



Japan's agricultural, forestry, and fishery exports have an excellent reputation. Clockwise, from top left: rice and sake, tea fields, strawberries, and cattle used in *wagyu* production.

CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES BY EXPANDING AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS

Spreading quality, appealing Japanese agricultural, forestry, and fishery products and food around the world will revitalize local economies and further encourage Japan's growth.

With its bountiful natural environment on both land and sea, Japan boasts agricultural, forestry, and fishery products with an entrenched popularity in Asia and beyond. The annual value of Japan's agricultural exports exceeded 900 billion yen in 2019, a figure that is forecast to grow further. At the same time, these agricultural exports hold increasing promise to boost the Japanese economy further through the revitalization of local economies that raises incomes in areas outside of Greater Tokyo, which account for approximately 70% of domestic consumption.

Under the new Japanese administration led by Prime Minister SUGA Yoshihide, the government is working with relevant ministries and agencies to provide a powerful push to expand those exports. In April 2020, when Prime Minister Suga was Chief Cabinet Secretary, the government arranged a system for expedited procedures by setting up a headquarters at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to supervise negotiations with countries of destination and the certification of establishments in Japan. That has significantly improved export operations, which previously had involved cumbersome requirements for companies, such as regulations that varied by countries of destination. The government has set new export value targets of 2 trillion yen by 2025 and 5 trillion yen by 2030, promoting a national effort to reform the country's agriculture, forestry, and fisheries so as to deliver the industry's products to the world.

Many companies have already produced positive results in expanding exports. One such company, Henta Seicha Co., Ltd., manages 25 ha of tea fields at the foot of Mt. Kirishima in the southern Kyushu prefecture of Kagoshima. The company produces pesticide-free, organic green tea leaves and sells powdered tea and other products. They began

exporting in 2015 in accordance with a motto that advocates providing overseas markets with environmentally friendly, delicious, and reassuring Kirishima tea. Riding the powdered-tea boom in the West, the company has grown at a rapid pace, and is forecast to export 14 tons of products in 2020, primarily to the United States, the EU, and Asia.

An important issue that comes up with organic farming, in addition to inconsistent yields, is how to prevent agrochemicals from floating over from neighboring farmland. Henta Seicha's response was to establish a method to prevent such flows by purposely developing tea fields surrounded by forest. That allowed the company to make the transition to organic farming that is pesticide-free, and to receive organic accreditations recognized in Western countries, where health consciousness is high. The company's president, HENTA Koichi, said, "Organic farming involves constant work, such as improving the soil. But if we can keep on making good products, then I believe the demand will definitely be there."

Henta Seicha has meanwhile acted to further expand tea leaf exports, such as popularizing organic farming among nearby growers and working with them to run promotions outside Japan. President Henta said, "By expanding exports like this, I truly feel that we can create jobs in the local community and revitalize towns. That is our mission."

Japan's quality agricultural, forestry, and fishery products and foods are made possible by the hard work and ingenuity of local producers. Growers' efforts to expand agricultural exports will show the world the appeal of Japanese food, while creating vibrant local economies throughout Japan. ●



Top: Henta Seicha is aggressively courting overseas buyers. The company invites them to visit its tea fields to build trust in the product's quality, aiming for an increase in steady demand. Bottom: Higher levels of health consciousness worldwide have fueled the global popularity of Japanese tea. In response to that demand, the Japanese government has become involved in promoting more exports.



Henta Seicha has benefited the entire local community by successfully expanding its exports. President Henta (middle of front row) is eager to double the production of organic farming.