

Pure Water, Distinctive Rice

Water from the mountain forests of Shirakami Sanchi is known for its taste, purity, and low mineral content. Bottled and sold under the brand name Shirakami Sansui, the spring water flows from the mountains north of Fujisato into the Kasuge and Fujikoto Rivers. The rivers provide irrigation crucial to the cultivation of local rice, which is known nationwide for its superior taste and texture.

Today, many rice farmers use combine harvesters and other modern machinery for cutting, threshing, and drying their rice. However, one can still find smaller fields where rice is dried in the traditional way. The plants are machine-cut, then gathered and bundled by hand. These bundles (sheaves) are hung grain-side-down from tall wooden poles driven into the field. The method of hanging them differs from region to region; in Akita, the sheaves are strung in layered rings around a central pole. Depending on the weather, the rice and straw can take two or three weeks to dry. The sheaves are rotated during this period to ensure all of them dry evenly. Once dried, they are taken down, and the rice is separated from the straw.

Rice straw (*wara*) also plays a role in local culture. *Wara* is used in many traditional crafts, including *shimenawa* (the twisted straw ropes that designate Shinto sacred places), Shirakami handicrafts, and the local specialty Hiyama Nattō (fermented soybeans). Unlike most modern *nattō*, Hiyama Nattō is still made by wrapping and fermenting the soybeans in *wara*, and the process requires a fresh supply of straw each year.

Bottled Shirakami Sansui, locally grown rice, and Hiyama Nattō are sold at Michi no Eki rest areas, produce markets, and regional product retailers in the area.