

Farm visiting reports <Part 6>

Tanokura Farm in Manazuru Town

This is the sixth article in our occasional series introducing farms in Japan, featuring Tanokura Farm located in Manazuru Town, Ashigarashimo District, Kanagawa Prefecture.

A Town Surrounded by Sea and Mountains

Manazuru is a small fishing town of about 7,000 residents in southwestern Kanagawa prefecture. Facing Sagami Bay and enclosed by the outer rim of the Hakone volcano, it offers a rich natural environment despite being only 90 minutes away by train from central Tokyo. In recent years, the town has also seen an increase in new residents moving in.

Our destination this time, Tanokura Farm, is the family home of our colleague at AAI. Our colleague being a local guide, introduced us to citrus cultivation in Manazuru as well as the town's unique local initiatives that we are going to introduce in the following article.

Extending the Harvest Season

When we visited Manazuru in late December 2024, we were struck by its mild climate. With the influence of the Kuroshio Current, Sagami Bay brings warm winds even in midwinter. On the coastal hillsides sloping down toward the bay, citrus trees are cultivated everywhere.

A 10-minute drive up a gentle slope from the town center, where the station and port are located, brought us to the first orchard, Asamayama, adjacent to the family home. The 35a farm featured citrus trees ready for harvest, a storage house, and a monorail used to transport the harvested fruit.

Tanokura Farm cultivates as many as 16 different varieties of citrus, though it focuses mainly on Unshu mikan (Satsuma mandarin). The early-ripening variety, Miyagawa wase, is harvested in October; mid-season varieties, Ōtsu, Aoshima, and Ishiji, from November to December; and late-season varieties, such as Ponkan and Amanatsu, from January to early May. This succession of varieties allows for harvesting over an extended period.

Unshu mikan varieties, such as Miyagawa wase, Ōtsu, Aoshima and Ishiji, are not shipped immediately after the harvest. Instead, they are stored for about a month in a storage house before being sent to the agricultural cooperatives in neighboring Yugawara town. In this region, known as the northern limit of Unshu mikan

cultivation, farmers use storage houses in each orchard to soften the acidity and make them mature before shipment. This additional step is key to achieving a well-balanced flavor of sweetness and sourness.

The storage house at Tanokura Farm was constructed with wooden beams and earthen walls. Inside, wooden shelves held about fifteen layers of crates filled with oranges, neatly lining the space. Peering into the crates, we saw the oranges with a beautiful luster, glowing like diamonds in the dim light of the storehouse.



Oranges are stored in wooden crates inside the storage

New Initiatives at the Farm

Citrus cultivation was spread in Manazuru after World War II, continuing through the period of rapid economic growth. At Tanokura Farm, it was our colleague's grandmother who built stone terraces on the hillside and began planting orange trees. Today, many of these original trees are over 60 years old and time for its renewal. However, due to limited labor for maintenance, vegetables and other crops are being cultivated in areas where the old trees have been removed.

The third-generation owner, Mr. Endo, is now embarking on new initiatives to make the most of the orchard farm. At Gōbe, the second site we visited, tea trees had been planted long ago on the terraces for erosion control. In 2019, Mr. Endo launched a "tea-picking experience program" using these tea trees, which had previously been grown only for household use. To date, seventeen groups, mainly from the Tokyo metropolitan area, have participated and enjoyed the activity. He also organizes annual orange-picking events for friends and their families.

Looking ahead, Mr. Endo aims to promote Manazuru as an agritourism destination and contribute to the revitalization of the local community. Having witnessed his passion firsthand, we look forward to seeing how Tanokura Farm continues to grow and evolve in the years to come.