientists, photographers and ceramic artists. They are related to Kuromatsunai through their work, recreational activities and other opportunities, and support the idea of and efforts for conserving the natural environment and landscape and promoting community improvement. Considering that citizens were uncertain about the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches," at the beginning, one can understand what an important part such people outside the town played in the process of developing the project.

7. Events and Efforts for Environmental Conservation

Kuromatsunai holds many events: Japanese Beech Town Fishing School, Mt. Higashiyama Moss Pink Festival, Japanese beech observation, Fureai Festival, Beef Paradise in the Town with the Northernmost Forest of Japanese Beeches, Sweetfish Festival, the long distance relay race circuiting the town, Shibuya-Yoshio Cup National Snowshoe Softball Games, Mogul Skiing Competition, Fureai Snow Festival and Japanese beech forest observation tour using snowshoes. It is clear at a glance that events are held throughout the year. Japanese beech forest observation tours are conducted from spring to early summer, especially in June, when Japanese beeches are most beautiful. Summer in the town features the largest event in Kuromatsunai "Beef Paradise," which was held on July 29 and 30 last year and attracted 18,000 visitors from the town, Sapporo and Hakodate, who appreciated beef from 13 head of cattle. In autumn, the Sweetfish Festival is held along the Shubuto River, where sweetfish that have spawned (which have been caught for artificial incubation) are grilled with salt. In winter, the town holds the Shibuya-Yoshio Cup National Snowshoe Softball Games. The games were named after Mr. Yoshio Shibuya, who was a grand master of snowshoe making.

It can be said that holding so many events made the basis for building up relationships with the above-mentioned supporters from outside town. The number of people who visited Kuromatsunai was 166,000 in 1998, and 226,000 in 1999.

The town is also addressing nature preservation and environmental conservation through community improvement utilizing Japanese beeches. As a statement of its strong determination to be in the same course, the town received certification of the international environmental preservation standard "IS014001" in December 2000. Of local governments in Hokkaido, Kuromatsunai is the third municipality following Akkeshi Town and the Hokkaido government.



"Beef Paradise in the town with the northernmost forest of Japanese beeches

8. Conclusion

Ironically, Kuromatsunai started community improvement because there were no enterprises making inroads into the town under projects for creating resorts in the area around Niseko-Yotei. This made citizens pay attention to their own local resources, Japanese beeches. They tried to develop activities for exchange with people in large cities by holding events through the use of local resources, instead of counting on resorts to attract visitors.

More importantly, they took Japanese beeches not only as ornamental plants, but also as watershed protection trees, shifting their perspectives to the preservation of nature and the environment, as well as to food processing (sticking to safe local resources).

Community improvement in Kuromatsunai has involved many people: the leaders who first engaged in the project for the "Creation of the Northernmost Home to Japanese Beeches," administrative officers who implemented specific measures, citizens who have played a central role in developing the activities, and people outside the town who have supported the efforts of the town (some of them have become new citizens of Kuromatsunai).

Hokuryu Town

"From one are per household to the top of Japan" – home of sunflowers

A report of an agricultural cooperative official, who had been fascinated by the beauty of sunflower fields seen from the sky over Yugoslavia, led to the "One Household One Are" campaign of local residents mainly consisting of the women's section of the cooperative, who were striving for development of a unique region, and then to the "creation of a home of sunflowers." Town development using sunflowers for beautification of the rural environment and improvement in the dietary habits with sunflower oil has been firmly established in the local community thanks to the efforts of farming groups.

The town has been revitalized as the scenery enchanted people from outside the town and a number of sunflower-related products were developed.

1. Overview of Hokuryu

(1) Natural conditions

Hokuryu Town belongs to Uryu-gun in the north of Sorachi. Extending 28 km east to west and 14 km north to south, the town has a total area of 158.82 km^2. It adjoins Numata to the north, Chippubetsu to the east, Moseushi and Uryu to the south and Rumoi and Mashike to the west. Topographically, it consists of a mountain area stretching from the Mashike mountain range in the west and flat and fertile land in the east. It has an inland climate and the winter is cold with strong northwesterly seasonal wind. Annual snow accumulation is 1.5 to 1.8 m. Summer is mild with warm southwesterly wind, and is suitable for both rice growing and dry field farming.

(2) Social/economic conditions

Hokuryu Town was founded in 1896 with 25 households immigrated from Chiba prefecture. While it belonged to Uryu Village at first, it was separated in 1902 to become Hokuryu Village and was reorganized into Hokuryu Town in 1961.

After its population peaked in 1960 amounting to 6,343, it decreased to 5,445 in 1965, 3,867 in 1975, 3,266 in 1985, 3,009 in 1990 and 2,785 in 1995, and was halved in 35 years. The decreasing rate has, however, become very low recently. Regarding age groups, the rate of people at the age of 65 and over increased from 15.0% in 1985 to 24.9% in 1995, while the population of both children and productive age are decreasing. The aging tendency can be seen in Hokuryu in the same way as anywhere else. The total number of working people was 1,783 in 1985 and 1,576 in 1995.

Regarding industries, the weight of primary industries has decreased while service (tourism-related) industries mainly related to sunflowers have been growing and the weight of tertiary industries has been increasing. The weight of primary industries is, however, still large, 53.6%, in 1995 compared with 31.5% of tertiary industries.

The number of farming households is changing from 470 in 1980 to 403 in 1990 and 319 in 1998. The total cultivated acreage was 3,262 ha. Only 453 ha of it is dry fields, making the town a typical rice growing district. The average cultivated acreage per household increased from 6.21 ha in 1980 to 10.23 ha in 1998.

2. Development of regional industries

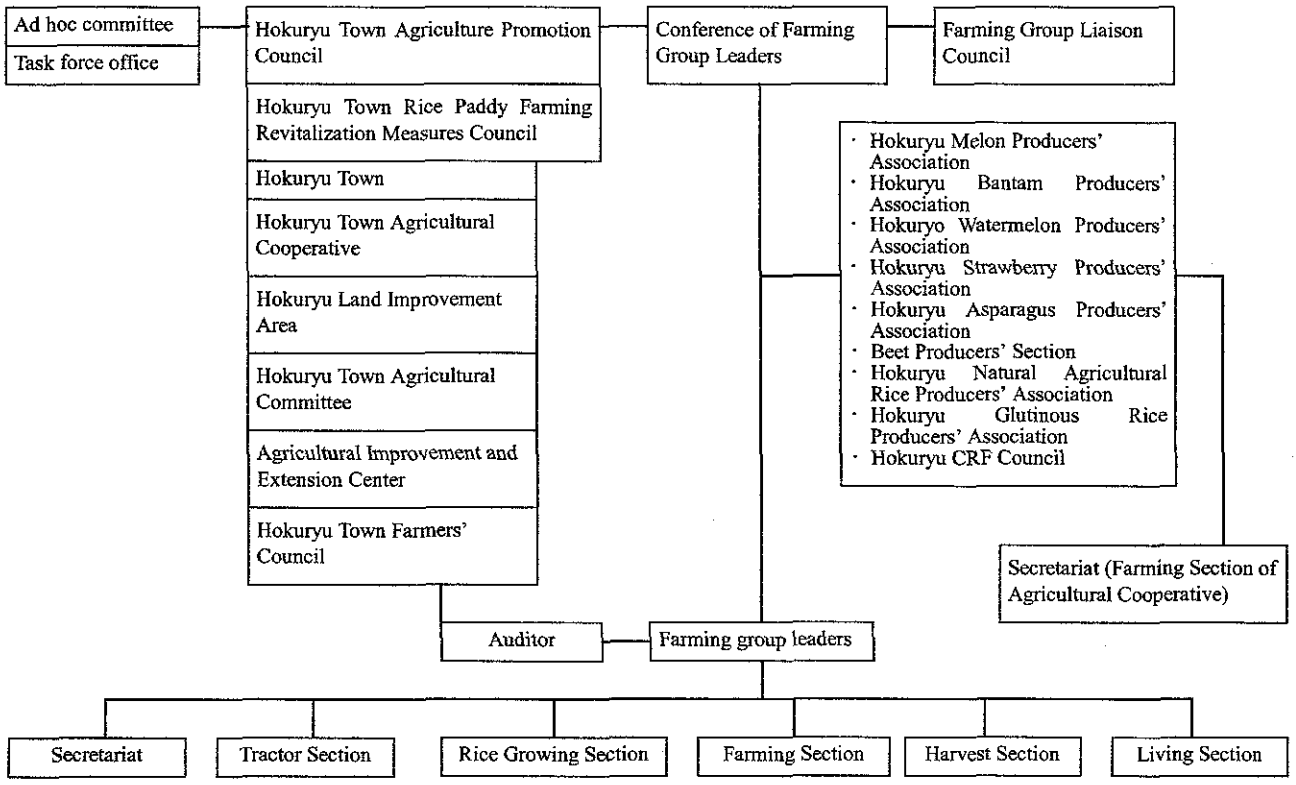
Key industries in Hokuryu are primary industries (= agriculture) focusing on rice, although its weight has slightly decreased. The establishment of the current Hokuryu agriculture is certainly due to townspeople's earnest efforts to deal with compulsory acreage reduction since 1970, though it is also based on the result of their ancestors' efforts since the town's foundation. The efforts can be divided roughly into the following three measures: The first is to establish a farming group in each area, avoid excessive investment in agricultural machinery and develop efficient, functional and comprehensive regional agriculture including promotion of growing different crops. The second is to improve the quality of rice in two directions – (1) improvement of grade and (2) pursuit

of safety. The third is the improvement of self-sufficiency in farm products mainly by the Women's Section of the Agricultural Cooperative.

(1) Efforts of farming groups toward changes of crops

Hokuryu is known as a town of farming groups. A farming group is an organization in which residents of a certain area (community) join forces to realize efficient and functional farm management. It consists not only of farmers, but also of all the people who own land in the community. A farming group has functions for jointly supporting comprehensive farm management in the community regarding land use, labor force, use of machinery and equipment, and intermediate product distribution. It also plays a role in land and water use adjustment in the community. (See Fig. 1 for the organization chart of farming groups in Hokuryu.)

Fig. 1 Organization chart of farming groups in Hokuryu



Farming groups in Hokuryu were established in 1974 by reorganizing and consolidating the roles and functions of tractor utility cooperatives, which were formed for each community in 1965 with the implementation of the national government's agricultural structure improvement project. There are currently 20 farming group in the town.

In 1990, the Hokuryu Farming Group Liaison Council, which is in charge of liaison and coordination with farming groups, town office and other related organizations, won the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Award for the first time in Hokkaido, making Hokuryu known as a "town of farming groups."

Farming groups have a number of advantages, including reduction of excessive investment in agricultural machinery, balanced expansion of farms in the group (a factor for regional revitalization), efficient rotation of crops such as wheat by the group of each community and introduction of highly profitable crops by reduction of labor. As a result of rotation of crops by farming groups of Hokuryu, sunflower, Hokuryu melon and Hokuryu watermelon (small) have become known as the town's specialties, while corn, wheat, beet and soybean have also been grown.

(2) Measures for improvement in quality of rice

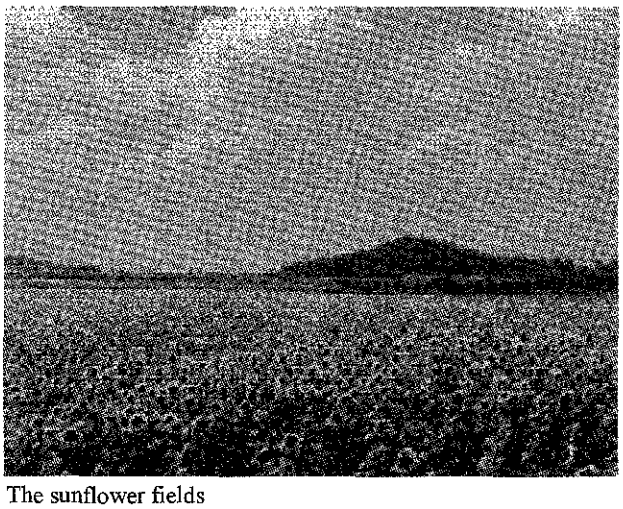
Hokuryu has promoted clean agriculture based on consumers' demand for health and safety since 1973 when the town began to grow rice in natural agricultural paddy fields. In 1988, it made the "declaration of producing safe food to protect people's lives and health." The specific purposes of the declaration was the realization of organically grown rice using less chemicals and organically grown rice free of herbicides or protectants. In the following year, "Kirara 397" rice was grown organically, and cultivation of "Himawari Yuki-kun," "Himawari Rice" and "Hokuryu town special cultivation rice" using organic fertilizer made from sunflowers began. In 1995, cultivation of organically grown rice free of insecticides also began. Efforts has been made for improvement in quality and stable production to achieve the two goals – (1) improvement of grade and (2) pursuit of safety.

(3) Measures taken by the Women's Section of the Agricultural Cooperative

① Cultivation of sunflowers

The start of sunflower cultivation in Hokuryu was the training of Mr. Y, an agricultural cooperative official, in an advanced agricultural area in 1979. When Mr. Y came home after being enchanted by the beauty of sunflower fields near an airport in Yugoslavia, he was asked for advice from the Women's Section of the Agricultural Cooperatives, which wished to begin activities unique to Hokuryu. He proposed sunflower cultivation, pointing out the beauty (landscape) of sunflower fields and the fact that sunflower oil is a healthy food containing large amounts of linoleic acid and vitamin E. It was a very timely proposal for the Women's Section which was beginning to take measures for realizing healthy eating habits by self-sufficiency.

In the following year, "One Household One Are" campaign was started by farming women of 500 households with two goals – improvement in eating habits and beautification of the environment, and sunflowers were planted in an area of approximately 4.2 ha of the town. While the sunflower acreage increased steadily to 63 ha in 1988, it continued to fluctuate after that and decreased to 40.2 ha in 1995.



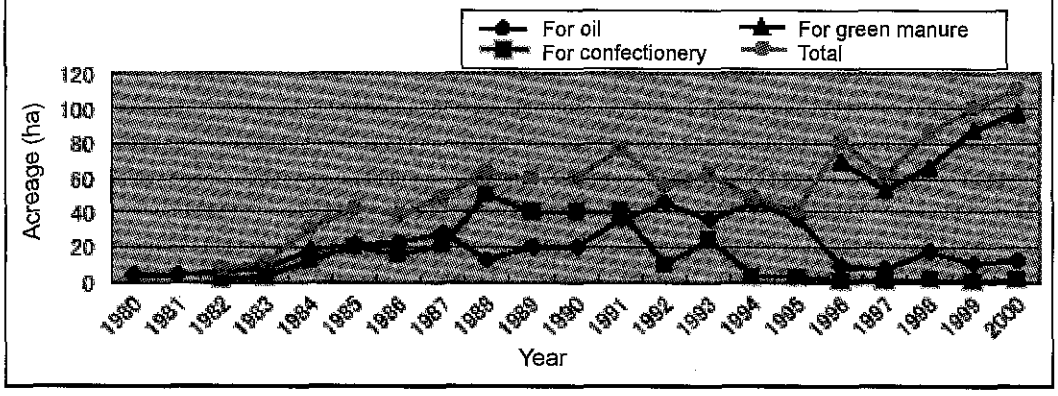
The sunflower fields

In 1990, the town office and agricultural cooperative began to provide subsidies for sunflower cultivation (¥100/kg) and subsidy for sunflower cultivation for tourism (¥10,000/10 a). The subsidy for sunflower cultivation was doubled to ¥20,000/10 a. By these subsidies and establishment of sunflower as a rotation crop and green manure (fertilizer), sunflower acreage began to increase again in 1996 to 80.2 ha (twice that of the previous year). It further increased to 99.7 ha in 1999 and 111.1 ha in 2000, finally exceeding 100 ha and becoming the largest in the nation.

Regarding the use for oil, confectionery and green manure, the use for oil peaked at 45.0 ha in 1992 and the peak of use for confectionery was 50.2 ha in 1988. The use for both oil and confectionery has, however, decreased dramatically since then.

In 2000, the sunflower acreage was 12.7 ha for oil, 1.4 ha for confectionery and 97.0 ha for green manure (see Fig. 2 for sunflower acreage by use).

Fig. 2 Sunflower acreage



② Development of sunflower-related products

Because the sunflower has the nature of a healthy food, as well as of a landscape crop, oil presses for sunflower oil were introduced in 1980 and a project to return oil and lees to farmers began. In 1982, development of sunflower-related products began in full scale, machinery for production of sunflower oil-related products was installed to prepare for mass production and nut processing machinery was introduced for production of edible sunflower seeds under the regional specialty promotion project (a project subsidized by the national government). In 1988, agricultural cooperative workers formed a project team for development of sunflower-related products, and the chamber of commerce promoted the project for revitalization of small local businesses (village development project).

The Review Board for Advanced Use of Sunflowers was also formed by Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, Hokkaido Tokai University, private companies in Sapporo and the town government for three years between 1990 and 1992. It conducted sunflower-related product development with industry-university-government cooperation, and presented its research results concerning bath liquids, drinks and sunflower oolong tea.

In addition, the Agricultural Processing Training Center was constructed in 1990 as part of the project to establish facilities for modernization of agriculture (subsidized by the national government) at the request of the Women's Section of the agricultural cooperative. It dramatically enlivened the activities of the Women's Section including development of sunflower-related products.

As a result, development of sunflower-related products has progressed steadily, and over 20 food items, including oil, nuts, confectionery, chocolate, honey, tea, ramen noodles, ice cream and wine, has been developed.

A variety of sunflower-related products other than food have also been developed. For example, a handmade wooden puzzle, which is a kind of toy to make a sunflower or dragon (symbols of the town), among other plants and animals, as well as vehicle, building or other things, by assembling wooden pieces, has been highly regarded. It has been patented and won the Director-General of the Small and Medium Enterprises Agency Award in 1990. A number of other products, such as clothes with sunflower patterns, as well as brooches and hairpins using sunflower seeds, have also been developed.

Furthermore, sunflower organic fertilizers (Himawari Yuki, Himawari Healthy) were developed for organically grown rice in 1989 from sunflower oil cake.

③ Progress of local food processing plants and a sunflower studio

Because a place for producing developed sunflower-related products was necessary, the Agricultural Processing Training Center undertook the role. New businesses of local companies were also created although the number was small. A sunflower studio for production of wooden sunflower puzzles also opened and accelerated development of sunflower-related products.

④ Sunflower tourism by development of the Home of Sunflowers

The sunflower planting campaign promoted throughout the town has gradually attracted attention of people outside the town, and the town was suddenly spotlighted with its sunflower tourism. In this

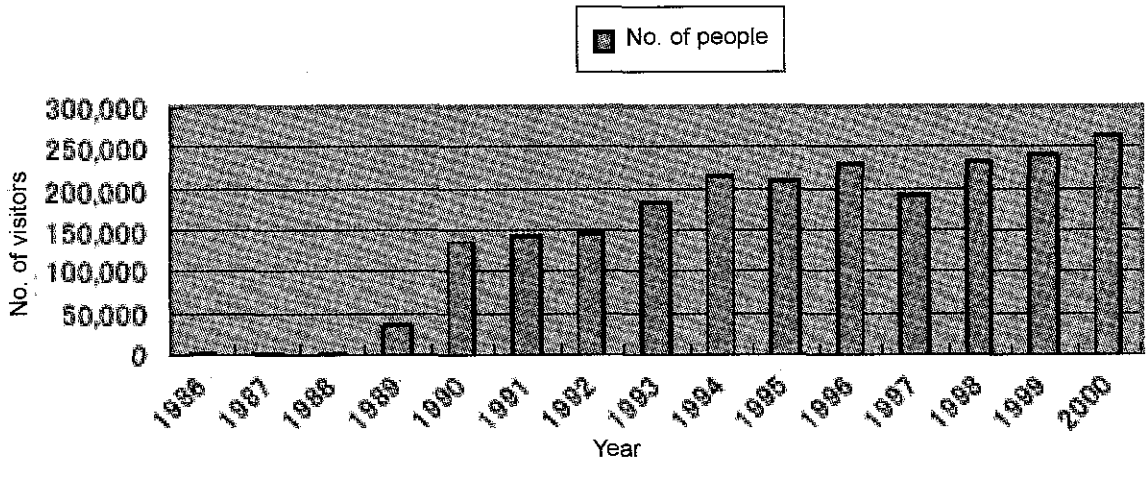
respect, development of the Himawari-no-sato (Home of Sunflowers) in 1989 had great significance. The start of this development was the time when a national farmland development project was implemented along National Route 275. A request was made to the town office and agricultural cooperative for management of a 4-ha farmland due to aging and health reasons of its owner. The town office decided to lease the land for establishing a sunflower field because it was feeling the need to deal with the gradually increasing number of tourists.

On May 1 of that year, the youth section of the agricultural cooperative, youth section of the chamber of commerce and workers of the town office, agricultural cooperative and chamber of commerce tilled and leveled the land using more than ten tractors, applied manure and planted seeds. The sunflower field was weeded occasionally after that by inviting volunteers from all over the town and asking for help from 200 members of the senior citizens' club.

Because the farmland used for the Himawari-no-sato was originally unfertile wasteland, land improvement was necessary. Although peat produced from an underdrainage (irrigation) project was applied as a land improvement measure, stumps and large stones were mixed in the peat and it took considerable energy to remove them. At present, sunflowers are cut down with choppers after blooming and plowed into the field. In addition, two tons of compost per ten ares purchased from the town's compost production association is applied to the field yearly. Because the Himawari-no-sato is gently sloped, autumn wheat is also planted to plow its straw into the field to prevent the outflow of topsoil in spring.

The sunflower acreage in the Himawari-no-sato was 6 ha at its start in 1989 and expanded to 13 ha in 1998 and 14.51 ha in 2000. Sunflower fields, including the six hectares scattered on the premises of farms or many other places in the town before the development of the Himawari-no-sato, were integrated into one area of over 10 ha. As a result of making a sunflower maze and establishing the parking lot, toilets, observatory, information center and other facilities, the Himawari-no-sato won popularity among tourists, and visitors increased dramatically in 1989 and 1990. The number of tourists visiting to see sunflowers (the number of visitors to the Himawari-no-sato after its development) increased from 3,000 in 1987 and 1988 to 35,000 in 1989 when the Himawari-no-sato was developed, and jumped up to 135,000 in the following year. It exceeded 215,000 in 1994 and reached 265,000 in 2000 (see Fig. 3 for the number of visitors to Himawari-no-sato).

Fig. 3 No. of visitors to the Himawari-no-sato

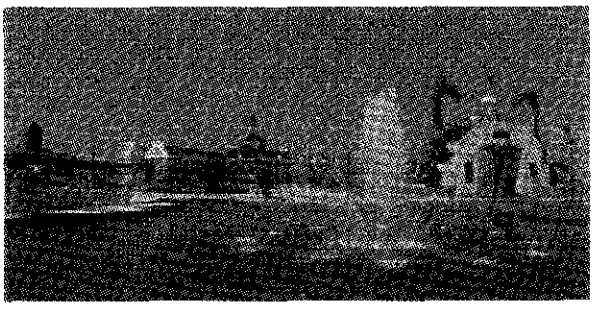


Also, the Hokuryu Town Sunflower Tourism Center with a total floor space of 1,254.31 m^2 was constructed in 1997 on the premises of the Himawari-no-sato by the town's tourist plaza establishment project. During the sunflower season between mid-July and end August, the center is lined with stands and used as a rest station. It also plays a very important role on rainy days. In the off-season, it is used as a sports ground or for other purposes. The sunflower maze (¥300), sales of specialties, "Himawari-go" tour around the Himawari-no-sato (¥500) and free bicycle loan are available at all times during the tourist

sunflower season. Events in 2000 included the opening ceremony of the association of stalls on July 15, opening ceremony of the Himawari-no-sato on July 22, Himawari Flower Festa (YOSAKOI dancing, karaoke, beer party, lottery, fireworks) on August 3 and the Sunflower Festival on August 5 and 6.

As a result of such efforts mainly by the town office and agricultural cooperative, the sunflower tourist industry has developed and the number of tourists visiting Hokuryu has increased remarkably.

(4) Establishment of Sunflower Park



Sunflower Park

As mentioned above, many tourists came to visit Hokuryu thanks to the development and establishment of the Himawari-no-sato. As sunflowers are in bloom for only around 60 days between mid-July to late August, the next task was to think about attractions for the rest of the year.

The town thus set forth the Sunflower Park project in 1990 to establish a year-round resort combining agriculture and tourism, with the sunflower – now the symbol of Hokuryu – as the main feature. It was a project to plan a year-round resort in a farming community through hot spring bathing, tourist recreation, farming experience and exchange with urban residents by establishing a hot spring health center, a food and drink sales center, an accommodation facility, a farm product processing facility, a farm for tourists, a geothermal greenhouse and a park. The Sunflower Park actually includes a Michi-no-Eki (roadside station), a health resort center (Hokuryu Hot Spring), Sunflower Park Center (restaurant, specialty shop) and an accommodation center (hotel). Its operation cost is mainly covered by funds from the national "hometown" development plan, regional development bond and other national subsidies.

Sunflower Park was constructed in 1992, soon after the above plan was developed. The hot spring resort and specialty shop first opened, followed by the opening of the Sunflower Park Hotel in 1994. The number of visitors in 1999 was more than 170,000 for the hot spring resort and over 11,000 for the hotel. (See Fig. 4 and 5 for the number of visitors to the Sunflower Park Hotel and hot spring resort.)

Fig. 4 No. of visitors to the Sunflower Park

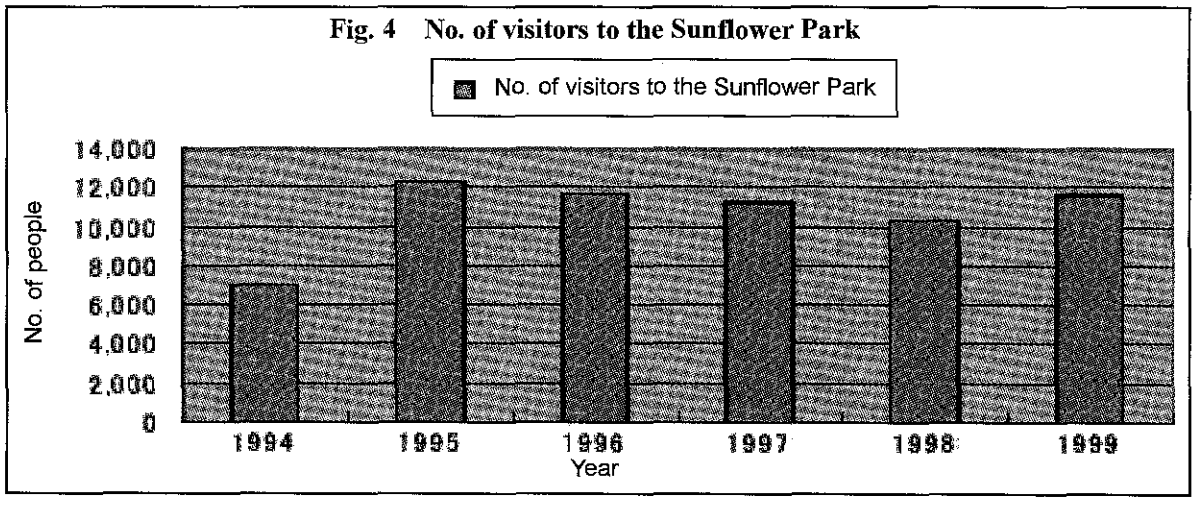
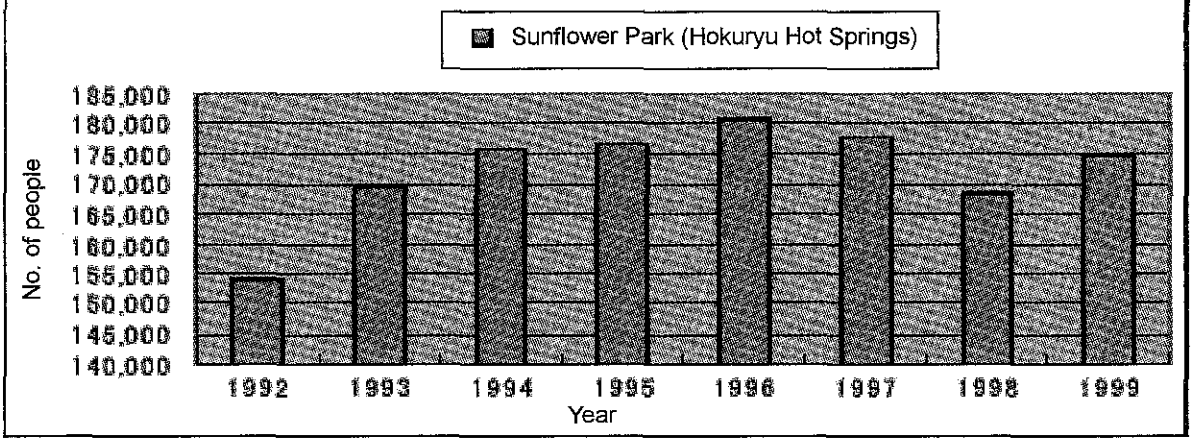


Fig. 5 No. of visitors to the Sunflower Park (Hokuryu Hot Springs)



(5) Sunflower Festival and other events

As mentioned above, Hokuryu has established a variety of facilities based on the Sunflower Park project since the development of Himawari-no-sato. At the same time, it has held various events to promote exchange with urban residents and residents of other areas. Among such events, the Sunflower Festival has played the most important role.

The Sunflower Festival is a unique festival started in 1987 by integrating several festivals of the town and combining various events with the sunflower as its main feature.

The town government, agricultural cooperative, chamber of commerce, tourist association, land improvement district, constructors' association and other organizations in the town contributed funds for organizing the Executive Committee of the Sunflower Festival. The committee designs implementation plans and organizes the festival. Unlike shrine festivals in Honshu organized mainly by parishioners, this festival organized mainly by residents is positioned as a large event for the entire town. The festival is held on the first Saturday and Sunday of August every year.

In 2000, it was held on August 5 and 6, and included a junior high school students' guide to sunflowers of the world (presentation of sunflowers from the world planted by students of Hokuryu Junior High School), sales of specialties, rice festival (rice cake making and giveaways), and a junior YOSAKOI Soran dance competition. The festival has been featured on TV in recent years and became one of Hokkaido's major summer events.

3. Development of regional industries and citizens' organizations

In town development of Hokuryu with the sunflower as its main feature, the role played by the agricultural cooperative and farming groups has been significant. It may be only natural considering agriculture is still the main industry of Hokuryu. In the case of Hokuryu, however, the significance of their leadership is especially prominent compared with other regions. This is thought to be due to the existence of farming groups formed in each area and playing a leading role in regional farming, leading farmers who have helped in the development of the region with appropriate guidance, and leaders of the agricultural cooperative who have displayed their leadership.

For example, active introduction of sunflower seeders and combine harvesters by farming groups led to the success of the "One Household One Are" campaign, which was started by the women's section of the agricultural cooperative and spread to the entire town.

The women's section of the agricultural cooperative has played the most important role in efforts concerning sunflowers. It is not too much to say that "there would have been no sunflowers in Hokuryu without the women's section." The women's section has played a significant role in town development with the sunflower as its main feature by promoting the "One Household One Are" campaign, development of sunflower-related products and other activities with a goal to improve self-sufficiency in farm products and creation of a beautiful

landscape.

The women's section has been highly praised for its achievements. It received the "Industrial Contribution Award" from the Hokkaido government in 1988 as their activities for adding value to farm products were evaluated. It also won the highest award at the Conference of Women's Sections of Agricultural Cooperatives in Hokkaido in 1991 and the "Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives Award" in the Beautiful Japanese Rural Landscape Contest in 1994.

The section itself has grown considerably through its involvement in sunflowers. Its campaign for self-sufficiency in vegetables and other farm products, which was a relatively familiar issue, evolved into commitment to organic and low-chemical cultivation. Organic and low-chemical cultivation of vegetables in family farms began in 1987 led to direct sales of such vegetables in 1992 and then to the opening of the Sapporo Green Shop (for sales of organic and low-chemical vegetables).

4. Development of regional industries and local governments

(1) Agriculture support projects

A variety of agriculture support projects have been promoted to revitalize agriculture, which is a key industry of Hokuryu.

Support projects which are currently in progress include (1) support and guidance for designated farm households, (2) guidance for improvement of the position and role of female farmers, (3) farm management support project, (4) measures against fluidization of farmland and (5) support for fostering successors. Administrative bodies have played a significant role in financial support for activities conducted mainly by farming groups of Hokuryu.

The town has recently placed special emphasis on fostering successors or new farmers by establishing the Hokuryu Farming Successor Fostering Office in its agriculture committee. Actual measures include (1) measures for successors of farmers (Himawari Bank Fund – subsidy for young people to experience farming, project for fostering local successors, incentive project for people engaged in farming, project for fostering young farmers, etc.), (2) measures for new farmers (subsidy for guidance on farm management, subsidy for new residents, incentives, subsidy for stabilization and independence of management, interest subsidy, etc.), (3) acceptance of trainees for experiencing farming (July and August, for single women) and (4) Hokuryu-no-kai village development through circuit guidance (sponsored by the Hokkaido Agriculture Independence Promotion Council).

(2) Sunflower-related projects

Regarding sunflowers, the Sunflower Tourism Sub-Section has been established in the town's Planning and Finance Section. It supports a variety of regional development activities by undertaking maintenance around the Himawari-no-sato, promoting improvement projects of Sunflower Park and surrounding area, as well as playing a major role in organization of the Sunflower Festival and other events. The Commerce, Industry and Sunflower Tourism Sub-Section has also been established in the town's Industry Section to support facilities related to farm product processing and the sunflower studio from the aspects of project planning, cost and public relations. Town workers involved in the above projects are closely related to the operation of the Hokuryu Town Specialty Sales Council as its members, and have provided support in connection with a variety of regional development activities.

5. Conclusion

Although the immediate cause of Hokuryu's commitment to sunflower cultivation was the study tour in Europe by Mr. Y working for the agricultural cooperative, the roles played by farming groups formed in each community, as well as leaders, women's section and youth section of the agricultural cooperative have been significant in supporting the progress of town development with the sunflower as the main feature into a project that involves the entire town.

This "central force" created by the solidarity of farmers led to the success of the "One Household One Are" campaign and worked as the driving force in spreading town development using sunflowers throughout the town.

Business and administrative people who share the idea of seeking the uniqueness of Hokuryu have also supported the activities.

By promoting unique town development with the sunflower as its main feature, Hokuryu managed to turn from just a "town along the highway" into a town which is visited by 250,000 people annually and counted as one of the summer features of the Sorachi district.

Horokanai Town

Town development taking advantage of buckwheat – a "passive choice" of a depopulated area

The national government's policy to reduce rice paddy area had particular impact on this northern limit of rice growing. Under circumstances that compelled people to leave their homes in search of work, the option of planting buckwheat in fallow fields was selected.

The "independent sprit" to use buckwheat growing, which was not necessarily a positive choice, as a local resource and lead to regional revitalization, and the arrival of the recent health boom accelerated town development using buckwheat. Buckwheat has now become synonymous with the town. In summer when buckwheat flowers bloom, the town bustles with the "New Buckwheat Festival."

1. Process of development of the region and regional industries

"A depopulated area with 2,000 ha of buckwheat flowers – a passive choice" was a disgraceful title given by the media to Horokanai with buckwheat flowers in full bloom ten years ago. Buckwheat is an annual of the buckwheat family and its grains are ground to make traditional soba noodles. Due to the low price of unpolished buckwheat, however, over 90% is imported. Because its growing period is as short as 90 days and hardly any management is necessary after seeding, it is an ideal crop for extensive agriculture. In Horokanai, the buckwheat acreage increased simultaneously with an increase in migrant workers, spread of extensive agriculture and progress of devitalization. This is why people said "regional farming was ruined with an increase of buckwheat." Horokanai, however, took advantage of this "passive choice" and use it to trigger revitalization in the town.

(1) Regional characteristics and increasing tendency toward rice growing

Horokanai Town is located at the northernmost part of the Sorachi district. It is an extremely long and narrow town extending 24 km east to west and 63 km north to south, and its total area is 767 km^2. In the northern part of the town are an experimental forest of Hokkaido University and Lake Shumarinai (impounding dam of Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Inc.), which is becoming popular as a tourist spot. The town is surrounded by the Teshio mountain range and other steep mountains in all directions. It is a mountain town with the Uryu River, a tributary of the Ishikari River, flowing through the center, and hilly arable land extends on the both sides. The cultivated acreage is less than 6%. The elevation is 155.6 m in downtown Horokanai, 250 m in Shumarinai in the north and as high as 287 m in Moshiri.

The temperature often drops to –30℃ or lower in winter in this cold, snowy town. The cumulative temperature is as low as 2,000℃ while precipitation reaches 1,800 mm. The snowy period lasts from early November to March, the average snow accumulation is around 2.5 m and thawing does not finish until the end of April. It is at the northern limit of rice growing area, and is more suitable for dry field and dairy farming.

Development of Horokanai began in the 1870s and progressed along the Uryu River. The population surpassed 4,600 (805 households) in the later 1910s and the headman's office was established in 1918. It became a second-grade village in 1923 and ordinary village in 1946 (upgraded to a town in 1959). Its key industry is agriculture, and the number of farmers was 3,963 (67% of the working population) in 1955 and 2,394 (59%) in 1965. Although there were also forestry, mining, commerce and service industries, the number of people engaged in those industries was approximately 400 at the most, and only a small percentage of the working population. Looking at the production income by industry, agriculture accounted for an overwhelming majority of 54.8%, while secondary industries were 10.7% and tertiary industries were only 2.5%.

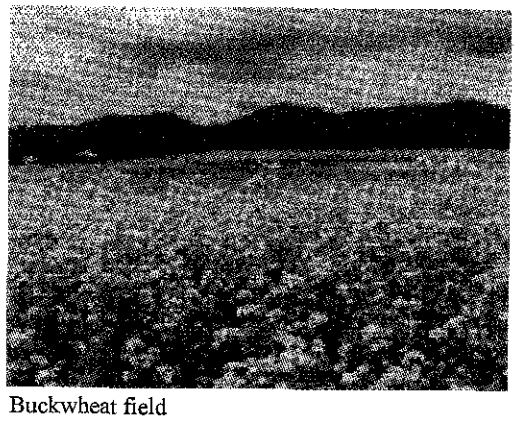
Before World War II, the town's agriculture consisted mainly of potatoes (= starch), followed by paddy rice, oats, peppermint and other crops. After the war, paddy field reclamation progressed rapidly under strong promotion of the policy to increase rice production, and rice growing completely outdistanced other crops in production by the 1960s. It is needless to say that the outstanding status of rice production was

supported by establishment of the land development district system and promotion of the drainage system, which played important roles in regional land development and water supply projects. Land improvement associations which had been organized in each region were integrated into the Horokanai Land Improvement District in 1963, and the Horokanai Area National Irrigation and Drainage Project began in full scale in the following year. Repair work of the Toyotominai dam was completed in 1967 and the paddy field area reached 2,152 ha in 1969. This accelerated tendency toward rice growing, supported by farmers' persistence and passion for "growing rice," was realized through the struggle with harsh climate and land conditions (the town was struck by ten large and small cases of cold weather, flood, wind or other damage between 1950 and 1967) on the one hand and through enormous investment into paddy field reclamation and land development (= cumulative increase in debts) on the other. Under these circumstances, the rice "production adjustment policy" (policy of reducing rice acreage) which began in 1970 was a great surprise.

(2) Development of the policy of reducing rice acreage and "fallow + migrant worker" type measures

Because the policy of reducing rice acreage, which began in 1970, was said to be an emergency-type measure only for the period of disposing of a huge amount of surplus rice, measures combining "simple fallow" and engagement in construction works in other municipalities were likely to be taken. The crop rotation area reached 556 ha (26.1% of rice paddy area) in 1970 and 1,237 ha (58.1%) in 1972. In the Soeushinai and Seiwa areas in the northern part of the town, which were under especially severe conditions, all the fields were left fallow and many farmers worked away from home.

It was, however, impossible to continue simple fallow for many years, leaving arable land to fall into ruin. As the policy of reducing rice acreage prolonged, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries also set forth a policy that fields simply being left fallow would not be counted as crop rotation area. It was therefore necessary to find land use-type crops to replace paddy rice, which are also labor-saving and compatible with construction work or other side businesses. Under such circumstances, buckwheat attracted attention from the viewpoint of soil and climate conditions. Another reason for the selection was the extremely low self-sufficiency rate of domestic buckwheat production (under 10%). Commitment to buckwheat growing began in 1973 with the acreage of 38 ha at first. Also with the town's policy – "entire fallow and entire crop rotation" – to change all rice paddies of some farmers into buckwheat fields, the buckwheat acreage increased dramatically. As planting on dry fields also began, the acreage exceeded 100 ha in 1975, 300 ha in 1980 and 1,000 ha in 1986, surpassing the acreage for rice growing (see Table 1-1 for details).


Buckwheat field

Although the buckwheat became a specialty and its acreage became the largest in Japan, it did not mean growth of regional agriculture and community. Many farmers gave up farming and worked regularly away from home, and the region was gradually devitalized. The number of farm households decreased from 637 (including 277 full-time farm households) in 1970 to 270 (103) in 1990 and 216 (83) in 1998. The number of farmers dropped from 1,300 to less than 500, and aging farmers without successors also increased dramatically.

Debts of the land improvement district also accumulated as collection of charges which were needed for rice growing became difficult due to the large rotation to buckwheat. Debts of the Horokanai Agricultural Cooperative (JA Horokanai) also increased sharply as unreasonable loaning and poor harvest continued. Bad debts of the two organizations totaled ¥6 billion in the mid-1980s, leaving them on the verge of bankruptcy. As reconstruction of the land improvement district and JA Horokanai was promoted by the overall backing of the Horokanai town government after that, they managed to clear their debts in the early 1990s.

Table 1-1 Changes in buckwheat acreage (ha)

Year	Total	Rice growing	Crop rotation	Buckwheat (crop rotation)	Ordinary fields	Feed crops
1970	—	1,569	556			
1980	—	805	1,227	130		
1985	3,463	792	1,290	763 (550)	387	1,521
1990	3,794	703	1,354	1,859 (973)	293	939
1995	4,242	784	1,261	1,800 (916)	520	1,138
1996	4,016	745	1,299	2,210 (1,008)	252	809
1997	3,987	746	1,297	2,251 (1,038)	224	766
1998	3,977	661	1,381	2,340 (1,070)	233	743
1999	4,094	589	1,451	2,246 (1,196)	265	814
2000	3,976	554	1,485	2,358 (1,186)	254	810

Source: data of Horokanai branch of JA Kitasorachi

It is hard to say that specialization in buckwheat growing was taken positively at that time. According to survey reports from those days ("Toward Reconstruction of Horokanai's Agriculture" in 1998 and "Ways to Reconstruct Horokanai's Agriculture" in 1999 by the Sapporo Development and Construction Department, Hokkaido Development Bureau), efforts were directed to reconstruction of agriculture by introduction of vegetables and other intensive crops rather than continuing excessive buckwheat growing. However, cultivation of intensive crops was not firmly established. Specialization in buckwheat growing continued, and the acreage exceeded 2,000 ha in 1996 and has grown to around 2,400 ha now.

(3) Promotion of cooperative sales by JA

Even if buckwheat growing was not taken positively, it was impossible to promote regional agriculture and community if drying, conditioning, shipping and sales were left to individual farmers. It was necessary to somehow open a way to cooperative sales by JA, uniform collection and advantageous sales. The first measures which were taken to realize these goals was cooperative drying and sales by JA. The idle rice center due to reduction of the rice acreage was remodeled for drying of buckwheat. The product was named "Saikan" buckwheat and 7,000 bales were sold experimentally in 1984. In 1986, the buckwheat section was established in JA with the participation of all 182 households producing buckwheat. With improvements in production technology, uniform collection, improvement in taste and flavor and the establishment of a system for farmers toward large-scale mechanization, JA's cooperative drying and sales started in full-scale.

JA invested nearly ¥26 million (including ¥17 million subsidy from the town) in 1990 to increase drying and conditioning facilities. Furthermore, the New Project for Special Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery Measures for Promotion of Rural Areas (50% subsidized by the national government) was introduced in 2000 with the Horokanai town government as the main operating body and JA Kitasorachi as the main managing body, and the Soba Nippon-ichi no Yakata (House of Japan's Best Buckwheat) – Horokanai buckwheat drying facility – was constructed by investing over ¥1.1 billion.

With a beneficial area of 2,600 ha and a seasonal throughput of 4,380 tons (nearly 100,000 bales x 45 kg), the facility more than covers all the buckwheat production in Horokanai. In 1999, a collection/shipping facility for B-class products was also constructed to add value to such products which had been discarded. In the following year, research to find effective use of buckwheat chaff, which had been treated only as industrial waste, was begun jointly with the Faculty of Agriculture of Hokkaido University.

The buckwheat section began development of processed value-added products in 1988, and developed "5・5 buckwheat noodles" (registered trademark) in cooperation with a noodle maker in Asahikawa. Although most of the noodles were returned to farmers at first, they became popular for their good flavor and orders began to come in. While JA was handling orders at first, Hard Inc., financed entirely by JA, was established in 1998. In the company, full-time workers are positioned to handle sales and engaged in further product development and marketing.

As a result of such efforts, the brand name of "Horokanai buckwheat" was gradually established, making it

the price leader of domestically grown buckwheat (see Table 1-2 for details).

Although the unit price (¥14,000 to 16,000/bale) has decreased considerably in recent years to around ¥10,000, due to increasing pressure from imports under the WTO system and the production share decreasing due to the spread of production to other parts of Hokkaido, the brand name of Horokanai buckwheat and its position as the price leader is still firm. Some noodle shops have even begun to use the brand name as their selling point.

Table 1-2 Changes in production and sales of buckwheat

(share in Hokkaido)

Year	Production No. of bales (45 kg)	Production per are No. of bales (45 kg)	Sales turnover (¥10,000)	Unit price (¥/bale)
1973	491(0.3)	1.29	327	6,657
1980	4,264(7.8)	1.20	7,338	17,193
1985	12,973(28.2)	1.70	15,088	11,630
1990	39,422(27.6)	2.12	41,590	10,560
1995	47,502(23.0)	2.63	61,030	12,847
1996	62,662(24.8)	2.83	60,057	9,584
1997	57,000(25.5)	2.53	56,053	9,833
1998	67,080(25.6)	2.87	70,272	10,476
1999	57,062(24.6)	2.35	66,298	11,618

Source: data of Horokanai town office

2. Development of regional industries, local governments and citizens' organizations

(1) Development of buckwheat-related support measures by the Horokanai town government

Even though it was criticized as a "passive selection" in a depopulated area" in newspapers and it was rumored among townspeople and farmers that "farming would be ruined if buckwheat production increases more than this," the town government could not ignore buckwheat which had already increased so much. There was also a growing sentiment in the town office that it was not enough just to keep encouraging farmers and that the town office should do something about it (see Table 2-1 for details).

Table 2-1 Major events related to buckwheat

Year	Item
1970	Policy of reducing rice acreage begins
1973	Commitment to buckwheat production begins
1980	Buckwheat acreage becomes largest in Japan
1984	Unpolished buckwheat dried and conditioned by JA sold as "Saikan buckwheat"
1986	Buckwheat Section established in JA
1988	Buckwheat Section begins research on processed value-added products
1989	Town government establishes Farm Product Processing Research Center and Fureai-no-sato Madoka
1990	JA's buckwheat drying facility extended
1991	Town government establishes Horokanai Agricultural Research Center
1994	Horokanai Sobautan-kai (buckwheat noodle-making club) formed. Horokanai Buckwheat Festival Executive Committee inaugurated. First Buckwheat Festival held
1998	JA establishes Hard Inc.
1999	Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council and Horokanai Soba-dojo established Horokanai Rural Area Revitalization Vision developed (Soba-no-Yakata plan)
2000	Soba-no-yakata (Soba House) constructed and promotion video "White Carpet in Mid-Summer" produced. Project for effective use of buckwheat chaff begins

Source: data of Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council

The first thing the town government did was to establish the Horokanai Farm Product Processing Research Center. With the main purpose of developing buckwheat products with high added value, the center was opened in 1989 as a town-operated facility. With the construction of a noodle-making plant in 1994,

operation of the center was shifted to the third-sector Horokanai Promotion Cooperation (financed by town government, JA and Horokanai Chamber of Commerce), which has been engaged in production and sales of buckwheat products, including semi-dried buckwheat noodles (with sauce), dried buckwheat noodles, semi-dried *yukizasa* and dried *yukizasa*. The sales turnover increased steadily from ¥71.68 million in 1994 to ¥95.36 million in 1998 and over ¥100 million in 1990. In the last few years, the center has been operated without the management commission fee of ¥15 to 40 million, which the town government used to pay each year.

Another thing that should not be overlooked is the establishment of the Horokanai Agricultural Research Center. The center was established as a sub-section of the town's industrial section with one full-time and several part-time workers, in order to conduct soil testing and add high value to buckwheat. As a result of the center's research, a new variety, "Horokei 3-go" (tentative name), was created, and the reason why buckwheat in Horokanai is free from replant failure, which is supposed to occur in buckwheat, is about to be clarified. According to a worker at the center, thawing of over two meters of accumulated snow at a time in April may have a soil cleaning effect.

Even though it has not been completely proven, the extremely unfavorable condition of Horokanai with cold weather and heavy snow was a major factor for its growth to be the "home of buckwheat." The Agricultural Research Center moved to a new building in 2001 and renamed "Horokanai Agricultural Technology Center." Further improvement of the center is promoted, with plans to invite a former agricultural extension service officer.

In 1989, an old school building in the Shumarinai area was remodeled by introducing the national government's "pilot project for the aged," and Fureai-no-Ie Madoka, where people can experience buckwheat noodle making, was opened. Due to the nature of the project, senior citizens serve as instructors of noodle making, and 1,700 people mainly from outside the town visit the center annually for experiencing noodle making. To further facilitate such activities, the third-sector Shumarinai Tourism Promotion Corporation was established with the capital provided by the town and some individuals to commission management of "Madoka."

As mentioned before, the town also provided a subsidy of ¥17 million for expansion of drying and conditioning facilities, and constructed Soba Nippon-ichi no Yakata (House of Japan's Best Buckwheat) – Horokanai buckwheat drying facility, as well as a facility for collection and shipping of B-class products.

Although its policies might have been one step behind of the increase of buckwheat in some aspects, the town government has been active in promoting various support measures since around 1990. It is not hard to imagine that the town government needed to take considerably drastic measures to continue promotion measures while buckwheat was criticized as a "passive selection" and there was a mood of "soba bashing" in the town with people thinking "regional agriculture will be ruined if buckwheat increases any more."

The town developed the Horokanai Rural Area Revitalization Vision in 1999, and promoted improvement in buckwheat-related facilities with subsidies from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' "New Project for Special Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery Measures for Promotion of Rural Areas" (1999 – 2003). It also produced a promotion video called "White Carpet in Mid-Summer – Horokanai, the Home of Buckwheat," based on the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' "Rural Area Revitalization Promotion Project" in 2000. These measures can be interpreted as the town's clear announcement that buckwheat is to play a central role in regional development.

(2) Formation and activities of "Sobautan-kai" (buckwheat noodle-making club)

Thanks to the various measures taken by the town, a tendency toward use of buckwheat that had increased so much grew gradually among townspeople, and signs of regional development with its focus on buckwheat began to appear.

A person who contributed greatly to the growth of this tendency was Mr. A, a former worker of the Horokanai Land Improvement District. Mr. A developed the "buckwheat revitalization plan" around 1990 and began to make approaches to different fields. The hardship he went through when the land improvement district came to a deadlock with debts of ¥3 billion and managed to overcome the crisis with the help of the

town government and many townspeople must have become his driving inspiration.

The first move for regional development with focus on buckwheat was the formation of the Horokanai Sobautan-kai in 1994. The forerunner of the Sobautan-kai was a gathering of town office workers, police officers, dentists, post office workers, veterinarians, agricultural cooperative workers and others to enjoy noodle making. It started with 11 members, after going to "Okina," a buckwheat noodle shop in Yamanashi to polish their noodle-making skills. The purpose of the Sobautan-kai is to make and eat Japan's best "Horokanai buckwheat noodles" themselves and enjoy the taste, while spreading the noodle making and promoting Horokanai's buckwheat culture. Since then, the Sobautan-kai has been holding regular meetings twice a month, and conducting various activities, including cooperation for noodle-making classes within and outside of the town, opening of noodle stalls at events, cooperation for the buckwheat revitalization project and cooperation for the buckwheat owner system (see Table 2-2 for details). It also issues certifications to acknowledge noodle-making skill.

As the buckwheat noodle boom also began, membership has gradually increased and there are as many as 41 at present (28 from within and 13 from outside of the town).

Table 2-2 Activities of Horokanai Sobautan-kai (2000)

Date	Activity
Jan. 31	Buckwheat noodle-making class by Mr. Kunihiro Takahashi
Mar. 4	Visit to "Okina," a buckwheat noodle shop in Yamanashi
Mar. 8	Shumarinai noodle-making class
Mar. 10	Participation in "buckwheat meeting" of Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council
Mar. 11	Noodle-making class at Asahikawa Furusato-kai
Apr. 12	Participation in a lecture of Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council
May 28	"Buckwheat producing area" open tour in Tsukamoto (8 participants)
Jun. 22	Participation in "Gen" Asahikawa Local Buckwheat Noodle Fan Club's party to enjoy Horokanai buckwheat noodles
July 12	Instruction on noodle-making at a Fresh Seminar for Hokkaido government workers
July 16	Serving noodles at a park golf competition in the town
Aug. 6	Buckwheat flower viewing
Aug. 11-13	Opening of a stall at Asahikawa 3.6 Festival
Aug. 26-27	Opening a stall at Numata Yako Andon Festival
Sept. 2	Participation in Hokkaido amateur noodle maker competition (1 second-rank and 2 first-rank winners)
Sept. 2-3	Participation in Horokanai New Buckwheat Festival
Oct. 8	Opening a stall at Numata Horoshin Spa Autumn Leaves Festival
Oct. 25	Cooperation in service noodles at Hokuryu Nursing Home
Oct. 25, 30/Nov. 8	Instruction at open noodle-making class of Numata High School
Dec. 2	Dateokina tour (16 participants)
Dec. 8	Participation in inaugural ceremony of Numata Buckwheat Noodle Fan Club
Dec. 16	Noodle-making class at Seiwa-area community hall
Dec. 18-19	Noodle-making class at Horokanai community hall
Dec. 28	Cooperation in dispatch of "owner noodles"

Source: data of Horokanai Sobautan-kai

Stimulated by such movements, similar groups have been formed one after another. Today, there are more than ten such groups, including the Sobadokoro Kitasaikan in the Kamihorokanai autonomous district; Sobadokoro Numaushi-an in the Numaushi autonomous district; Shinen Soba Club in the Shinen autonomous district; Heiwa Soba Club in the Heiwa autonomous district; Horokanai Sobataben-kai, Fureai Soba Aiko-kai and Soba Soft Kenkyu-kai formed by townspeople; Yu Mate Soba Club of post office workers; Ichimi Club of women in the town; Sobakko Club of the JA women's section and Soba Kenkyu-han of high school students.

(3) Horokanai Buckwheat Festival Executive Committee and holding of Horokanai New Buckwheat Festival


Noodle-making class

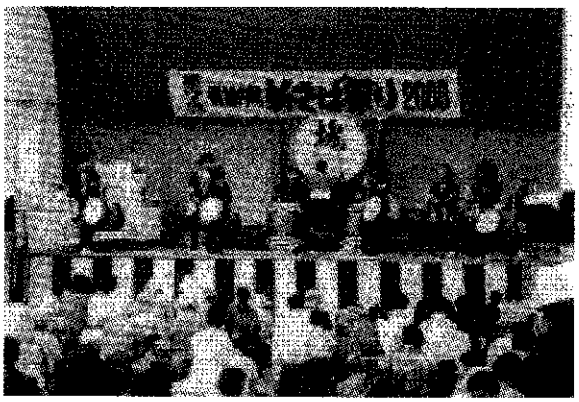
At the same time as the establishment of the Horokanai Sobautan-kai in 1994, the Horokanai Buckwheat Festival Executive Committee was formed by townspeople and the first Horokanai New Buckwheat Festival was held in July when buckwheat flowers were in full bloom.

Formation of the Committee was suggested by Mr. K, a buckwheat farmer and a member of the town council. Mr. K attended an event of the National Noodle Culture Inter-Regional Exchange Promotion Council where municipalities promoting development using buckwheat get together, and decided to promote town development using buckwheat in Horokanai too. Subsequently, he appealed to buckwheat producers and requested support. It can be imagined that it was no easy task as the town council was not yet interested in "town development focusing on buckwheat" and the tendency toward "getting rid of buckwheat" was becoming stronger in those days.

Mainly farmers and other townspeople who responded to his appeal made preparations by dividing up the work among them, and JA served as the secretariat. The town government supported from the sidelines because it was thought to be better for townspeople to take the initiative without the government coming to the front and hindering the people's independence.

The Buckwheat Festival was funded by the support from the town and JA, as well as by contribution of ¥50 per bale from producers. Tickets were sold within and outside of the town and, combined with a music event inviting singer Takio Ito, 5,000 people participated in the festival. It, however, ended up showing a loss of ¥3.5 million.

Although the Festival was in the red, the Executive Committee decided to hold the festival again in the following year and began preparation, as they believed in the power of persistence. Fortunately, the Hokkaido Tourist Association provided subsidies (¥2 or 3 million annually) from the second to fourth festivals and some positive figures could be expected. Cooperators and agricultural unions that open stalls increased gradually and the festival began to prosper. In the fourth year, the time of the festival was changed to the end of August when new buckwheat is produced and the site was moved from the Seiwa area to the Horokanai area where the town office is situated. The festival is now firmly established as a regular event. The New Buckwheat Festival in 2000 involved 59 Executive Committee members consisting mainly of farmers and JA workers and14 organizations opening noodle stalls (8 from within and 6 from outside of the town), and the number of participants exceeded 28,000. For reference, a variety of organizations from outside of the town, including the Hokkaido Buckwheat Society, Chomei-an in Sapporo, Yamato in Fukushima prefecture, Takeo in Fukui prefecture, Ibaraki Buckwheat Noodle Fan Club and the Women's Section of Shimizu, Shizuoka, opened stalls.


Horokanai New Buckwheat Festival

It must be said that the role played by the New Buckwheat Festival was extremely significant as an important event to promote the trend toward "town development focused on buckwheat" and appeal to the entire nation about Horokanai buckwheat.

(4) Formation of Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council

While a variety of attempts were made, a tendency to unify them and consolidate the promotion of town development focused on buckwheat began to grow. Under such circumstances, buckwheat-related organizations, groups and individuals in the town were united to create the Formation of Horokanai

Buckwheat Revitalization Council in July 1999. Members consisted of 27 organizations including the town government, JA, chamber of commerce, tourist association, agricultural extension service center and almost all the organizations in the town, as well as 422 individuals. With the number of individual members accounting for 20% of the total population of the town (2,300), the council is truly a town-wide organization. It can also be seen that many buckwheat-related organizations were formed in those days (see Table 2-3 for details).

The president is JA's director in charge of the Horokanai area; vice presidents are the president of the town's chamber of commerce, president of the town's tourist association and the deputy mayor; the secretary general is the above mentioned Mr. A, a former worker of the Horokanai Land Development District; and buckwheat-related organizations serve as directors.

Table 2-3 Organizations related to Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council

Supporting/cooperating organizations
Horokanai town government, JA Kitasorachi, Horokanai town chamber of commerce, Horokanai tourist association, North Sorachi Agricultural Extension Service Center
Related organizations
JA buckwheat section, Horokanai Buckwheat Festival Executive Committee, Horokanai Promotion Corporation, Hard Inc., Horokanai buckwheat research and processing plant, Horokanai Soba-dojo, Sobadokoro Kitasaikan, Horokanai Sobataben-kai, Sobadokoro Numaushi-an, Fureai Soba Aiko-kai, Shinen Soba Club, high school students' soba kenkyu-kai, Yu Mate Soba Club, Ichimi Club, Sobakko Club, Heiwa Soba Club, Soba Soft Kenkyu-kai, youth section of JA Kitasorachi, Horokanai Sobautan-kai, Soba Owner System Association, Horokanai Buckwheat Added Value Society, Katainaka

Source: data of Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council

The objective of the council is to facilitate consensus of townspeople and cooperation with related organizations and to promote business focused on Horokanai buckwheat in order to take advantage of Japan's largest production of buckwheat and promote buckwheat. The council is engaged in various activities with the belief that regional revitalization cannot be accomplished without buckwheat resources. Its main activities include (1) cooperation in the New Buckwheat Festival, (2) cooperation with ranking acknowledgment committee of the Horokanai soba-dojo, (3) opening of stalls at the National Buckwheat Festival, (4) holding of the "sobadangi" (buckwheat discussion meeting) for exchange among representatives of active organizations, (5) publication of "Kyoshin" buckwheat information magazine, (6) opening of a web site and (7) promotion of effective use of buckwheat chaff. It is also worthy of mention that the council aims to establish a "buckwheat cluster" for establishment of cultivation technology and further quality control, as well as for cooperation among related industries and consumers centering around buckwheat, in order to further improve the standard of Horokanai backwheat.

Although activities of the council have only begun and there is much more to do, it can be said that regional development focused on buckwheat has finally begun with the participation of the entire town.

3. Factors underlying town development focusing on buckwheat and its achievements

(1) Factors underlying town development focused on buckwheat

Horokanai is now about to take off toward town development focusing on buckwheat. The days when buckwheat was criticized as a "passive selection" whose further increase could ruin regional agriculture ten years ago seem to belong to a different age. What changed the people's idea from "it's only buckwheat" from "we still have buckwheat," and made them advance toward town development focusing on buckwheat?

As one factor, the presence of Mr. A, a former worker of the Horokanai Land Improvement District, and Mr. K, a buckwheat farmer and a member of the town council, must be mentioned. As stated earlier, Mr. A had already developed the "buckwheat revitalization plan" by 1990 and proposed the use of buckwheat, which had been taken negatively, to trigger town development. It is true that there was a tendency to enjoy the regional resource (= buckwheat) among some townspeople, such as members of the forerunner of the Sobautan-kai. As can be seen from the initial members of the club, however, it was a limited group of

enthusiasts, and it might not have led to the formation of an association with a clear purpose without encouragement from Mr. A. The presence of Mr. K was also significant. Without his passion, it is highly unlikely that the New Buckwheat Festival could have been realized.

Mr. A went through a deadlock of the land improvement district due to the reduction of rice acreage and Mr. K suffered hardships of seeing many neighboring farmers abandoning farming with the increasing change to buckwheat growing. Under such circumstances they must have fostered emotional strength to overcome difficulties and changed their ideas from depending on a "dream-like farming plan" to using the actual situation – increasing buckwheat production – as a local resource and leading it to regional revitalization. In short, Horokanai was waiting for people who would play the central role and commit themselves to town development with enthusiasm.

The second factor was that the town government continued its support from the sidelines. It began with the establishment of the Horokanai Farm Product Processing Research Center in 1991, followed constantly by the subsidy for the "New Buckwheat Festival," establishment of the Buckwheat Revitalization Council, construction of Soba-no-yakata, production of a promotion video and other very timely activities. As mentioned before, it deserves special mention that support began in the days when people said, "regional agriculture will be ruined if buckwheat increases any more." The well-maintained concept that "it is better for townspeople to take the initiative without the government coming to the front and hindering the people's independence," and the government staying behind the scenes in order to foster independence of the townspeople (including farmers) is also worthy of note. Establishment of the Farm Product Processing Research Center (present Horokanai Promotion Corporation) and Madoka (present Shumarinai Tourism Promotion Corporation) as the third sector company can also be thought of as an extension of this idea as they shook off the bureaucratic way of working and introduced the vitality of townspeople. Horokanai's effort to bring out townspeople's abilities as much as possible without government control is now about to bear fruit.

The third factor is that neither the town government nor JA did things in haste. Like the attitude of the town government mentioned before, JA never did things in haste either. While JA handled the establishment of collection/shipping facilities and joint sales system, development of processed products and other businesses little by little, it did not do anything forcibly. Both town government and agricultural cooperative indicate certain directions not only for buckwheat but also for introduction of vegetables, and they do not persuade people by force before a foundation to accept such direction is established. It might have been fortunate that the circumstances surrounding buckwheat were difficult and it was easy to have communications among only 2,000 townspeople. This case, however, proved that, when carrying out a certain policy, taking time to foster a foundation for accepting it is a shortcut to success.

The fourth factor is that the town has promoted exchange with other regions and learned good points of others and its own good and bad points. It began when the forerunner of the Sobautan-kai went to "Okina," a buckwheat noodle shop in Nagano, for training. It can also be said that the New Buckwheat Festival was created from exchange with people all over the nation. A variety of exchange opportunities, such as demonstration of noodle making by members of the Sobautan-kai, exchange at "Madoka," "New Buckwheat Festival" and "Soba-dojo" and discussion with outsiders who purchased buckwheat from the town, have been provided since then. Through such exchanges, the "troublesome buckwheat" was reconsidered and recognized as a local resource. Without exchanges with other regions, the idea of town development focused on buckwheat might not have been created. Horokanai teaches us the importance of "keeping your feet on the land and turn your eyes and ears to the entire nation and world."

Lastly, their foresight of directing their attention to buckwheat in the early 1970s should be pointed out. Buckwheat was regarded as a "vanishing crop" in those days. Crops that attracted attention then were vegetables and flowers with high yield per unit or wheat whose price standard was raised due to the tight international conditions of cereal supply and demand, and these crops were the main targets of crop rotation. Buckwheat was not subject to any policies, especially price policies. Except for incentives for crop rotation, it was not necessarily an advantageous crop in light of profit, and hardly anyone paid attention to buckwheat. Although it was later found out that Horokanai was suitable for buckwheat growing for its cold climate and heavy snow and the buckwheat noodle boom created a wind-wing situation, there was no information or sign

of the boom in those days. It is not certain from only listening to investigations who suggested buckwheat first, it deserves special mention that the town directed attention to and fostered this unique crop rather than following the examples of other regions. Buckwheat indeed had some negative aspects, but it teaches a lesson that the independent spirit to "open up an original field" is more important than anything for town development. Probably because this "independent spirit" backed by the harsh history of colonization was present as an undercurrent, the town was not discouraged by the criticism of an "abortive flower in a depopulated area" and the movement toward town development focusing on buckwheat arose and became a large current in the town.

(2) Results of town development focused on buckwheat

Town development focused on buckwheat has brought considerable results to Horokanai.

One such result is the fact that townspeople have certainly regained confidence. As mentioned before, dreams of townspeople, especially of farmers, were shattered by the policy of reducing rice acreage. Rotation to buckwheat growing that they chose with reluctance accelerated the abandonment of farming and population drain, and buckwheat was criticized by the media as a "passive selection of a depopulated area."

It was only natural that townspeople and farmers lost confidence. They overcame such hardships, however, by displaying their "independent spirit." Horokanai buckwheat has now become a national brand name, the Horokanai New Buckwheat Festival has become an event known throughout Hokkaido and the rest of Japan, and Horokanai has even become synonymous with buckwheat. As symbolized by the successive formation of groups enjoying buckwheat noodles in the town, townspeople have begun to have confidence in Horokanai buckwheat and in their region.

The second result was the progress of harmony and mutual understanding among townspeople. As shown by the formation of a number of buckwheat-related organizations and of the Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council with 422 individuals and 27 organizations, social links among townspeople have been consolidated greatly centering around buckwheat and mutual understanding has been promoted. Such harmony and understanding are critical when considering town development. Further directions for town development may even be created from here.

The third result was the creation of new employment opportunities in the town. Without buckwheat, the Horokanai Promotion Corporation, Shumarinai Tourism Promotion Corporation, Horokanai Agricultural Technology Center, Hard Inc. and other places for employment would not have been created. Also, as the town became famous as the home of buckwheat, farmhouses providing meals and lodging for tourists and noodle shops have also increased. Even though it has not really stopped population decrease, buckwheat has certainly increased employment opportunities in the town.

The fourth result was that instruction on noodle making and other activities gave senior citizens a reason for living. Senior citizens seem full of life when making noodles at "Madoka" and "Soba-dojo" or participating in the New Buckwheat Festival or the Buckwheat Revitalization Council. Having opportunities to take active parts in the local community must be a great inspiration in their lives.

Horokanai Buckwheat Revitalization Council

Chapter 3 Essence and Various Effects of Regional Promotion

In the preceding chapters, we studied what agricultural roles has played in regional promotion and economic development through successful case examples by clarifying the historical course of Hokkaido's development, the meaning of agriculture in the development as well as the current meaning of agriculture. Taking that study in mind, we aim to consider successful factors common to regional promotion and economic development with agriculture as the core as well as effects of regional promotion and economic development in this chapter. Please note that all the "common factors" do not apply to all the regions and that even if they apply, there is a difference in degree among regions; they are primary in some regions and secondary in others.

1. Primary Factors of Successful Regional Promotion and Regional Development

The ten municipalities highlighted in this report have extremely successful case examples of regional promotion and economic development among the 200-odd municipalities in Hokkaido.

(1) Recognition and ideas for converting "materials" into "resources"

The most important factor for these successful municipalities was the fact that they focused on things that originally did not exist in the regions concerned and considered them as the core or highlight of regional promotion and economic development.

Highlighted products are Genghis Khan barbecue in Takikawa, wine from Ikeda and Furano, lavender in Furano, tomato juice from Takasu, charcoal from Shimokawa, "Yusui (high microorganism-content culture solution)" in Koshimizu, sunflowers from Hokuryu Town and buckwheat from Horokanai Town. These products had not long been key products at all in respective regions.

Apparently, "Yusui," lavender, sunflowers and buckwheat were not even local "resources," but other products were also treated in much the same way.

Although sheep were raised, tomatoes were planted and wild grapes and Japanese larches grew in mountains, Genghis Khan barbecue, tomato juice, wine, larch charcoals and other items have never been created and eaten/used routinely in the regions. The beech forest in Kuromatsunai had long been neglected, being reflected by the fact that there was a plan to lift the designation as a protected species, i.e., a felling plan.

The idea of Genghis Khan barbecue was born out of the "food crisis" after World War II whereas tomato juice was initially designed to use remaining tomatoes for home consumption. In addition, wine and charcoal were born out of the idea of a pioneer who saw wild grapes, and out of difficulties in disposing of thinned Japanese larch wood, respectively. Dairy farming in Hamanaka began after World War II while fighting against severe natural conditions, and has developed since the 1960s, and the beech forest was born only recently out of a campaign designed to revive the region.

If Genghis Khan barbecue, tomato juice, wine, charcoal, beech forest, etc are regarded as important "resources" for the regions, "materials" producing these "resources" existed in the regions concerned. However, they were not "resources" that had existed since time immemorial.

Mutton could have been cooked into English-style "mutton steak," a dish like Yakitori (grilled skewered chicken), etc., instead of Genghis Khan barbecue. Tomatoes could have been shipped to fresh food markets while wild grapes and Japanese larches could have been made into grape juice and Japanese larch chips.

Beech forests could have been forestland or timber, and fresh milk was marketable when its quality was decent. Generally speaking, a large number of regions paid no special attention to sheep and wild grapes, but shipped tomatoes for fresh consumption purposes and made thinned wood into chips.

Focusing on new aspects and/or factors that did not exist in the regions and converting existing "materials" to add such aspects and/factors led to the creation of the symbol of regional promotion and economic development. The key to regional promotion and economic development is whether the ability to come up with ideas of converting simple "materials" into "resources" was nurtured in regions or not.

Even when "exotic" things were introduced, called into question was whether regions had the ability to decide on what to focus. Worthy of attention is the fact that in addition to the case examples included in this report, many municipalities regard "training programs" not as junkets, but as the forums for self-enhancement

toward clear goals without time constraints.

(2) Presence of enthusiastic subjects = enthusiasts

The second factor is the presence of people who passionately advocate and devote themselves to regional promotion and economic development. Typical examples include the mayors of Ikeda, Takasu and Furano, Messers. A and K from Horokanai and the staff of the Hokuryu Town Office. The current Ikeda, Furano, Takasu, Horokanai and Hokuryu would not have existed without the idea of wine production by the mayors of Ikeda and Furano and subsequent activities; without the mayor of Takasu's call for "making healthy tomato juice" and cooperation by citizens; without Messers. A and K's enthusiasm for buckwheat and community responses in Horokanai; and without the strong impression of a Hokuryu Town Office official when he saw sunflower fields from aboard an airplane and then approached the JA (agricultural cooperative). It is highly likely that they would have become several characterless municipalities.

The same applies to the other case examples. It is not difficult to imagine that those with proper leadership have appeared one after another at turning points of regional promotion and economic development even though they were not so conspicuous as those mayors and Messers. A and K. Such people may be mayors, residents or residents' groups. People would refer to regional promotion and economic development led by mayors as being "top down" whereas those led by citizens or citizens' groups would be called "bottom up." At issue is not whether it is "top down" or "bottom up," both of which are superficial and nonessential. Whether it is "top down" or "bottom up," at stake is whether proposals are timely and based on strong beliefs and enthusiasm that withstand some opposition and difficulties without being impromptu and irresponsible.

In many municipalities, regional promotion and economic development measures have suffered a setback, picked up steam only temporarily or flickered out like "sparkling fireworks" whether they are "top down" or "bottom up." The difficulty in bringing such measures into fruition may have been caused by the "absence" of those who advocate such measures passionately and devote themselves to promoting them.

(3) Consolidation of various civic capabilities

The third factor is the consolidation of various citizens' power toward a single goal. In this report, agriculture-centered regional promotion and economic development of were studied. It is, however, clear that such promotion and development measures would never have materialized if farmers, JAs, agricultural sections of municipalities and agriculture-related organizations and institutions had merely existed.

Takikawa needed cooperation of food service companies and processing companies whereas Furano, Ikeda and Hokuryu required that of tourism associations and tourist agents. Indispensable cooperation was provided by people concerned with forestry and the young who moved in from cities in Kuromatsunai and Shimokawa, processing companies, public health offices and other health-related institutions in Takasu, wholesalers and researchers in Koshimizu, buckwheat noodle restaurants and other food service companies in Horokanai and dairy product manufacturers in Hamanaka.

It goes without saying that the most vital elements are the cooperation of ordinary citizens and their active participation in regional promotion and economic development of campaigns. In addition, it should not be overlooked that a variety of such cooperative relationships transcended the boundaries of the municipalities concerned. For example, such relations were spread during training sessions of elementary and junior high schools as well as residents' associations in other municipalities, and mutual exchanges were repeated, thus broadening infinitely. Typical examples include the "Wine Festival" in Ikeda, the "Yusui Cultivation Festival" in Koshimizu, the "Sunflower Festival" in Hokuryu, and the "New Buckwheat Festival" in Horokanai. "Toit Vert" in Kuromatsunai, the "Support System" in Hamanaka and various "networks" in Takikawa are considered to belong to the same category.

Regional promotion and economic development succeeded not only because of farmers and related organizations/institutions, but also even seemingly irrelevant organizations and institutions were involved in launching a conglomerate campaign centering on farmers and related organizations/institutions toward a single goal. The key to success is "self-support effort" whereby all the people concerned actively addressed challenges as their own issues without leaving them to others. This may be a clear solution to the movement

of creating "industrial clusters," which is currently promoted in Hokkaido, whereby the formation of a myriad of organic relations and collaborative relations among related industries is pursued around one core industry. Needless to say, serving as the core are crisscross human relations connected by the relationship of mutual trust.

(4) Importance of the idea "Citizens should enjoy local products/resources first"

The fourth factor is the importance of the idea that "citizens should enjoy local products/resources first" as well as of citizens' love of and affection for them. Genghis Khan barbecue, sunflower fields and tomato juice among other products were initially contrived for farmers and citizens in the regions concerned, not for citizens in other municipalities. Genghis Khan barbecue was contrived for farmers and local citizens to enjoy eating mutton that they raised, sunflower fields to beautify surrounding scenery and make farm work pleasant and tomato juice to promote farmers' health by utilizing excess tomatoes. The same applies to wine in Ikeda, buckwheat noodles in Horokanai and beech forest in Kuromatsunai, and Furano's wine and lavender also share the same idea. Furthermore, Hamanaka Town's fresh milk was born out of farmers' natural wish to "produce good fresh milk," and the use of "Yusui" in Koshimizu Town was also initiated out of farmers' natural wish to produce secure farm products by maintaining soil fertility and protecting rich ground.

They were never born out of ambition to attract customers or to sell extensively outside each region. In this regard, it is not too much to say that they were based on the idea of "regional self-sufficiency" – including not only goods, but also unique landscape befitting regions that are created from ideas unique to the regions.

They gradually gained popularity and became specialty products or people came to visit regions to appreciate their unique scenery. This idea runs counter to that of creating "one product per region," under which citizens go through hardships to create "products marketable outside regions," not to enjoy the product themselves first. It is thus necessary to understand that the essence of regional promotion and economic development is "for citizens to enjoy products/resources first."

(5) Emphasis on "software" and investment commensurate to regional ability

The fifth factor is to emphasize "software" and put "software" first. These municipalities have no indications that they constructed large-scale processing or other facilities first. Ikeda, Furano, Takasu and Horokanai, which currently have large-scale facilities, began with small-scale or "miserable" facilities, depending on how you look at them. These facilities were commensurate to their strength. Typical facilities include the facilities for Ikeda Town's "Research Institute for Viticulture and Enology," the "Simple Facilities for Agricultural Processing," which was built by modifying the community center in Takasu, and drying facilities modified from an existing rice center in Horokanai. Instead of investing money in facilities, they directed their energy to consensus building in the region, i.e., "software," which led to a great development. As the initial investment was small, it was possible to spend time on consensus building and direct all energy to the regional promotion measure because "even if it failed, damage would be minimal."

The typical representative of dissimilar cases is the large-scale resort development that became rampant like a fever during the latter half of the 1980s, most of which went into "bankruptcy," were "closed" or suffered "poor business results." The large-scale projects were intended to compete with other regions by constructing large-scale facilities based on impractical calculations (which are too optimistic and include much wishful thinking). A comparison of these two types, however, indicates that "large-scale resort development"-type regional promotion and economic development are highly likely to exhaust regions and leave behind "negative" legacies alone – gigantic, useless, artificial structures, constrained finance of municipalities, sinking feeling and resignation among local residents, etc. Conversely, regional promotion and economic development that are preceded by consensus building and commensurate to regional capacity provide regions with great vitality and leave behind irreplaceable "positive" legacies.

(6) Importance of introducing various national and regional government policies in accordance with regional dimensions

The sixth factor is the importance of introducing the central and Hokkaido governments' various policies in

accordance with regional dimensions. The central and Hokkaido governments have planned and appropriated budgets for various policies for the development of Hokkaido. As mentioned in (5) above, however, none of the municipalities introduced as case examples here jumped at new policies introduced by the central government or the prefectural government.

Even the Ikeda Research Institute for Viticulture and Enology, which has grown into one of Japan's most famous wineries, had to negotiate with the public health office over license acquisition several time and began with an extremely small-scale "experimental production license for fruit wine." The milk and milk product plant in Hamanaka Town began its operation by "recycling" a bankrupt company's factory. Horokanai Town's "Japan's No. 1 Buckwheat Noodle House" also started by renovating a rice center that was made idle due to the central government's policy of rice acreage reduction. The other municipalities experienced very similar situations.

In all cases, various projects (many of which were accompanied by the construction of facilities and equipment) based on new regional development policies by the central government, the prefectural government, etc. were effectively utilized according to the need and realities of the regions. In particular, Ikeda managed to acquire a "temporary license" by persuading the public health office and "appealing the necessity and local circumstances to the central government." For the "Japan's No. 1 Buckwheat Noodle House" in Horokanai Town, sunflower-related facilities in Hokuryu Town and the tomato juice factory in Takasu Town, it was possible to introduce projects by the central and/or prefectural governments smoothly because buckwheat and sunflowers had already been planted and tomato juice had also been under production. As mentioned in the introduction of case examples in Chapter 2, various projects were introduced gradually according to the actual conditions in each region, instead of introducing them all at once. That is why operations have been smooth without, for example, being pressed for repaying huge amounts of loans or forcing farm households to produce impossible amounts of raw materials in order to ensure operating rates.

In this context, the central and prefectural governments' well-timed implementation of various policies and projects should also be highly valued. Nevertheless, the attitude of the aforementioned municipalities reflects the ideal local government befitting the era of "decentralization" because these municipalities utilized such policies and projects for regional promotion and economic development in accordance with their capabilities. In addition, this may be the way for municipalities to accumulate "policy prowess" and cultivate the "spirit of independence."

(7) Optimal size of community

Last but not least, let us touch upon the optimal size of community. The municipalities subject to this case study have a population ranging from a little over 2,000 to below 50,000, which is equivalent to approximately 500 to 10,000 four-member family households. Municipalities with this scale of population generally have reliable neighborhood associations and residents' associations with close cooperative relations and alliances among citizens. As the phrase goes, they are "societies whose members cannot live anonymously" or "societies where members are always identifiable." With close relations with municipal governments, JAs and other institutions, they can generally be referred to as societies rich in "neighborly love" and the "spirit of reciprocity." While this kind of society is vulnerable to defects of "letting things drift" or having "interdependent relations" on one hand, it easily creates "affection toward regions" and the climate of solidarity" on the other. All the municipalities introduced in the case examples overcame the former defects and maximized the latter advantages.

Although case examples of the regional revitalization of ten municipalities, which are covered by this study, are varied, it is no exaggeration to say that the expertise for "regional development" is reflected by these case examples. In addition, they provided clues to the proper size of community for revitalization.

Although the term "region" is vague, it is necessary to consider regional promotion and economic development measures, with the sweep of the eye or the scope where members "cannot live anonymously" as a single region, because the region is nothing but a myriad of relationships forged by people. The point is the optimal size of community and we cannot always say "the bigger, the better." The size of community holds the key to future regional promotion and economic development.

Nevertheless, we do not suggest that existing large cities should be divided into municipalities with populations of 40,000-50,000. People's lifestyles cannot transcend time and space so easily as "information" and "money." It is deemed necessary to establish subject-specific regional promotion and economic development measures in accordance with the aforementioned scale of people's time and space (e.g., covering specific sub-districts in a district).

2. Effects of Regional Promotion and Regional Development

Regional promotion and economic development have a great impact on each region. For one thing, a sense of independence has increased significantly. Without wine or lavender in Ikeda and Furano, "wolf's peach" in Takasu, sunflowers in Hokuryu and buckwheat in Horokanai, these regions would not have had anything to boast of, and would have undergone turbulent changes in conjunction with policy development by the central and prefectural governments as if they were seaweeds tossed about by rough seas. The same would have applied to the other municipalities.

There is no question that "having something to feel proud of" has encouraged regions, enhanced self-esteem and nurtured a sense of independence that enables regions to face difficulties. We also cannot overlook the fact that such pride has helped improve intra-regional reconciliation and mutual understanding further. In addition, the notion that "agriculture is the cornerstone of community" has spread widely among non-agricultural households as well, indicating that agriculture is infusing energy into regions.

Various kinds of regionally established "public corporations" have demonstrated advantages of both the "public" and the "private" sectors, assuming an important role in regional promotion and economic development. This is believed to be based on a sense of responsibility corroborated by independent mindedness. This is worthy of special mention because there are so many public corporations or "quasi-public corporations," which possess defects of both the public and the private sectors.

A sense of independence and responsibility, which has supported the Japanese society, serves as the driving force behind regional revitalization. The sense derives from citizens' self-help and self-esteem based on the idea of "having something to feel proud of." We believe that this is the very essence of "self-supporting efforts."

Secondly, ingenuity of regions or, generally speaking, the capability of applying various technologies has been enhanced significantly. Although such examples are too numerous to list here, they include the "Yusui" utilization technology in Koshimizu, sunflower processing technology in Hokuryu, wine making technology in Furano and Ikeda, tomato juice processing technology in Takasu and buckwheat noodle making technology in Horokanai. Each municipality contrived or modified textbook technology or technology too ordinary to be practical in accordance with the characteristics of each region or images of products to be manufactured so that the technology was advanced to usable levels. We believe that all the municipalities have learned by trial and error, but such hardships serve as the breeding ground for developing new practical technology. Actually, the following development has been under way in the municipalities taken up in the report: production of ham, hamburger and other meat products in Ikeda; production of sunflower nuts and sunflower ice cream in Hokuryu; production of cheese in Furano; and production of miso (bean paste) in Takasu.

Thirdly, employment opportunities have been created in these regions. Reasonable job opportunities have been created on farms where materials are produced and in various facilities and different kinds of public promotion corporations, not to mention wineries, tomato juice factories and buckwheat noodle drying facilities. Although it is difficult to stem a decrease in the number of farm households under the current agricultural situation, it is important to note that the decreasing speed has decelerated significantly.

Maintaining a certain level of population in a region makes immeasurable contributions to regional promotion and economic development. For example, maintaining the population of a region at a certain level serves as a way of guaranteeing the livelihood in the region, such as supporting elementary and junior high schools, shops, hospitals and transportation systems.

Fourthly, during the course of regional promotion and economic development, the elderly have come to play a larger role, enabling them to find their roles in local community, find something to live for or engage energetically in various activities.

The typical example is "guidance on buckwheat noodle making" in Horokanai. Similar examples are under

way in other municipalities: improvement of sunflower fields in Hokuryu; charcoal production in Shimokawa; transfer of agricultural techniques in Koshimizu, etc. If local communities are to be created by everybody, young and old alike, "normal communities" cannot be realized if we "keep the elderly out in the cold," nor can we rid regional promotion and community development of distortions. We should pay due attention to the fact that the society in which everybody joins hands in sharing responsibilities is created during the course of regional promotion and community development.

The fifth point is that the mind of cherishing local natural environments, pastoral landscape, etc., instead of quick profits, has steadily been cultivated.

Like the saying "poverty makes you dull," we devoted ourselves to disorderly development in the past for quick profits by sacrificing various irreversible elements, such as natural environments in regions. In Japan, this tendency was rampant during the "bubble economy" (the mid 1980s) and remains strong even today. It made people feel hollow and ruined regions.

The municipalities introduced in case examples never prioritized "quick profits." From the viewpoint of "quick profits," they rather went a roundabout way. Whether it is wine, buckwheat noodles, lavender, sunflowers, "Yusui," etc. it takes a long time to take shape. These regions succeeded only because they chose to do their utmost to strike a balance with the environment. Such decisions led to "clean agriculture" and "organic agriculture" in Takasu, Koshimizu and Hokuryu, as well as the forest protection and afforestation in Shimokawa and Kuromatsunai. It is apparent that the other municipalities have also pursued agricultural production in harmony with the environment. Referred to as a place that is famous for its scenic beauty, we have built our beautiful nation and communities with a sense of responsibility to each and every citizen of the nation, self-support efforts and the spirit of partnership, with agriculture in harmony with the environment as the foundation.

We should be proud that this wonderful tradition of community building in Japan exists throughout Hokkaido.

As the saying goes that "man can not live by bread alone," we should maintain harmony with our surrounding natural environment, beautify the landscape and, by doing so, enhance the mind of people. As a result, we can enjoy economic merits, as well. That may be the ideal image of regional promotion and economic development in the 21st century, which is referred to as the "century of the environment."

Closing

As the case examples of regional promotion in Hokkaido, this study shed light on ten municipalities.

Although Hokkaido has 212 municipalities, we selected for this study the most diverse case examples to prevent bias of local natural environments, population and other social environments or their changes, mechanisms of implementing promotional measures, etc.

Fortunately, the results clearly indicate various keys to and expertise in regional promotion. Citizens' labor and enthusiasm during the course of regional promotion are very interesting even as a story and we cannot help but pay tribute to them for their efforts. Every single example is a human and regional project.

Case examples of regional promotion in Hokkaido feature the fact that collaborative systems (ideal teamwork) for local residents (farmers) needed to be established in conjunction with the development of proper agricultural technology. In Honshu, autonomous organizations centering on rice cultivation were already established in villages with a 1,000-2,000-year history and technology could be utilized as soon as it was developed. Unlike regional development in Honshu, the ideal regional teamwork that supports proper technology can also be learned from case examples of Hokkaido. This is the secret of Japan's development and the goldmine for developing countries – capacity building and self-support efforts necessary for developing countries.

Recently, the emphasis of development assistance for developing countries has shifted to "software" development, such as the "establishment of systems" and "human resource development." Under these circumstances, the essence of regional promotion is one piece of expertise that developing countries need most.

HICS is committed to conveying this essence of regional promotion to developing countries through various JICA programs. Under the catchphrase "Conveying the Technology of the North Which Has Cultivated the Earth!," we are resolved to improve cooperative relations with local governments and local residents to make Hokkaido live and developing countries together. In this regard, it is very appreciated if you could give us continued kind cooperation and guidance.

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