

## **Dairy Farming in Hokkaido**

Much of Hokkaido is covered with vast expanses of farmland where cows graze in green pastures. Visitors to the town of Teshikaga, which includes a large part of Akan-Mashu National Park, can get a taste of farm life by visiting a working ranch or dairy farm.

### *Farming eastern Hokkaido*

Dairy farming is one of the primary industries of Teshikaga. The area's farms are integral to Hokkaido's production of high-quality milk, yogurt, cheese, and butter. Hokkaido produces about 50 percent of Japan's milk.

The Kussharo Caldera was chosen by early settlers in Hokkaido as an ideal environment for raising cattle: the land inside the caldera is fertile, and the air temperature remains relatively cool in summer. Cows are susceptible to heat stress in hot weather, so the lack of high temperatures in this region keeps them strong and healthy.

### *Authentic dairy farm experiences*

Several of the dairy farms in Teshikaga offer hands-on farming experiences. Visitors can try milking and feeding a cow, making their own butter or ice cream, or riding a tractor through the fields. All of these activities help participants gain a deeper appreciation of how milk and milk products are made, and can be a memorable experience for both children and adults, rain or shine.

Some of the farms in Teshikaga are certified "National Dairy Education Farms," which meet the appropriate safety and hygiene criteria to operate in an educational capacity. While participants cannot drink milk directly from the cows, they can sample pasteurized milk produced on the farm that same morning.

### *The development of dairy farming*

Dairy farming began in Hokkaido in the late 1800s, when the Japanese government promoted agricultural development in exchange for land. However, farming on Japan's

new frontier was challenging—settlers had to clear the land first by logging it.

Hokkaido pioneers used strong draft horses, known as *banba*, to clear the land of trees, which is why there are so many of these horses in the region today. Holsteins, a breed of cattle raised specifically for milk production, were brought from the United States.

Travelers to Hokkaido will often see these cattle grazing in the pastures.