



Agriculture in Japan

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Eastern countries are recognised primarily in the milling industry as key producers of rice, but the market for other food and feed materials in Japan is also growing by an impressive amount year on year. Japan, as well as South Korea, are some of the largest importers of wheat and corn, with Japan importing on average four million tonnes (mt) of wheat per annum.

Agriculture currently accounts for 1.2 percent of the country's economy, a surprisingly low number, largely due to the difficult terrain in Japan that minimises available land resources for farming. Only 12 percent of the land in Japan is cultivable, as much of the land is mountainous, and so imports are heavily relied upon in order to produce sufficient quantities of food for the 126 million people residing in Japan.

The situation is also similar for the animal feed sector in Japan. Soybeans, the primary ingredient for animal feed in Japan, are also imported from all over the world. Certain vegetables are often grown in Japan, such as sweet potato, as well as beans and peas through intercropping (the system of growing multiple crops in proximity on the same field), but the demand for imported materials is still a significant one.

Corn

One raw material that Japan imports in especially large amounts is corn (or 'tōmorokoshi', in Japanese). In 2011, Japan consumed 15mt of corn, even more than their annual rice consumption. The numbers for imported corn in Japan increases year on year, thanks to its popularity. In 2003, 15mt of corn was imported into

the country, which to 16.5mt in 2004. A small decrease happened in the following years, leading to imports of 15.4mt in 2015.

Corn has always been a favourite food source in Japan. The vegetable was first brought to the land of the rising sun in 1579 by the Portuguese. At this time corn was only used for animal feed, but human consumption of corn soon saw a rapid increase in the Meiji Period (1868-1912), once animal production began to truly take off with Japan's increase in meat consumption. By the 1960s, corn became a very popular food throughout the country and sweetcorn is a popular snack in summer.

Rice

Rice is a staple part of the Japanese diet and is used in a variety of dishes. The grain has been farmed in Japan for over 2000 years and is of such importance to the country that, at one point, rice was even used as currency. The most established rice variations in Japan include hakumai (white rice), genmai (brown rice), mochigome (glutinous rice) and multigrain rice (also known as sticky rice). All these different products are popular ingredients in producing sake, rice vinegar, mochi, onigiri as well as other dishes such as donburi, kayu and sushi.

Rice is cultivated under irrigated conditions and most paddies also house underground drainage systems to allow water to drain into the canals during the off-season. The majority of rice fields are located in terraces and valleys. Toyama, Akita and Niigata are the prefectures which produce the most rice.

In 2009, 8.2mt of rice was consumed in Japan, which rose to 8.3mt in 2015. Rice production has also remained steady in Japan. In 2014, Japan harvested 10.5mt of rice. The primary production seasons for rice farming in Japan vary slightly, depending on the region.



In central Japan, planting typically occurs in April-May whilst harvesting takes place three months later, from August-October. In Southern Japan, planting takes place at the same time, whereas harvesting occurs between September-November. In Northern Japan planting takes place slightly later, between May-June whilst harvesting occurs August-September.

Wheat

Whilst wheat isn't as widely imported and eaten when compared to corn and rice, wheat consumption is steadily increasing year on year in Japan. Four main types of wheat are produced in the country: common wheat (for flour production), naked barley (for miso), six-row barley (for barley rice and miso) and two-row barley (for beer and other alcoholic beverages). Hokkaido, Saga and Fukuoka are the key prefectures where wheat production is most concentrated.

In 2003, wheat consumption reached 5.9mt, which increased to 7.1mt in 2013. In 2013, wheat imports in Japan reached 6.1mt. Japan, on a smaller scale, also exports wheat. In 2015 Japan exported a total of 270,000t of wheat to outside countries such as Hong Kong. One reason why wheat production has not increased in Japan is that it is cultivated only as a secondary crop.

Oilseeds

Rapeseeds are one of the primary oilseeds harvested in Japan, but their production has been subject to increases and decreases in quantity following a lack of sunshine in areas such as Hokkaido. Rapeseed production was expected to reach 4,000mt in 2020.

Soybeans are primarily used in the production of miso, soy sauce and tofu. Soybean cultivation, much like wheat, does not

constitute a significant amount of total farming production in Japan, as soybeans are only used in crop rotation. Production also tends to fluctuate, having seen periods of both growth and decline. Despite this, soybeans are a crucial aspect of the Japanese diet and so large amounts of soybeans are also imported from other countries.

The top three prefectures focussing upon soybean production are Hokkaido, Saga and Shiya. In market year 2018/19 Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) reported that a total of 146,600 hectares (ha) were dedicated to soybean planting.

