

Yaeji Land Consolidation Project

The terraces of Yaeji were once in danger of losing their iconic contours due to the pressures of modernization and a shrinking labor pool. Now, they represent a story of community preservation efforts and a pioneering model of land consolidation.

Small, steep terraces such as those found in Yaeji before 2002 are unsuited for mechanized agriculture. Even the specialized paddy-use tractors used in Japan are difficult to maneuver smoothly in small terraces, or to lift and lower easily from one terrace to another. At Yaeji, there were only footpaths, so even mini trucks were unable to approach the fields. The uneven terrain also made irrigation a challenge. Moreover, the region faces a declining farming population, as more than 70 percent of the residents are now over the age of 65.

Tokushima Prefecture adopted a plan in FY1998 to consolidate the rice paddies of Yaeji into wider, rectangular fields that would facilitate the use of available machinery. However, some concerns were expressed that this plan would spoil the traditional terrace scenery. Tokushima Prefecture thus proposed an alternative plan with the cooperation of landscape experts. The land-consolidation project completed in November 2002 balanced landscape protection and farming management needs by creating terraces that follow the natural contours of the land as much as possible. The absence of sharp angles allows machinery to make turns easily. At the same time, roads were widened enough for small trucks to transport the necessary agricultural machinery. The breakthrough system developed was presented at the Sixth National Rice Terrace Summit in 2002. The fields of Yaeji are Japan's first example of terraces reshaped this way. As such, they serve as a model of landscape conservation and cultivation efficiency.