

Restoration of Fisheries

The road to reconstruction with the help of industry peers



▲ Fishermen who participated in a subsidized program blanched wakame seaweed each morning at Mitobe Fishing Port. February 2013.

Fishing is Minamisanriku's core industry. It experienced an unprecedented crisis due to the damage caused by the tsunami.

Minamisanriku's principal farmed marine products are coho salmon, oysters, scallops, wakame seaweed, and sea squirt; while its ocean-caught counterparts are isada krill, giant Pacific octopus, Pacific cod, and salmon. Of these, salmon production used to rank top or second in the prefecture, thanks to the hatchery and stocking program.

However, the tsunami completely destroyed aquaculture facilities, fishing boats, fishing materials, and joint processing facilities for marine products. It took with it all infrastructure related to the industry, including fishing ports and fish markets. Furthermore, many of the fishermen had also lost their dwellings. For a time, the fishermen felt overwhelmed by the situation, and wondered if a recovery was truly possible. However, they held firm to the belief that they would definitely be able to start over if they could just go out to sea again.

Presently, the government launched a program to subsidize five-sixths of the rebuilding of boats used jointly by fishermen, as well as subsidies for jointly managed aquaculture operations. The fishermen discussed the situation together, took advantage of the subsidies, and revived their livelihoods. As subsidies were to be received per aquaculture cooperative, the fishermen decided on joint management for a certain period of time. This also served as a good opportunity for them to come together to discuss and reconsider sustainable aquaculture systems and the maintenance of the marine environment.

The Togura area has a tradition of helping each other in work, daily life, and the running of festivals, and this led to the making of a significant decision in the area. Togura's oyster producers made the bold decision to cut the number of aquaculture rafts to one-third previous levels in order to reduce environmental impact and ensure a bountiful sea in the future.

In 2016, they became Japan's first recipients of Aquaculture Stewardship Certification. They also succeeded in bringing their business performance to levels higher than before the earthquake.

Although they are inheritors of the traditions of old, Togura's oyster producers suddenly became the top runners in Japan's aquaculture industry, with advanced initiatives that focus on the future.