



**JAPAN URBAN HOMELESS PROJECT:  
HOMELESS AND SENIORS TEAM TO  
REBUILD JAPAN**

10.27.2019

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## **X. Executive Summary**

For less than \$1.6 million, you can provide clothing, feed, house and employ 50 urban homeless individuals and generate enough income to make a profit. The real capital gains, however, lie in the number of people and communities you assist and rebuild in the process. With a \$1.6 million price tag you can ensure your legacy forever. Economically and morally it makes sense. Better than buying your own private yacht or island, you have invested in a permanent asset that will yield dividends for generations to come. In Japan, a person who does not have a fixed address faces few job prospects and most landlords demand that six months' rent be paid in advance to rent an apartment. Hence, once one becomes homeless, opportunities for steady employment or obtaining a permanent residence becomes more difficult. This project offers a path to both.

There are advantages with working with Japanese homeless. For starters, drug abuse rates are extremely low compared with homeless demographics in other parts of the world. That is to say, drug use is not the common reason for the chronically homeless in Japan. There are alcoholics among the Japanese homeless population as well as others who may be compulsive gamblers, both of which, without moderation, can force individuals to live on the streets. You also do not have homeless Veterans in Japan as Japan keeps its citizens out of war by renouncing war in its Peace Constitution. However, you do have individuals who are living in internet cafes or finding temporary housing arrangements besides living in tents or on the streets called Senzai Homeless or "Latent Homeless". This is a demographic that the government does not have accurate statistics to capture. What we do know is that historically almost 98% of homeless people are Japanese men in their 50s, who tend to have rural backgrounds, and lost their source of income as a result of economic downturns. We also know of individuals who became homeless because they were running away from loan sharks and unable to pay the high interest rates charged on their debts.

Individuals who are running away from loan sharks often do not apply for livelihood protection with the government nor register in homeless shelters because they are required to provide contact information such as their name and address. Once that is given, it makes it easier for loan sharks to come after them. Most debts have a statute of limitations of five years, so if a



person cannot be contacted by the loan shark, the loan expires. Hence some persons become homeless to buy time and rid themselves of loan sharks and debts, waiting for debts to lapse.

Many homeless people in Japan live in urban parks, inside buildings such as train stations, along river banks, as well as streets. But they select locations where they can maintain a basic level of hygiene and be clean and prefer parks for access to public toilets. Many Japanese homeless also do not beg as a way for making money, but tend to collect and sell recycled cans, cardboard or newspapers to earn some cash. This indicates that Japanese homeless care about basic hygiene and are willing to work.

In the process of losing a job, a home, money and/or family members that supported them financially, many homeless lost hope, confidence in themselves and started to believe that they no longer are important members of society. Shame, guilt, and isolation crept in. Even with government protection programs and non-profit organizations that aim to help the homeless, there are groups of homeless that withdraw from wanting to seek help. As foreigners, however, we can create a relationship with homeless to bring them out of that shell and avoid some of the cultural shame factors that a Japanese male may feel towards other Japanese, but not toward foreigners. In other words, we can connect with homeless at a deeper level where the homeless can freely talk about sensitive topics that they would avoid discussing with a Japanese person.

In addition, homeless persons can help educate and teach foreigners Japanese and about life, culture and history and a host of other topics increasing foreigners' knowledge of Japan. This in turn can increase a homeless person's confidence in himself and make him acknowledge that his life does matter!

Emergency centers, independent support centers, public housing, private shelters, and cheap, “no questions asked” accommodations are available for the homeless. Emergency centers have a maximum stay of two months where homeless are picked up from the streets to stay in the emergency center, obtain medical care and live. After those two months homeless move on to the independent government financed and run support centers for four months in Tokyo or six months in Osaka and Yokohama where homeless can live for free and enjoy three meals a day. These centers aim to assist homeless persons obtain jobs through training courses, assistance in writing resumes, providing suits to borrow for interviews, and exchanges with local employers. In Tokyo, the homeless who are in the program are provided some money to rent an apartment and obtain furniture in lieu of staying at the center for six months like in Osaka and Yokohama where no rent for apartment or furniture is provided.


While public housing does exist, there is a wait list and top priority goes to single women with children. Single men with no children are very low down the list of priorities for public housing. If one is able to enter public housing, the rent is based on income. For those who enter private shelters run by non-profit organizations, they can receive legal representation to obtain livelihood protection money from the government. However, the problem is these NGOs take 80-90 percent of the welfare payments aimed for the homeless once approved engaging in what is known as “poverty business” to exploit formerly homeless people.

Getting on livelihood assistance is not as straightforward for the homeless. Barriers include needing to have a home address and not knowing who to talk to and where to go to obtain such assistance. Others have too much pride to ask for government handouts. Livelihood protection is 130,000 yen or roughly \$1,300 a month for those who qualify. Each town or ward in the case of large cities such as Tokyo has a welfare office where a homeless person can apply for assistance. The number of homeless persons peaked in 2003 with 25,296 people officially reported and that number has fallen by more than 80 percent in 2017 with 5,534 reported. Shelters are in place to help those homeless who are unable to obtain livelihood assistance. As the number of homeless has decreased, the number of people on livelihood protection has increased. Currently, there are more than 2.2 million Japanese who are officially on livelihood protection. So why are there still over 5,000 homeless people (a number advocacy groups believe is closer to 15,000)? A variety of reasons from individuals who have maxed out their time in shelters, do not want to stay in shelters due to restrictions on drinking and regimented lifestyle or cannot obtain livelihood protection among others.

What we offer is a rural lifestyle, full of physical activity, nature, and spiritual well being and way forward to own assets and earn profits without exploiting the vulnerable.

## 1. Market Demand Here and Rising

28 percent of Japan’s population is 65 years of age or older. That number is expected to rise to 40 percent of the population by 2060. Home to the oldest citizenry in the world, average life expectancy for men is 80 and for women 85 years of age. So why should you invest in the world’s third largest economy if its population is projected to shrink by one third from its current total size of 128 million to 88 million by 2065? Simple economics. For one the elderly control the majority of assets in Japan and the demand for products and services targeting the over 65 age group will only soar. As fertility rates remain low, immigration policy remains strict, and



advances in medicine and technology raise life expectancies higher, Japan becomes the leader of the pack of super aged countries for companies to market and target and profit. Experimenting in the Japan market where consumers are some of the pickiest in the world bodes well for setting the highest standards to replicate in other super aged societies. By 2020, Italy, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Portugal, France, Latvia, Malta, Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and Austria will join the ranks of super-aged countries where the over 65s dominate. By 2030, over 30 countries are expected to fall into this category. Forget diapers for babies. Adult diapers are the future. Mother Nature does not discriminate when it comes to race, ethnicity, religion, nationality or age.

## 1.1 Moral Imperative


From a moral standpoint, allowing seniors to live more fulfilling lives in dignity is one way to show respect for life and teach future generations the value of caring for those who may reach an age where they no longer can care for themselves. One day, that will be us. Investing in our seniors is investing in ourselves. We can learn much from our elders and this spirit of respect for seniors dominates Japanese society in general. In other words, Japan is the perfect market to make lasting inroads into senior populations eager to live, work and prosper!

## 1.2 Why Japan

Benefits include: 1) Some of the best food in the world; 2) rich cultural heritage; 3) low crime rates; 4) astounding natural beauty preserved by high environmental protection standards; 5) culture of respect for seniors; 6) innovative, technologically advanced society; 7) strong work ethic; 8) retired labor force that wants to work; 9) rule of law is respected; 10) punctuality is honored; 11) customer service and loyalty in human relationships valued; 12) high standards and expectations in terms of quality and service – possibly the highest in the world.

## 1.3 Politically Timing is Right

Prime Minister Abe's Administration presented its draft policy outlines for supporting an aging population to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on January 17, 2018 and held its Aging Society Policy Council on February 16, 2018. The outline aims to achieve the following by 2020: increase the employment rate of seniors 60-64 years of age from 63.6 percent to 67 percent; increase the number of welfare taxis from 15,128 to 28,000 cars; create an option for seniors to delay receiving pension payments until 70 years of age vs. 65; and financial support to



senior entrepreneurs to launch start-ups. With the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Japan is also keen on presenting a positive image of the country, which includes addressing homelessness and promoting a culture of respect toward seniors.

## 2. Areas of Investment

### A. Homes

There are more than 8 million abandoned, empty **homes** in Japan as a result of a dwindling population according to Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs. The number of vacant houses in Japan continues to soar. This presents an opportunity to buy, renovate and create adult care centers.

### B. Farms

The number of small **farms** is decreasing every year. Seniors retire from the fields with no heirs to take over. According to the Ministry of Agriculture nearly three-fourths of Japan's farmers will be at least 65 by 2030. This presents an opportunity to recruit others to manage day-to-day operations. Seniors could provide internship opportunities for youth enrolled in horticulture or other fields related to agriculture with hands-on live experience. At the end of their internship, these students could land jobs working these small farms to carry on the legacy with the option to eventually own the land themselves.

### C. Construction

Every year primary and secondary schools are closed due to a lack of children throughout the country. Some of these schools are converted to adult day care centers. There is an opportunity for **construction** in terms of building new nursing homes and adult care centers.

### D. Manufacturing

Similar to the decrease in small farms, there are a number of families involved in the arts and crafts industry or small scale **manufacturing** business that must close their operations or factories because of a lack of family willing to take over. Hundreds of years of knowledge and tradition are not handed down due to a lack of available hands. Students or job seekers eager to restore or rejuvenate the small scale manufacturing sector have an opportunity to apply their skills here as well.

## 2.1 And Don't Forget Services

Home delivery of food items or toiletries is another business opportunity. Already there are convenience stores in Japan that cater to the elderly. Grocery stores could follow suit. Forget about Old Spice deodorant, Old Age might be the next hot perfume or cologne.

Adult education services at home, including home demonstrations of the use of latest technologies can appeal to technologically savvy seniors or those interested in learning about the latest gadgets. Yoga, art, music, and exercise programs for senior groups present other golden opportunities for engagement.

Counseling services tailored to the elderly who have lost loved ones or may not have friend and family survivors is another opportunity. In senior homes there are some places that bring dogs or cats or animals for seniors to pet in order to satisfy the need for more human touch.

Fiduciary services assisting seniors tackle inheritance issues and long-term care and asset wealth management can be lucrative as well. There is always room for real estate and stock investing seminars to target those seniors who still enjoy investing.

Funeral services are expensive in Japan. The majority of Japanese follow Buddhist burial customs. However, that is changing as there are other religious denominations present albeit in smaller numbers. Here, there could be opportunities to design urns or coffins in ways that are environmentally friendly but also capture the spirit of the person passing from stage to another.

## 3. Triumvirate: Homelessness, Aging Society and Food Self Sufficiency

The number of possibilities to assist seniors are endless. There are ways to leverage the senior market to do social good. One way is to address the urban homelessness problem in Japan. The Government estimates that there were roughly 1500 homeless in Tokyo last year. Advocacy groups place the number three times higher. The Ministry of Labor reports 1300 homeless people in Osaka, followed by Kanagawa Prefecture with 1061 in 2017. The total number of homeless that the government officially reports throughout the country is 5534, with 93 percent of those individuals being male.

By providing the homeless a place to stay and a job in the agricultural sector, we can help them get back on their feet and assist seniors who no longer can or desire to work the fields. At the same time, we can boost Japan's food self-sufficiency rate and work to preserve its culinary treasures. Japan's food self-sufficiency rate is so low it cannot feed its people without importing



food and while government officials and scholars acknowledge this, no one has come up with a viable solution. This action plan does so.


Farming is hard work. So is being homeless with no job and prospects for a better future. If we provide homeless with the means to live and succeed, not only will they better sustain the economic development of an aging population, but can also form the backbone of a Farming Corps of Production to turn the country's food decline around. A reserve group of dedicated individuals, they can fulfill a gap sorely needed in the agricultural production arena. As consolidation of small farms becomes inevitable, they could also be employed by larger corporations to boost Japan's agricultural production and food self-sufficiency rates to normalcy. This model could also be used to potentially alleviate homelessness in other developed countries!

### **3.1 Save the Homeless Save Japanese Food**

Growing locally grown fruits and vegetables also means preserving the Japanese diet. Japanese take pride in their culinary diversity and prefer Japanese grown foods. Advocating for preserving Japanese grown products rather than relying on imports will be popular among many Japanese consumers as well as associations such as the traditional Farmers Association. As seniors no longer can cultivate the fields and grow the crops their ancestors did for generations, the homeless can help to save a family business and preserve a tradition. Food is culture. And the Japanese are keen on preserving their culture for their offspring and for the benefit of others to enjoy. By coaching are efforts to help seniors and the homeless to preserve Japan's dynamism, culture and culinary wonders, while boosting its economic development, we all prosper. And that message will resonate among various sectors of the Japanese population. So much so that the homeless may become the model for youth and other Japanese eager to make a difference in their country to get off their sofas and make soybeans. What isn't inspirational about reading a story of someone who went from homeless to becoming a hero of saving Japan's farms, food, and fabulous seniors.

### **3.2 Tackling Cultural Bias**

There is a cultural stigma attached toward the homeless and a very real bias that homeless are unclean and face health challenges, both physical and mental. Let me address both concerns. First, agriculture is a business which requires one to roll up one's sleeves and get dirty in the mud, facing the elements, and picking crops from the fields. The homeless are used to dealing with all types of weather just to survive in their day-to-day operations. They now can focus on being dirty for the 8 hours they are in the fields working as opposed to 24 hours in the day



scraping to survive as they will have access to homes, clean water and warm meals. Second, any job training program will include a support network of counselors. Studies have shown that support groups as well as physical activity and goals can help individuals address physical and mental health challenges. While not every homeless person may agree to join or seek help, there are plenty of jobs that could be created to employ the skills of homeless who may face more serious health limitations. These jobs could include: administrative, reception, cooking meals for team members, cleaning, laundry services, and more. They will receive much better care and supervision than simply being left alone to starve on the streets or spend their days collecting cardboard or recyclables while sleeping under bridges or living near parks and along the river banks.

There will also need to be a concerted effort to convince the politically strong farmers association groups to welcome homeless persons to work on the fields, especially those who are migrating from the cities who may not speak the rural lingo. The northern prefectures do not face the same homelessness problem as in Tokyo, Osaka, and Yokohama. In fact, the prefectures in the north report less than 10 homeless persons total. The local governments and communities may not be keen on having 50 homeless persons from the cities transported into their villages. It will be important to highlight that the homeless persons are there to contribute to society and economic development, but this will take some time to allay fears and preconceived biases that community members may initially harbor. We will need to address their concerns over crime, mental health, and promoting Japanese values of cleanliness and decorum.

In order to allay such fears, it will be necessary to have an extensive pre-screening process to determine which homeless persons in the major cities would be best suited to life in rural, agricultural areas.

## 4. 2020 Tokyo Olympics Provide Impetus

Given the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, the Government of Japan certainly has more incentive to address the homelessness issue. But we do not want to create a short term fix for some PR purpose, but a long-term sustainable model that will benefit society. Creatively utilizing the talents of foreigners to take on a project that the Government is less adept to tackle given its bureaucratic limitations and shame factor (i.e., not wanting to acknowledge the problem or its severity due to political and cultural factors) presents a golden opportunity for innovative private partnerships that also will assist the Government address a serious need. In doing so, we can form a profitable model based on social justice and creating an environment more friendly to the planet and humanity. We can also leverage the strengths of the Government to support our cause and utilize any programs that are offered to provide services that the homeless are entitled to but may not be fully aware.

In addition, utilizing homeless to save Japan is a vastly cheaper proposal than any alternatives and addresses several social ills: homelessness, food insecurity, and population decline. The average Japanese taxpayer would also save three times the amount of money (conservatively estimated at a savings about \$30,000) by placing homeless persons in permanent housing than financing shelters, paying for emergency hospital costs, or costs associated with any jail time.

Japan expects a \$238.5 billion economic boost (combining direct and legacy effects) with 1.94 million new jobs created as a result of the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics and Paralympics. Direct effects are projected at 5.2 trillion yen or \$47 billion. If the Japanese government creates a Tokyo Olympics Homeless Fund using 1 percent of the projected direct earnings of \$47 billion, that fund would raise \$470 million, more than enough to support the urban homeless to farming project, raise food self-sufficiency rates, and aid senior farmers. If that fund would only include .001 percent of the projected direct earnings, that would still amount to \$47 million that could be used to get the homeless off the streets, into permanent housing and back to employment.

## 5. The Market - Opportunities for Labor

It is of importance to Japan to develop its agriculture and farming sectors to reduce dependence on imports. Pre-WWII and immediately after 1945, Japan's food self-sufficiency rate was over 70 percent. After the Agricultural Basic Law came into effect from 1961 onward, you saw a perilous decline in Japan's agriculture sector resulting in loss of farmland, loss of employment in agriculture and consequently loss of food production. Today, Japan's agricultural self-sufficiency rate is well under 40 percent, a dramatic decline from pre-WWII levels and is the lowest among developed countries. Even developed countries like the U.S., France, Germany and the UK have experienced declines in agricultural production, employment and so forth but it is the rate in which Japan's agricultural sector has declined that is most alarming. Japan can't feed its own people growing its own food. It has to rely on imports. Many of these imports come from the U.S., dramatically changing the Japanese diet and the percentage of that diet that is completely 100 percent Japanese. When the composition changes, the diet changes.

Many became homeless after losing a job. Why not solve a social problem by offering the homeless employment and a place to stay. Agriculture is one area. As many seniors can no longer work the fields or dedicate the same number of hours as before, a program that would gather the homeless, teach them to farm, and provide housing would help alleviate both the homelessness problem (which the Tokyo government is keen to do prior to the 2020 Olympics) but also the lack of agricultural labor issue. Perhaps some abandoned homes could be reclaimed and refurbished to make them livable or primary or secondary schools that have closed become a center for employment and housing for homeless ready to regain their lives.

Such centers could also host workshops on construction and real estate for those homeless who are interested in developing skills outside of agriculture. The Japanese Government is reluctant to handle all homeless issues and cannot address them alone. It could benefit greatly from the support of others, particularly foreigners, to transform the country in multiple positive ways.

### Agricultural Spotlight



## Type of Agricultural Cultivation for Homeless - Rice and Edamame:

There are many types of crops grown in Japan including soybeans, wheat, barley, rice, and a large variety of fruit and vegetables. The climate in Japan ranges from temperate in the north to semi-tropical in the south, with abundant rainfall (typhoons are common). Data on crop production is easily attainable via Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery (MAFF) which has a Crop Production branch that collects agricultural data at the prefectural level. There is also a U.S. Foreign Agricultural Service presence in the country and the EU can also serve as a source for data.

When it comes to which type of crop to teach the homeless to grow, the focus should be on a variety of crops, including rice, but based strategically on where the greatest population decline is seen, the climate of that region, and then determining an effective jobs program. Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido, for example, ranks number one in producing, corn, beef and wheat, and also is known for skiing as well as rice production. But rice from Akita prefecture is extremely popular and Akita is a prefecture facing higher rates of population decline. Thus the climate and demographics are more favorable to have urban homeless target Akita prefecture for rice cultivation. Growing *edamame* or soybeans, on the other hand, is very easy and requires no special treatment. It is also easy to prepare and is a great healthy snack often used in Asian cuisine. Edamame farms can be created where there is sufficient sun, something easy to find in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Identifying locations to farm and cultivate soybeans, which should be easier for those homeless with no background in agriculture or gardening to do can meet a definitive need in addressing Japan's trade deficits while making homeless productive members of prefectural economic development. As the second largest importer of agricultural products in the world (over \$30 billion each year), offering training to homeless to cultivate *edamame* soybeans can help eat away that agricultural deficit and restore Japan's abysmally low food self-sufficiency rate to higher levels. Nothing stops the homeless to also move toward cultivating wheat and fruits and vegetables, but we want to start gradually and raise up our game to harder facets of agricultural production as we raise up our revenue streams.

Here, retirees and seniors with experience in strategic marketing and business development can leverage their connections and networks to do good in retirement. It also is an outlet for retired business executives to remain active and enjoy a new business challenge in sustaining a new chapter in Japan's economic rise with seniors at the center. Unlike in the United States, many Japanese seniors prefer being able to continue to work well after retirement, but do not have that opportunity as many have to make room for younger workers. This business model allows Japan to take advantage of changing demographics to suit the needs of Japan's seniors.

## Agricultural Kiosks:

One of the advantages of Japan being a relatively small island nation is it is possible to get food from farm to market quickly. This creates a number of additional employment opportunities for homeless persons. Crops cultivated on the fields can be transported by drivers, offering an opportunity for homeless interested in becoming drivers. There is a need for people to account for the number of crops cultivated, a basic accounting job can be created for homeless who cannot go out into the fields but would like to develop and employ other skills valuable to agricultural operations. Cleaners of facilities and equipment, lunch and food preparers, a host of jobs can be created for homeless by homeless to sustain an economic model for success.

Agricultural kiosks could be created by homeless to sell and market their products in urban centers. A portion of those proceeds could go back to sustaining business operations in rural areas, purchasing more land or homes, and creating more job opportunities. A restaurant that features farm to table cuisine could be attractive to tourists offering nutrition and deliciousness. The customer could also feel good about the fact that the organic meal he or she paid for and organic drink enjoyed is helping a cause worth supporting – Japan’s food and person revival. How many people get to enjoy a hearty meal while saying they are literally helping humanity? Not many restaurants I know anywhere in the world. If that restaurant entitled “Homebound” or “Head Home” or some other catchy name obtains popularity, we very well may see a global franchise opportunity that sees similar stores featuring Japanese cuisine pop up around the world. Then more customers can enjoy a meal that helps humanity.

## Target Northern Prefectures First – Rice and Edamame, but Other Products too:

The declines in population are the fastest in rural areas, with northern prefectures such as Akita, Aomori and Iwate most affected, losing about one percent of their people per year.

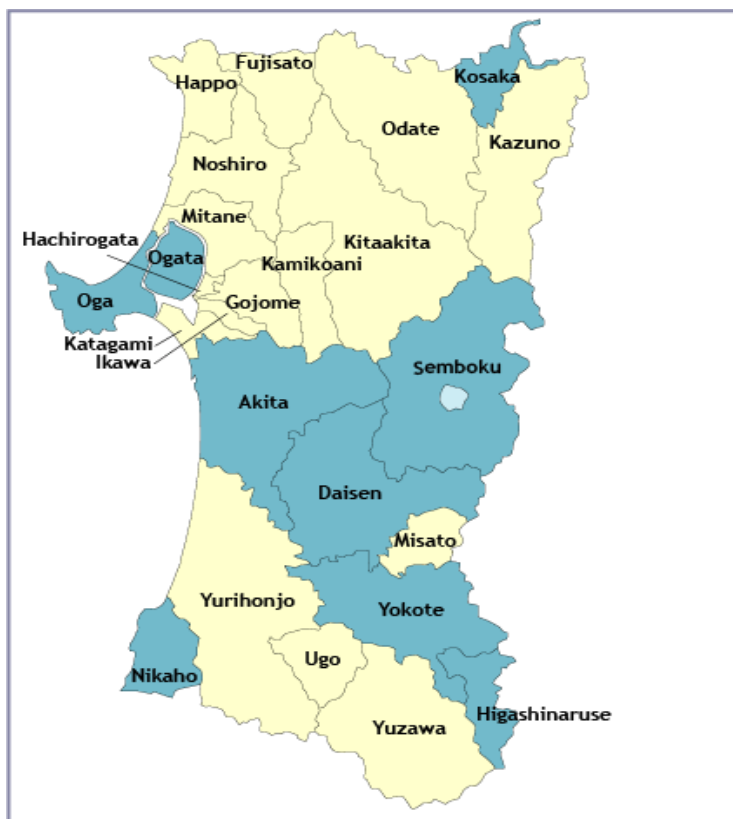
### *a. Akita Prefecture - Rice Remains King*

Akita prefecture remains heavily dependent on agriculture and has some of the best rice in the world. The climate is perfect for rice cultivation. Rice is by far the most important crop in Japan. Nearly 40 percent of arable land is devoted to rice cultivation. Rice from Akita is famous not only for its quality, but also used in products like sake wine. Homeless persons, with the assistance of sake producers, could help produce more sake wine, potentially even developing a new brand of sake produced by homeless persons for world-wide distribution. Seniors with a love of sake could also assist in creating bottles targeting the senior palette – perhaps naming

their sake 70s, 80s, 90s, and 100+, offering discounts to individuals in that age bracket. An exclusive sake for seniors club could be created.

Besides rice, Akita prefecture is also known as the home of the Akita dog. First brought to the United States by Helen Keller, the dog is known for loyalty and protecting adults and children. An Akita dog museum in Odate, Akita exists for those dog lovers and these dogs can also serve as excellent protectors and companions for both Japan's seniors and homeless. Akita also has the advantage of being the prefecture where the Virgin Mary is claimed to have appeared in a series of apparitions to Sister Agnes Katsuko Sasagawa in the remote area of Yuzawadai, near the city of Akita in 1973. Those Marian apparitions were approved by the Holy See in 1988. The approval was issued by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI. Never hurts to have Our Lady of Akita's support in a cause that even God would approve.

Moreover, high tech educational centers can be created whereby former homeless persons and retired seniors can inspire and teach children (and adults) about farming, cooking, and nutrition, working with corporations and prefectural governments to sponsor food festivals each year.

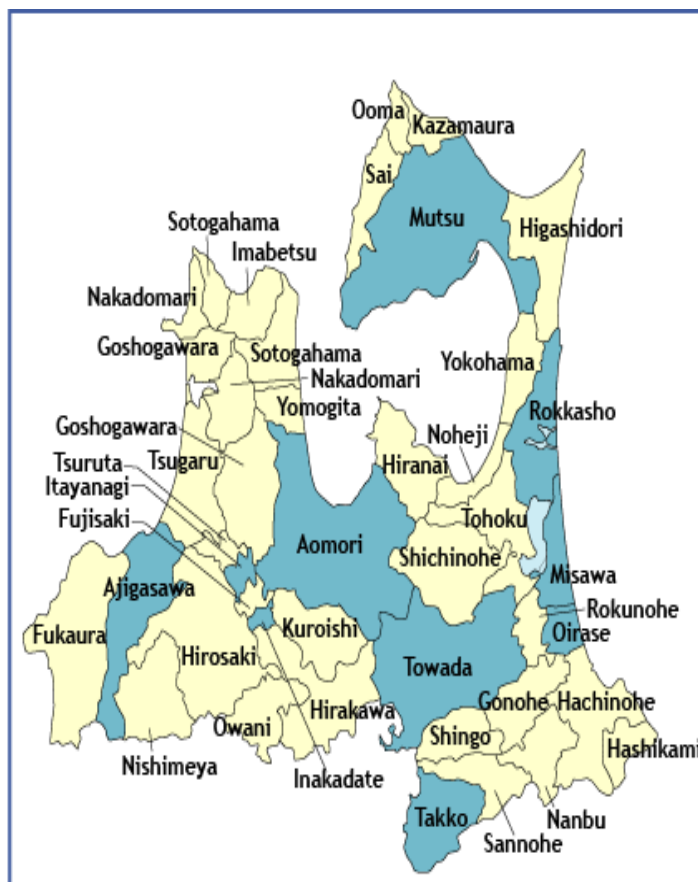


*Map of Akita; Akita dogs; Our Lady of Akita*

*b. Aomori Prefecture - Fuji Apples, Race Horses & Communicating with the Underworld*

While rice can also be cultivated in Aomori prefecture, the prefecture is most known as the home of the “Fuji” apple, which is the most produced apple in Japan. Aomori apples cover 50 % of total apple production in Japan. Aomori-branded Fuji apples are exported to China, Taiwan and other Asian countries as high-quality products and are increasingly present outside of Asia. The storage period of Fuji is very long. It can be kept for four months at room temperature and seven months in the refrigerator.

The production volumes of apples, Chinese yam, garlic, and cassis produced in Aomori take first place in Japan. The prefecture also produces large volumes of cherries and radish. But there are a number of farms also producing tomatoes, Japanese leeks, pumpkin, burdock, asparagus, pears, grapes, and more. The number of horses bred in Aomori also is higher than other regions of Japan, except Hokkaido where the majority of thoroughbreds are bred and raised. The prefecture is also home to Mount Osore of “Mountain of Dread” where elderly female mediums communicate with the souls of the dead. One can find a Buddhist temple located beside a lake in the caldera of an eight-peaked volcanic mountain which has not erupted in over 10,000 years.



*Map of Aomori; Mount Osore; Fuji Apples; Race Horses*



*c. Iwate Prefecture - Wine, Writers, and World Heritage Sites*

Rice and edamame cultivation is also present in Iwate prefecture as are farms to grow spinach. Much more mountainous than other northern prefectures, Iwate is famous for its World Heritage site Buddhist temples, is home to the deceased famous writer Miyazawa Kenji, buckwheat soba noodles, delicious beef, pork, and fowl and is a hidden gem for cycling.

There are also many orchards and wineries producing excellent wine in Iwate such as Edel Wine and Kuzumaki wine. Edel wine has won numerous domestic and international awards, and the city of Ohasama (home to Edel wine) is twinned forever with Berndorf, Austria as a twin city where cultural exchanges take place. There is an annual wine festival in Ohasama in mid-September where local girls wear Bavarian dress, crush grapes with their feet, while German music is played in the background. Agriculture can connect countries together.



*Map of Iwate; Wines; Kenji Miyazawa; Hiraizumi World Heritage Site*

## Connecting Japanese and Foreigners - Case of Iwate

### *i. Iwate Prefecture and Austria*



*Ohasama wine festival celebrating links with Berndorf, Austria*



*Twin city alliance since 1965 between Hanamaki City, and Berndorf, Austria*

## ii. Iwate Prefecture and USA



*Sister city exchanges also exist since 1993 between Ohasama, Iwate Prefecture and Hot Springs, Arkansas, USA.*

Friendships, cultural exchanges, and sister city relationships are also possible to forge in other prefectures in Japan and with other countries leading to commercial opportunities and innovation. Italy, Sweden, Latvia, Greece, Portugal, Finland and other rapidly turning super aged countries can benefit from forging lasting bonds with eyes to the future.

## Real Estate market

There are several empty plots of land lying idle. If a person owns or inherits land and has no route to use it, the land becomes a serious financial burden. So much so, that there are people begging others to take their land. The cost of paying asset taxes and maintaining land that is no longer used is a drain on resources for those who own it. The Japanese Government faces a problem with what to do with land that is not claimed. Parliament is planning on introducing legislation to let public bodies make use of unowned land on leases that automatically renew every five years. Heirs to worthless pieces of land have no reason to register their interest in order to reduce taxes.

There was a time in Japan where land was considered the greatest asset, especially in a nation where land was scarce. Today, there is a considerable change in people's attitudes toward land. With no one to cultivate the fields or make use of it, extra land equals extra taxes and maintenance fees, something many owners no longer desire to continue to pay. If the Government can identify parcels of land with no owners and encourage landowners who would like to donate their lands to do so, thereby reducing their tax burdens, perhaps that land can be used to cultivate edamame or at the very least serve as a training center for homeless and a permanent housing location. This would greatly reduce costs for buying land.

There is also the possibility that museums and schools and buildings such as former bank buildings could be used to house homeless while renovation or demolition plans take a year or two to start. Corporations or the government may also be willing to allow unused buildings that meet codes to be used to house homeless. In this proposal, I assume that we would rent a building to house homeless persons.

## 6. Agriculture in the North-Aquaculture in the South

Japan has the most advanced fish farming in the world. In fact, the Japanese Government is involved in assisting developing countries with fish farming. Yellowtail and sea bream account for a large portion of fish farm products with Yellowtail needing 18 months to reach a good weight for harvest and two years for sea bream. Through artificial insemination and hatching techniques used to breed fish and shellfish, these fish and shellfish are then released into rivers or seas. Fish accounts for a large portion of the Japanese diet, but with overfishing and China's appetite for increasing sushi in their diet, the Japanese have and will continue to need to rely on aquaculture. Here again presents an opportunity for employing homeless persons.

According to the Fisheries Agency, domestic aquaculture increased from 10,400 tons in 2013 to an estimated 14,700 tons a year later. That trend continues. Japan remains the world's number one consumer of tuna when all species are accounted for; it also consumes the vast majority of the world's bluefin tuna catches. The vast majority of Japan's "blue diamond" tuna farms are near the cities of Nagasaki and Kagoshima (located in Kyushu, the most southwesterly of Japan's four main islands) with research institutes and Japanese companies involved in the aquaculture business. Okinawa is another location where tuna farms exist and is the southernmost prefecture of Japan. To accommodate homeless populations in the southern part of Japan and to save on transportation costs, these persons could be housed in the above three locations, employed in aquaculture which will continue to grow and require more labor, enjoy low cost or free housing and some of the best fish in the world as they supply Japanese consumers with quality fish.

Northern prefectures can employ homeless persons to increase food self-sufficiency while southern prefectures can employ homeless persons to increase fish self-sufficiency. Japanese consumers benefit, homeless in different locales can feed themselves and others, and local economies are able to benefit from additional productive labor.

## 7. Benefits of Foreign Involvement

First, it will change the image of foreigners in the country. Second, it will allow the Japanese Government to save face. Third, there is a need for more labor outside of Tokyo to sustain rural economies. By hiring urban homeless to work in rural areas, this can address the economic challenges rural communities face. Fourth, it can change the behavior and attitudes of Japanese towards the homeless. Finally, it can also fill the demand for labor caused by an aging population. Seniors can feel comfortable knowing that they are contributing to helping those in

need to secure a bright future. Homeless and Senior citizens hand-in-hand as partners to assist one another make each other and their communities more fully alive!

## 8. Budget

The target cost to feed, clothe, and house 50 homeless persons is \$1.57 million dollars, including providing salaries and transportation costs for both homeless persons and five staff. With donations of materials, and heavy equipment, as well as reductions in medical costs and emergency aid, the total cost could be reduced by another \$180,000. With the average cost of each homeless person in Japan costing taxpayers \$45,000 this project saves nearly \$700,000 in total taxpayer money while at the same time leading to agricultural output and sustaining local economies. Building 3 such models: one in Akita, one in Aomori, and one in Iwate would cost less than \$4.75 million to support 150 homeless people become self sufficient.

Teaming up with agricultural associations and prefectural governments, these workers could then move on to inherit, receive or purchase at a reasonable price their own property to cultivate the land and produce agricultural products. On ten acres of land, one can expect to produce 80,000 lbs or 176369 kg of rice. White rice in Tokyo costs roughly \$5.5 per kg. If we sold rice at \$5 per kg, total sales would equal \$881,845. If we went cheaper and sold it for \$4.6 per kg, total sales would equal \$811,000. In both scenarios, the amount earned would be more than enough to pay for salaries for homeless workers and their medical health insurance fees. When we add 3 acres of tomato we can expect to produce 112,500 lbs of tomatoes. 2 lbs of tomatoes in Tokyo costs roughly \$7.7. If we sold our 2 lb bag of tomatoes for \$6, we can generate sales of \$337,500. When we add other crops from apples to edamame to grapes, we can generate another \$500,000, allowing us to generate \$1.63 million dollars in sales per year.

Edamame production yields roughly 40 bushels per acre of land or 2,440 lbs of soybeans. There are a variety of options for utilizing soybeans to offset the cost of cultivation. We can sell them raw or create soy-based products which can include: wood stains, concrete stains, caulking, paint, insulation, foam, candles, and beauty supply products.

One acre of soybeans can also make 82,368 crayons. These crayons can be used to sell for \$1.25 each totaling \$102,960. Some of them can also be used for art classes and art therapy as a means for expression and therapeutic relief.

[Click here for the budget breakdown.](#)

## 9. Timeline

0-12 months

Weeks 1-3: Review of property plans; rent building and land

Week 4-7: Permits; buy-in from municipal government and farmers associations

Week 8-10: Prepare furnishings for the property and hire staff/volunteers

Week 11-13: Pre-screen homeless in Tokyo

Week 14: Review transportation costs/purchase used vehicles

Week 15: Transport homeless from Tokyo to Akita

Week 16: Orientation, physicals, and job-training

Week 17-48: Cultivation

Week 49-52: Harvest, sell at market, end of year inventory and stockpiling

Week 52: End of Year physicals and celebration

## 10. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

**Strengths:** Labor force availability; ample land; self-sustaining model; meets rural sector aging population demands for food production;

**Weaknesses:** Need for capital investment upfront; hiring qualified healthcare professionals; finding move-in ready facilities; obtaining approval from rural farming associations.

**Opportunities:** Employment, agricultural production, spin-off businesses; Government incentive to address homelessness prior to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics; partnerships with academic institutions, research centers, and philanthropic organizations interested in financing

**Threats:** Rural Farming Associations and local government authorities may object to transporting homeless to their locations; Perceived bias towards homeless persons; Other homeless shelters and associations in Tokyo, Osaka, and Yokohama may feel threatened;

## 11. Bio

Ken Reiman is a United States diplomat who has served in Taiwan, Nigeria, China, Guyana, Washington, DC and Burkina Faso. Ken has also served as a Business Development Manager in Tokyo employing his English and Japanese to address Japan's energy needs. A Japanese American, Ken is interested in addressing Japan's senior and food security needs by leveraging the resources of Japan's underutilized population – the urban homeless. Ken drives no fancy cars, owns no fancy property and has neither ties to corporate tycoons nor politicians. He is engaged in this project simply because he cares about providing a voice to those who are often ignored yet in need. Seniors and homeless in Japan are two such groups. He chooses Japan's seniors because he has benefitted from the love of a senior who cared for him – his grandmother who passed away in 2008 during his assignment in Beijing, China. In her memory he would like to pay all Japanese seniors back and appreciates what seniors can do for society. He believes his grandmother would support utilizing homeless to support the elderly. And he also believes if we can do such a project in Japan, similar models could be replicated elsewhere. Interestingly enough, Ken's middle name Obata (小畑) translated from Japanese into English means "small rice field". He believes there are many health benefits to society when we care for each other and the planet we live in.