

# Introducing Iwaki's Produce to the World: Gourmet Tour of Iwaki

It has now been over six years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Since the disaster, Iwaki alongside the rest of Fukushima has been working tirelessly to restore the confidence of consumers regarding local agricultural produce. Iwaki City created the "We Will Show You!" Iwaki Information Bureau to help counter the misinformation about Iwaki's produce. All the results of radioactive monitoring of local food samples are also published on the bureau's website so consumers can make an informed judgement for themselves.

Of course this is not the only way Iwaki is working towards restoring the agriculture industry. The city also carries out bus tours where participants can experience how local produce is cultivated, witness how samples are analysed for radiation, and most importantly, taste the products. These participants are encouraged to become "Iwaki Vegetable Ambassadors" who help in promoting Iwaki's fresh and delicious produce to others.

These tours are not only aimed at people inside and outside of the prefecture, but have also been held for international guests to the city. In April 2017, 36 students from Thailand visited Iwaki for a Japanese language training program at Higashi Nippon International University. As part of their stay in Iwaki, the students visited Agripark, Iwaki's largest producer of strawberries, and were able to pick and try fresh strawberries straight from the vine. The students not only deepened their understanding of the Japanese language, but also their understanding of the Iwaki agricultural industry's efforts in revitalisation after the 3.11 disaster.



Left: Participants of the YPO Program in Fukushima picking ripe tomatoes from the vines at Wonder Farm.

Right: YPO members listening to a presentation from the Agricultural Promotion Division of Iwaki City Government about Iwaki's efforts in combating misinformation with regards to local produce.



Fukushima lamb



White asparagus from Aizu



wagyu beef raised in Iwaki

## YPO Program in Fukushima

In a separate tour, two groups of participants of the Young Presidents' Organisation (YPO) program visited Iwaki from 25-26 May for a day each to visit local gourmet facilities. YPO is a leadership program made up of members who are all presidents, CEOs or in other top-level positions of their company and aims to help them become better leaders through sharing ideas and learning from each other. The participants of this tour included Chinese, Thai, Singaporean and German nationals.

The Iwaki portion of this tour began with a visit to Wonder Farm where the participants tried the array of tomatoes and purchased some tomato products. The participants learnt about Iwaki's tomato industry and also how the industry has been working to restore sales after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

The second half of the day was spent enjoying lunch at Hagi French Restaurant. This restaurant is one of the most exclusive in Iwaki where the chef only serves one group of customers per day and usually requires a reservation well in advance. The chef Harutomo Hagi is one of the few chefs in Japan registered as a Ryori Masters chef. These chefs are highly acclaimed not just for their "ryori" (cuisine) but for their passion and involvement with local farmers and industry by using local produce and contributing to the promotion of their regions.

The YPO participants were treated to a supreme quality course which included Fukushima lamb and Iwaki-raised wagyu beef, homemade bread and vegetables grown on Shiraishi Farm in Ogawa. Whilst enjoying fresh and in-season local produce, the participants also heard a presentation about Iwaki City's efforts to counter the misinformation of local agricultural products as a result of the nuclear accident.

The participants thoroughly enjoyed the hospitality of chef Hagi, farmer Shiraishi and everyone who helped organise the tour. By offering a positive experience of Iwaki and allowing people to try local flavours, this helps encourage participants of tours such as these to share their thoughts with their personal networks and thus lead towards improving the image of the local agricultural industry in Iwaki.