

Takachiho's Rice Terraces and Mountainside Irrigation Canals

Takachiho's famed rice terraces are green in the summer and golden in the autumn. These terraces, over 1,800 hectares, are supported by a network of over five hundred kilometers of canals created and maintained by town residents. Local dedication to these agricultural traditions has earned the area, which is located in the steep Takachihogo-Shiibayama intermountain region, a certification recognizing it as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS).*

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Takachiho is located in the Takachihogo-Shiibayama intermountain region, a steep, mountainous area that has long been challenged by a scarce supply of water for its agricultural needs. Until the Meiji period (1868–1912), villagers mostly farmed millet and maintained diets of assorted grains. However, a strong admiration for rice, which is a rich resource, motivated the people of the town to source water from higher ground, several dozen kilometers away and deep within the mountains. They thus constructed mountainside irrigation canals, originally all by hand. Today, these canals make up a network of over 500 kilometers, which allows for the cultivation of more than 1,800 hectares of terraced rice fields.

The people of Takachiho today maintain their agricultural heritage in the harsh environment of the intermountain region through community efforts. They continue to clean and maintain the canals, many of which are now one hundred years old or older, as well as to plant and harvest the fields. Fields today yield rice as well as other crops, such as Chinese cabbage and tobacco. Ownership of the fields is often dispersed and intermixed along single swaths of land.

*In 2015, the Takachihogo-Shiibayama intermountain region received the GIAHS certification. This means that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which launched the GIAHS initiative, seeks to promote and conserve this area as one with important agricultural systems and culture, and to ensure that these valuable assets are passed down to future generations.