

Rice Terraces of Yaeji

The rice terraces of Yaeji are nestled deep in the hills of the westernmost area of Kamikatsu. They form a network of 468 rice paddies, each of which has an area of approximately 250 square meters. The terraced fields represent an enduring heritage; one that has balanced preserving the historical landscape with the challenges of an aging population.

Yaeji remains a quiet refuge and place of well-preserved history. A stroll through narrow roads and alleys reveals the same landscape as that of 200 years ago—traditional houses surrounded by stone walls, Chorakuji Temple, stone monuments, and shrines. This small settlement has 22 shrines where the gods of mountains, water, and farming are enshrined.

The terraces are on the lower slopes of Mt. Takamaru between elevations of 550 and 650 meters. Rain that falls on Mt. Takamaru flows down to water the fields of Yaeji, helping to sustain farming and people's livelihoods. This approach of balanced interests has earned national recognition, and the rice terraces of Yaeji were designated an Important Satochi-Satoyama Site by the Ministry of the Environment in 2009. A *satochi-satoyama* site is characterized by interactions between settlements, secondary forests, rice paddies, and irrigation canals, and plays an important role in biodiversity conservation.

In 1998, Tokushima Prefecture adopted a plan in to create larger, rectangular paddies to improve irrigation and allow for mechanized farming of the small fields. In Kamikatsu, however, some expressed concerns that the terrace scenery would be spoiled, leading to a pioneering land-consolidation project completed in November 2002. Terraces were created that followed the contours of the natural terrain as much as possible, while still allowing for streamlined farming operations through the introduction of irrigation channels, the widening of roads and paths between fields, and the elimination of sharp angles.