

Prosperity Through Silk Farming

From the Edo period (1603–1867) onward, the people of Shirakawa-go earned hard currency mainly through sericulture and saltpeter production. The former industry was particularly important for the area from the end of the Edo period to the late Meiji era (1868–1912), when Japan became a major exporter of raw silk and demand grew rapidly. Records from 1870 indicate that the settlements corresponding to the present-day municipality of Shirakawa produced an average of 65 kilograms of silk per household per year—more than any other part of the surrounding Hida area. The Toyama household was one of the most productive in Shirakawa: At its height, it produced a remarkable 375 kilograms of raw silk during a single spring season.