

# NAMI-E-GOMA

## Vitalizing through "egoma"

### Namie Farm's Struggle

Namie Farm, an agricultural group in Namie Town, strives to become the largest producer and cultivator of *egoma* (perilla) in Japan. After the Great East Japan Earthquake and the accident at Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO)'s Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, the farmland was left unattended and has become desolate after evacuation. They are struggling to revitalize the fields and bring back vitality to the town. (Saito, Wakamatsu, Ito)

Namie Farm was established in March 2020 by three old classmates, headed by Wataru Izumi, 30, who moved from Shirakawa City. The town's population of about 20,000 fell to 1,900 after the earthquake. The idea is to transform weedy land into farmland, create jobs for young people, and boost agriculture to create the most enjoyable town in Japan. All farmland was decontaminated and the soil was replaced. Crops are tested for radioactive materials,

and only safe and secure crops are shipped. The farm currently covers about 11 hectares, an area equivalent to 15.4 soccer courts, and harvested about five tons last year. They expect to harvest seven tons this year. The cultivation of *egoma* requires less labor than other crops, but the yield depends on the weather and other factors. Although 90% of his work is manual labor, he says that earning a solid income as



A picture of us being briefed by Mr. Izumi (left) on *egoma*.

a result of his efforts is his greatest joy. Mr. Izumi said, "I want to increase the number of young farmers while making the town I live in more enjoyable with our own hands."

### The magic to grow delicious *egoma*

#### Farmer's wisdom: "Sedome"

Mr. Izumi and the farm manager, Mitsuru Otaka (30), showed us how to conduct "sedome" (cutting off the fourth node of an *egoma* stem), which is one of the processes involved in growing *egoma*. The process allows a lot of nutrients to reach the seeds and produce delicious *egoma*. The fragrance of the leaves during the work was refreshing like *shiso* (Japanese basil). The stems were firm and I thought they would be difficult to cut, but I was surprised to find that they were actually

soft and easy to cut. Mr. Izumi said that it was very hard to conduct *sedome* of all the *egoma* on the vast land of Namie Farm. We learned that it takes hard work to produce delicious *egoma* – all the way from seed planting in June to harvesting in October. *Egoma* has long been familiarly known as "Ju-nen" (ten years). On New Year's Day, "ju-nen-mochi" (rice cake with grated *egoma* on top) was eaten. They call *egoma* "ten years" because it is good for one's health and is believed

to prolong one's life by ten years. *Egoma* has attracted attention as a health food because research has shown that it contains "omega-3," which is good for the skin and dementia.

#### Eating Healthy

There are many processed foods made from Namie Farm's *egoma*, such as dressing, *egoma* oil, hot sesame oil, and soft caramel; each of which enhances the flavor of *egoma* and is enjoyed in different ways. It is great to eat these and be healthier. New products currently planned include kimchi made with *egoma* leaves and *Ju-nen* miso, both of which I am looking forward to trying out. (Kimura)



### "Be interested in agriculture"



We interviewed Mr. Izumi and asked him about his thoughts on farming.

- Q: Why did you establish the Namie Farm?
- A: Because I wanted to revitalize the town of Namie through agriculture, and help the town to become a welcoming place for young people who are interested in agriculture.
- Q: What are the strengths of the Namie Farm?
- A: One of our strengths is the ability to spread information through our website and social media. We also use Instagram, and this

has brought elementary and junior high school students to visit us in class, and have young people from outside of Namie Town come to learn, so we feel that we are getting a good response. Also, since the three of us (operating the farm) are old classmates, we get along very well and have a lot of fun.

- Q: What do you consider as important in your activities?
- A: Human connections. Farming cannot be done alone. When I started growing *egoma*, I learned a lot from the elderly people in the town.
- Q: Lastly, do you have a message for generations like ours?
- A: Many of you may have an image of farming as "dirty," "tough," or "uncool," but farmers are very cool people who grow the vegetables that you eat every day. Nowadays, it can be difficult to live solely on agriculture, but instead, there are more and more possibilities, such as the ability to work at both ends of the business. We want you to be more interested in agriculture.

### Make a No.1 town in Japan

Eleven years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, but many residents of Namie Town have remained displaced from their homes since the earthquake. It is precisely because this is the time, I believe, that the heat of agriculture will lead to encouraging Namie Town and Fukushima Prefecture. Mr. Izumi repeatedly emphasized that he wanted people to become interested in agriculture. I hope that Namie Town will become the most prosperous agricultural town in Japan. (Shojo)

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