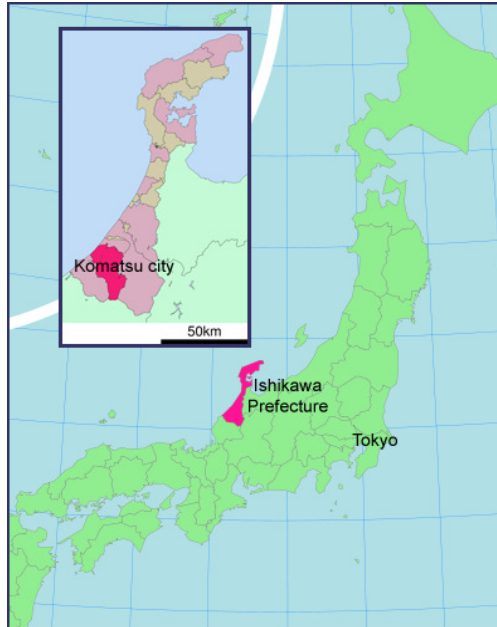


Komatsu city profile

Population: 109,285

Density: 294 /km² (761 /sq mi)

Area: 371.13 km² (143.29 sq mi)



Komatsu city's area improvement strategies – a safer, happier city

Komatsu's agricultural vision – safe, healthy produce

Komatsu, the central city of southern Ishikawa prefecture, sitting between the sacred Mount Hakusan in the east and the Japan Sea in the west, is currently implementing area improvement strategies to become a place that residents are proud of and want to continue living in. The three main areas that city planners are concentrating their efforts on include providing fresh, safe food, creating a safe environment for raising children, and maintaining public transport.

“A number of food related problems have emerged recently such as falsely labeled and packaged products, and agrochemical residue in foreign produce. I think one of the duties of public administration is to create a system that provides fresh, safe local produce,” says Toru Nishimura, mayor of Komatsu city.

“But only up until recently, if you went to a grocery store here you would have been hard pressed finding local produce not just from Komatsu but even from Ishikawa prefecture itself. Even school lunches contained very little locally produced food, so there was a problem from this idea of producing local food to be consumed locally.

“In Japan the saying *shindo fuji* means a person's life and health is not sustained by food, rather, it is sustained by the earth. For a local population, eating locally grown food and thus following the natural course of the seasons in one's diet is the best source of vitality. A healthy population needs a healthy and enriching diet. We wanted to create a system that delivered fresh, safe local produce to all residents and that's when we came up with the *local production for local consumption* promotion.”

As can be understood from the words of Mayor Nishimura, when the *local production for local consumption* promotion was first drafted there were a number of agricultural-related issues that needed to be resolved. For example, Komatsu, originally a rice mono-cultural zone, was a prominent rice producing area that produced the second largest amount of rice in Ishikawa prefecture. Field crops such as carrots, tomatoes, hyacinth beans, strawberries and barley were also grown, but despite producing the largest yield of such crops in Ishikawa prefecture, the overall amount produced was still comparatively small. For the *local production for local consumption* promotion to work, there had to be a balance in the demand and supply of food, which required an increase in total agricultural production through the cultivation of non-rice produce.

One other issue is that over 60 percent of all agricultural workers in Komatsu are over the age of 65. There is a serious shortage of successors, so the training and development of the next generation is vitally important.

In light of all this, last year Komatsu established the *Komatsu Food and Agricultural Community Vision* which looks at both agricultural workers and end-consumers. This “unique agricultural vision at the municipal

level" (Mayor Nishimura) covers a broad range of areas to examine future developments and ways of overcoming current issues. The overall aim is to promote diet education and local production for local consumption, and expand the distribution of agricultural produce.



Above: View of rice fields and mountains in Komatsu city

Boosting agriculture to improve the area

"The Local Production for Local Consumption Promotion Council, made up of representatives from the city's private sector, intellectuals, and resident representatives, was set up in October last year. It is the organisation responsible for the system and driving force behind Komatsu's *local production for local consumption* promotion, and is also the first such trial in Ishikawa prefecture. The initial set up of this council was of course supervised by the local authority, but as of next year we expect the main players to come from the private sec-

tor." (Mayor Nishimura)

The Local Production for Local Consumption Promotion Council is still in its infancy, but has so far managed to:

- establish and promote agricultural produce for direct sale at local companies, hospitals, welfare facilities, and roadside stations (April 2010 opening planned);
- push for local produce in school lunches and at grocery stores;
- promote *local production for local consumption* goods; and
- set the groundwork to research the results of the *local production for local consumption* promotion.

"Already this year the town hall cafeteria has switched to serving Hotaru Mai ("firefly" rice), which is specially grown in the mountainous areas of Komatsu. As well as this, a local *bento* (ready-made meal) company has decided to switch to rice grown in Komatsu. School lunches at primary and middle schools now serve Komatsu rice three times a week, and on one of the remaining two days bread constituting of 30% Komatsu rice flour is served. Work has also begun on the Komatsu Bento which will contain lots of local produce." (Mayor Nishimura)

The Komatsu Bento will be a specially featured product sold at a "farmers' restaurant" roadside station from April 2010. The public will be solicited for ideas and a Komatsu Bento for each of the four seasons will be decided. A number of other *local production for local consumption*-related projects are also underway, such as the Assorted Flavours of Komatsu Pack made up of Komatsu rice and farm produce.

Produce that sells well is essential for the success of the *local production for local consumption* promotion. As mentioned, the Hotaru Mai brand of Koshihikari rice, produced in the abundant mountainous areas of Komatsu known for fireflies, is now served at the Komatsu town hall. And from next year, Komatsu plans to put even

more effort towards the development and sale of products that use fresh, safe local ingredients, as well as planting different varieties of fruit trees, expanding the cultivation field crops, and growing edible wild plants.

“If the consumption of local produce increases through the *local production for local consumption* promotion, it will stabilise the agricultural industry, and Komatsu will become an attractive agricultural community. Such environmental improvement will inevitably help with the nurturing and development of the next generation. The *local production for local consumption* promotion is essential for consistently providing fresh, safe food.”

“Certainly, this all depends on the hard work of agricultural workers, but it is also important that residents gain a deeper understanding of food and agriculture through practical diet education. They must also become supporters of local agriculture, and we must listen to their opinions on how to foster it.” (Mayor Nishimura)

To give an example, Hotaru Mai rice is becoming more widely known as a local brand. This rice is cultivated using fresh water from the mountains and environmentally and human friendly low-agrochemical, low-chemical fertiliser farming techniques that preserve firefly populations. Such environmentally sound farming methods work in harmony with residents’ area improvement efforts.

It is clear from Komatsu's initiative that producing local food to be consumed locally has a direct flow on effect to many other aspects of town and area improvement.

Providing the best childraising support in Japan

Since 2005 Komatsu has been aiming to provide the best childraising support in Japan, undertaking a number of programmes that work closely with the community.

“As with the relationship between the provision of quality food and area improvement, creating a safe environment for childraising is directly linked to creating a town where people of all ages can live in harmony. The first step we took towards this was to transform the city's childcare centres into what we call *community childraising bases*.” (Mayor Nishimura)

Currently in Komatsu city there are fifteen public (plus one sub-branch) and twenty-one private childcare centres. All of these centres offer post-maternity leave childcare, emergency temporary childcare, extended hours childcare, and special needs childcare.

“The reason these different types of support services are available even at private childcare centres is because many of them are administered by social welfare service organisations established and financed by the community.” (Mayor Nishimura)

Of the various programmes and services carried out, the most prominent is the My Nursery System. The defining characteristic of this system is that childcare centres are positioned in a similar fashion to family doctors. When an expectant mother receives her maternal and child birth handbook, issued to every expectant mother in the country, she can register at a childcare centre where before and after the birth she is able to, at any time, receive advice on child raising, learn such things as how to change nappies, and (for half a day) make use of the emergency temporary childcare service free of charge up to three times.

At least three times a week childcare centres are opened as *public childraising zones* that parents who have not yet decided on a childcare centre can use freely. On these open days such parents can receive information and advice on childraising.

“This year we also started providing a personalised childraising support service, aimed primarily at families in need of childraising support who we find out about via the My Nursery System and public childraising zones.” (Mayor Nishimura)

This support service allows for the early detection of households in need of support, mothers experiencing postnatal isolation, and child abuse, and has the added effect of preventing accidents. The people at the forefront of these services are from childcare centres themselves, not city hall, so this allows for closer, more intimate support.

Other unique childraising support programmes in Komatsu include after school activity clubs for children in all primary school districts, and the establishment of the Minami Kaga Emergency Centre which accepts children who become suddenly ill at night or on holidays.

“Within the twenty-five primary school districts there are twenty-seven after school activity clubs - two of the larger districts have an extra club. Twenty of these clubs are outsourced to the community or community welfare organisations, and the other seven are directly managed by the city.”

“The Minami Kaga Emergency Centre operates at night and on holidays with the help of the Komatsu Medical Association, doctors from the Minami Kaga district, and the University Hospital. In Komatsu, assistance towards medical expenses for children has been expanded up to the end of compulsory education (end of middle school), and the Emergency Centre gives parents a sense of reassurance, especially to those with small children.” (Mayor Nishimura)

Of the childraising support establishments that this publication has been able to cover, the most impressive was probably the “Sky & Children Picture Book House”, a public library housing picture books aimed at children up to five years old. It is highly regarded by many people, and is apparently named after the city's affinity with the sky through Komatsu Airport. Inside, parents and children sit around the heated parquet floor or ta-

tami mat room enjoying picture books and eating lunch. Visitors from outside Komatsu often comment that they wish their town had such a charming little library.

Below: The “Sky & Children Picture Book House”



Maintaining public transport – the legs of the people

Komatsu has a high population aging rate with more than sixty percent of agricultural workers over the age of 65. If low birthrates and population aging continues then this trend will only increase, and concurrently so will the number of mobility impaired people.

The maintaining of public transport - the legs of the people - is certain to become a major national issue into the future. In Komatsu a number of public transport-related initiatives are being undertaken, such as the Silver Passport programme and bus services to energise the town centre.

“The Silver Passport programme was provisionally introduced last year. It allows over 65s to travel as much as they like on any inner city bus using a 1000 yen per month “passport”. Silver Passport holders can also receive discounts at local shops and visit art galleries and museums. When participating in a city event or lecture the passports are stamped, and upon accumulating a certain number of stamps, the holder can receive gift certificates or passes to hot spring hotels. As well promoting the use of buses, we also hope the Passport gives senior citizens the chance to venture into town and enjoy their lives more. You might even call it a senior citizen outing support programme.” (Mayor Nishimura)

The Silver Passport programme was introduced from October last year to March this year as a limited test, but as it received a very favourable reception it has been extended until September this year. If more people make use of it there is a possibility it will be implemented permanently. However, one of the effects of the programme has been the unbalanced usage of certain bus routes, resulting in the announcement that some of these will be either merged or closed. But new routes will also be established, including routes between JR Komatsu train station, hospitals and outside communities, so in this sense it is clear that the city has the needs of residents in mind first and foremost.

“The people of Komatsu possess a strong sense of belonging to the region. Komatsu is not just about agriculture. We also do a lot of manufacturing and production, and because of this there have been many dual-income families here for a long time which led to the growth in childcare centres. Also, elderly residents are positioned as key workers. I think such regional characteristics nurtured love for the region. However, I also feel that there is a tendency for residents here not to fully realise how special the area really is. As public administrators, one of our duties is to have residents understand these positive attributes and have people of all

ages working together to revitalise the community.” (Mayor Nishimura)

Whether to boost the agricultural industry, be the best city in Japan for childraising, or provide support for the elderly through public transport programmes, Komatsu's area improvement strategy is certainly very multi-layered and has been carefully designed to cater for the needs of the residents.

Translated with permission by Jason Buckley, Communications Officer, Japan Local Government Centre, London Office

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Japan Local Government Centre

15 Whitehall, London
SW1A 2DD

Ph. 020 7839 8500
Fax. 020 7839 8191
www.jlgc.org.uk