

Iwaki Agricultural Tour

Sunshine Iwaki Nashi (Pear) Sorting Warehouse

The JA Pear Sorting Warehouse utilises optical sensor machines to sort out Sunshine Iwaki Nashi and ranks them according to sweetness, shape, complexion and size among other factors. The warehouse handles and sorts over 20 tonnes of pears a day. Since the pear harvesting season is relatively short, it is used as a regular storage facility outside of the pear season.



Firstly the days' worth of pears are brought in from fields in Taira and Yoshima and hauled onto conveyor belts. They are first sorted by workers (see photo top right) who inspect the pears for their shape and whether they have bruises or imperfections. After that they continue along the conveyor belt and are analysed by two optical sensor machines (left), one which measures sweetness and another which measures the size, colour and condition of the pear. The pears are then automatically sorted into various boxes (below) where they are assigned one of four ranks; number 1 being the sweetest and most ideal pear, number 2 being of an ideal shape but less sweet, and 3 and 4 assigned to those with slight bruises or imperfections.



Incidentally there are four types of *nashi* pear each with their own unique characteristic and harvesting season which generally last for about 20 days each:

Kousui: The sweetest type of *nashi* and has soft flesh.

Harvested from late August to early September.

Housui: Soft with a balanced flavour that's not too sweet or sour. Harvested throughout September.

Ryouhou: Unique to Fukushima. Smooth and crunchy.

Harvested from late September to early October.

Niitaka: The largest of the four types of *nashi*.

Harvested from mid-October to early-November.



Iwaki Vision went along to check some of Iwaki's fresh agricultural produce. In this edition of Iwaki Vision we introduce two innovative agricultural facilities in Iwaki: the Iwaki Sunshine Nashi Pear Sorting Warehouse and Golden Shiitake Mushroom Factory.

Iwaki Golden Shiitake Mushroom Factory

The Iwaki Golden Shiitake Mushroom Factory (left) in Onahama produces over 500 tonnes of *shiitake* mushrooms yearly. The factory cultivates *shiitake* mushrooms artificially using the indoor tray method as opposed to harvesting them from old logs. Cultivating mushrooms in factories has become the mainstream practice since the Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear incident and has proven to be more efficient.



The cultivation period takes about 90-100 days and the growth period an additional 70 days. With a week-long rest period in between, it takes about 160-170 days until the mushrooms can be harvested.

First, fertiliser is mixed with a fine sawdust and water and put in a bag. After the sterilisation and inoculation processes are complete, the bags are then placed in room with regulated temperature and humidity and allowed to form a mushroom bed (top right). Once they have turned from black to a whitish-brown colour, they are ready to be taken out of the bag and begin the growing period (bottom right).



The mushroom beds are again placed in a separate temperature-controlled room and allowed to grow for several weeks. The beds are also soaked in water after the rest period to hasten the growing process. Finally, once the mushrooms have grown to reasonable size (such as those in the left photo), they are harvested and either packaged for consumption or used as an ingredient in a variety of products such as *shiitake soumen* and *udon* and even *shiitake shochu*.



Iwaki vision has introduced some interesting and unique aspects of Iwaki agriculture. We hope to introduce more exciting features of Iwaki's agricultural industry in the coming editions