Together with
FUKUSHIMA
15 Years After the Great East Japan Earthquake

神田外語大学
Shibata Seminar (Global Career) Prof. SHIBATA Shinichi, Director of the Career Education Center
HAGIWARA Kairi/HIGASHI Yukino/IGUCHI Sana/MIYAZAKI Yuiko/OGATA Ichika/
OIKAWA Yuki/OKAZAKI Koharu/OSADA Tsumugi/OYAMA Gota/
PERRIDGE Kyomary/SAKAMOTO Yuta/SASAGE Kazuma/SATO Yui/
SEKIGUCHI Riku/SEKIGUCHI Shunya/SENAVIRATHNA Kalpana/YAMAMOTO Haruka/
YAMASHITA Ayumi/YONEYAMA Kanade Edited by The MAINICHI
University Website

Fukushima: A Hub of Recovery,Innovation, and Renewable Energy

The Fukushima Institute for Research, Education and Innovation (F-REI) was established to support recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. Its mission extends beyond rebuilding to creating new knowledge, industries, and value.

Headquarters, research facilities, specialized testing sites, and short-term accommodation facilities are under construction, with completion planned for 2030.

F-REI integrates the Fukushima Robot Test Field, originally developed under the Fukushima Innovation Coast Framework, and now serves as the institute's center for empirical research on robots and drones.

In the town of Namie, efforts are under way to promote development that leverages hydrogen and renewable energy. The town hosts the Fukushima Hydrogen Energy Research Field, one of Japan's leading hydrogen research sites. The 22-hectare facility includes about 68,000 solar panels and uses a 10-MW hydrogen production unit to produce, store, and supply hydrogen.

Each hour, it generates 1,200 Nm³ of hydrogen—enough to fuel roughly 560 fuel-cell vehicles. Hydrogen produced here was also supplied to the Tokyo Olympic cauldron and the Olympic torch.

Around F-REI, numerous research institutions and advanced technologies are gathering, making Fukushima a growing hub of innovation and a "ray of hope" for long-term reconstruction.

Ongoing Challenges: Nuclear Waste and the Path to Safe Living

Despite major progress, Fukushima still faces long-term challenges stemming from the nuclear accident.

The interim storage facility, located across Okuma and Futaba towns, stores large quantities of removed soil, waste, and incinerated ash. The materials are scheduled for final disposal outside Fukushima Prefecture by March 2045, but no disposal site has yet been determined.

The Japanese government plans to reuse decontaminated soil that meets safety standards for public works materials. Some of this soil has been used symbolically at the Prime Minister's Office, but broader reuse remains limited.

A true solution, many say, lies in restoring living environments where residents can feel safe and eliminating restricted zones as soon as possible.

Fukushima Bananas and Strawberries Drive New Local Industries

In the coastal town of Hirono in Fukushima Prefecture, bananas are being grown inside the greenhouses of the Tropical Fruit Museum as part of a project led by the Hirono Town Development Public Corporation. The initiative aims to support the community as it continues to rebuild after the 2011 disaster.

"The most important thing is to create local charm together with the people," says company president NAKATSU Hirofumi. Since the disaster, Hirono has focused on improving its image by developing new industries residents can take pride in. Banana cultivation is one example of these efforts.

The banana variety was given a long, symbolic name: "The banana from the town with mandarin-orange hills and a beautiful horizon shining in the morning sun." Its nickname, Kirei—meaning "beautiful"—captures its image.

Students from Kanda University of International Studies, led by Professor SHIBATA Shinichi, also took interest in the banana as part of their research on sharing Fukushima's appeal internationally. They developed an original craft beer, "Kirei Ale," using the bananas, hoping to help reshape Fukushima's image by transforming a locally grown crop into a unique new product.

Brewing took place at Haneda Sky Brewing in Haneda Innovation City, where students learned about fermentation, ingredient handling, and flavor design. They discussed how to balance fruity notes, keep the banana aroma natural, and create an easy-to-drink beer.

The project brought together brewery staff, banana producers, and university members. Students helped choose the product name and considered label designs.

"Kirei Ale" was completed in January 2026. Students said they were proud to see their ideas take shape through the cooperation of many people, and they hope the beer will introduce more consumers to Fukushima's lesser-known charms.

In the nearby town of Okuma, Nexus Farm Okuma began cultivating strawberries in 2019 to help revitalize the area. The farm covers 4.8 hectares including 2.8 hectares of greenhouses. Workers monitor sugar levels and quality using data-driven methods that combine technology with human expertise.

Factory manager TOKUDA Shingo says, "If people say in 10 or 20 years, 'Okuma has become a town of strawberries,' that would be wonderful."

From banana cultivation to student-made craft beer to high-tech strawberry farming, new industries in Fukushima continue to expand—strengthening local identity and supporting long-term recovery.

Tropical Fruit Museum Connecting Banana Cultivation to Mental Recovery

Agriculture Brings Smiles Back to Naraha

Interview with TAKIZAWA Mei of Fukushima Shirohato Farm

In the town of Naraha in Fukushima Prefecture, along Japan's northeastern Pacific coast, a young agricultural specialist is helping rebuild community ties and chart a new course for the region's future. TAKIZAWA Mei, 33, oversees sweet-potato production at Fukushima Shirohato Farm, an agricultural corporation supplying ingredients for confectionery products.

A native of Sagamihara, Kanagawa Prefecture, just south of Tokyo, Takizawa studied agriculture at Meiji University before joining the Shirohato Group. She relocated to Naraha in January 2020 and now manages every stage of production—from cultivating seedlings to harvesting and storage. Seedlings grown at the farm are used within the Shirohato Group, and harvested crops are processed into sweet-potato confectioneries and other products.

Working alongside local farmers—many of whom cultivated sweet potatoes in Naraha long before the 2011 earthquake and nuclear accident—has been an important source of learning, Takizawa says. The mix of long-time residents and younger workers is gradually shaping a new model for the town's agricultural sector.

Community engagement is another priority for the farm. It partners with local schools to

provide hands-on agricultural programs, giving children opportunities to plant, harvest, and learn how food is produced. Takizawa hopes these experiences will help younger generations appreciate the role of agriculture and strengthen their connections to local industries.

Challenges remain. Medical facilities in the area are limited, and balancing farm work with childcare can be demanding. Even so, Takizawa remains committed to supporting both agriculture and community revitalization.

"Through agriculture, we want to spread warmth, smiles, and the appeal of local produce," she says, expressing her hope that Naraha will continue moving forward on its path to renewal.

Leaving Home to Take on a Challenge in Futaba

Interview with KOYASU Yuka, Asano Nenshi

In the town of Futaba in coastal Fukushima, near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, where reconstruction continues more than a decade after the accident, KOYASU Yuka, 22, is taking on new responsibilities at the local branch of Asano Nenshi, a textile manufacturer headquartered in Gifu Prefecture, northwest of Nagoya. Koyasu, also from Gifu, joined the company after high school and relocated to Futaba about three years ago.

During her job interview, Koyasu expressed a desire to "work in an environment different from where I grew up." She was assigned to Futaba, a town still rebuilding, and began working alongside employees involved in textile production and operations at the facility's café.

Her first impression of Futaba was shaped by the visible traces of the disaster. Many areas still bore signs of earthquake and nuclear damage, and some districts remained under evacuation orders. "It was very different from the image I had before coming," she recalls. But as the months passed, she began noticing gradual changes: the reopening of facilities, residents returning, and new shops appearing around town.

Asano Nenshi runs a café inside its facility, which serves as a gathering place for residents, workers, and visitors.

Through her work there, Koyasu has met people engaged in Futaba's recovery and has gained a deeper understanding of the town's challenges and progress.

Living far from home brought moments of uncertainty. But as she saw more residents coming back and young workers relocating to Futaba, her mindset shifted. "Watching the town take steady steps toward reconstruction has been meaningful for me," she says.

Koyasu now views her continued stay in Futaba as part of supporting the town's revitalization. With improvements in the living environment and employment opportunities under way, she hopes more young people will consider joining the effort. Her experience reflects a growing movement of individuals choosing to engage directly with the work of rebuilding Futaba.

Bringing Back Ukedo's Seafood

The Recovery Efforts of Shibaei Fisheries

"I want people across the country to know how wonderful the fish from Namie are." These words reflect the hope of SHIBA Tsuyoshi, third-generation president of Shibaei Fisheries in the Ukedo district of Namie Town, a coastal community in Fukushima.

The company's plant was devastated by the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident. Fishing in the area came to a complete halt. Yet Shiba remained determined to revive the business and honor his ties to his hometown.

During the long years of uncertainty, local residents offered encouragement, and the town government continued to express its wish for Shibaei Fisheries to reopen. In a survey conducted before a new shopping facility's opening, many respondents wrote that they wanted to see "Ukedo fish" on the shelves—a sign of how deeply the community valued its seafood heritage.

The new processing plant was completed in February 2020. Two months later, when the first fish auction resumed at Ukedo Fishing Port, Shibaei Fisheries restarted operations. Today, the company ships seafood not only to local restaurants but also to markets outside Fukushima.

"Recovery isn't just about bringing back what we lost. It's about creating new value," Shiba says. With that belief, he aims to help restore Ukedo's once-vibrant fishing port while also building a future full of possibilities.

Editor's Note

Fifteen years after the disaster, working on this newspaper and learning about Fukushima's current situation has prompted us to reflect on what "true reconstruction" means.

It involves rebuilding towns destroyed by the tsunami, restoring vitality by attracting businesses, increasing visitors through local food and industry, and becoming a hub for next-generation technologies. It includes eliminating prejudice, addressing the problems that remain, and reclaiming the Fukushima that existed before 2011.

Through this project, we realized that all of these efforts are part of reconstruction. Because the challenges are complex and long-term, they cannot be solved by one prefecture alone. Collective wisdom and cooperative support are essential.

This newspaper is our way of sharing Fukushima's 15-year journey with readers and expressing our hope that more people will engage with its continued recovery.

(OSADA Tsumugi)