

# Sustainable farming in Kawagoe, Japan



The Ooki Farm is situated in the Fukuhara district, nestled in the southwestern expanse of Kawagoe City. The agricultural practices in this region revolve around the innovative "fallen-leaves compost farming method," a technique that garnered recognition as a World Agricultural Heritage in 2023. This method, rooted in tradition and dating back over 360 years to the Edo period (1603-1868), involves composting fallen leaves from the flatland forest, which are then meticulously integrated into the fields. Beyond the cultivation of crops, the indispensable aspect of the operation lies in forest management. Maintaining the delicate balance between farming and forest care is crucial for sustaining this time-honored practice. To delve deeper into the unique agricultural landscape of Kawagoe, we had the privilege of interviewing Mr. Hiroshi Ohki and Ms. Keiko Ohki, the custodian of this traditional farming method.

## Profile



Ms. Keiko Ohki Mr. Hiroshi Ohki

### Ooki Farm

A vegetable farmer spanning eight generations since the Edo period, they steadfastly adhere to the time-honored tradition of "fallen-leaf compost farming." Leveraging the flatland forest situated behind their residence, they employ this method to nurture the soil, ensuring the cultivation of vegetables that are both safe and secure. Notably, their approach minimizes reliance on pesticides and chemical fertilizers, reflecting a commitment to sustainable and eco-friendly farming practices.

Q. Could you share the history of your farm?

(Hiroshi) Certainly. We are the eighth-generation farmer who has been dedicated to practicing "fallen-leaf compost farming" since the Edo period (1603-1868).

Q. What types of crops do you cultivate?

(Hiroshi) We cultivate taro, leafy vegetables, and potatoes.

Q. Where do you distribute your products?

(Keiko) Our products are available at supermarkets in Kawagoe City, prominently featured in the produce section, where we deliver fresh vegetables every morning.

Q. What are the challenges and rewards of farming?

(Hiroshi) Farming may not be a highly lucrative industry and presents numerous financial challenges. Nevertheless, the meaningful interactions with a diverse range of people make it inherently rewarding.

(Keiko) Since initiating direct sales, we've received compliments from customers about the deliciousness of our products. Some have given me their recipes, and it's these engaging interactions that I find truly enjoyable.

Q. What makes Kawagoe appealing?

(Hiroshi) While the central area primarily caters to tourism, venturing beyond the city unveils diverse industries like our agriculture. I would appreciate it if everyone would take the time to notice of these lesser-explored facets of the city.

Q. "Fallen-leaf compost farming" achieved World Agricultural Heritage status in July 2023. What are your reflections on this, and what are your plans for the future?

(Hiroshi) Every farmer has a special connection with their soil, but conveying this to consumers can be challenging. With the recent recognition as a World Agricultural Heritage site, I believe it has become more accessible to explain this vital aspect to a broader audience.

(Keiko) I aspire to educate children about the role of fallen leaves in cultivating delicious vegetables. Looking ahead, I hope for the establishment of a system that allows schoolchildren to visit our site and learn about sustainable farming practices.



Q. It seems there is a growing number of young individuals taking up farming in Kawagoe, why do you think that is?

(Hiroshi) I believe this trend is influenced in part by Kawagoe City's geographic location, being approximately 40 km from the Tokyo metropolitan area. This proximity allows individuals to easily commute for higher education in Tokyo while maintaining a connection to agriculture. The environment fosters a seamless integration of agricultural living, making it more plausible for young people to consider agriculture as a viable career option. The accessibility of Kawagoe to the metropolitan area contributes significantly to this phenomenon.

Q. How would you like to present agriculture to people from other countries?

(Hiroshi) I understand that it might be challenging for people to visit the forest directly for sightseeing. Nevertheless, if they develop even a slight interest in agriculture and choose to purchase the vegetables we grow, it would be a meaningful way to support our farming practices.]

(Keiko) Beyond the city limits, the natural scenery is truly magnificent. I believe it would be enjoyable for visitors to partake in a harvesting experience amidst this beautiful environment.

Q. How do you suggest preparing and enjoying your crops?

(Keiko) Given their freshness, I believe simplicity is the best approach to accentuate the natural flavors of the ingredients. For potatoes, steaming and adding butter, salt, and pepper create a delicious combination. As for taro, boiling it with soy sauce and sugar is my preferred method.

(Hiroshi) I highly recommend fried taro.

(Keiko) It's straightforward – pre-boil the taro, and the process is akin to making karaage. Taro pairs well with oil, making it delightful when deep-fried. Seasoning with just salt and pepper or consommé is all you need.



Q. Finally, why do you believe your family has sustained a farming tradition in Kawagoe for eight generations?

(Hiroshi) This region has consistently offered fertile ground for vegetable cultivation, allowing us to make a living from farming despite not enjoying luxuries. I believe this accessibility has made inheriting the family business a viable option for descendants. Looking ahead, I anticipate challenges in the future for the farming industry. Nevertheless, I am hopeful that we can diligently preserve our farm, ensuring it remains a viable employment option for generations to come

### About the Musashino Leaf Composting Method

The Musashino leaf composting method is a system that involves planting trees to cultivate flatland forests. The fallen leaves from these forests are collected and utilized as compost in the fields, enhancing soil quality and ensuring stable production. This practice not only contributes to agricultural sustainability but also fosters the preservation of the landscape and biodiversity.

Explore the rich legacy of this small town in the following video:

Link to Video: [https://youtu.be/tW8VWVD3c\\_M?si=jjcxo-VR9igjreUV](https://youtu.be/tW8VWVD3c_M?si=jjcxo-VR9igjreUV)