

## **Rice Terrace Owner System**

Kashihara participates in a nationwide rice terrace owner system that is an initiative run since 2004 by a Japanese NPO aimed at preserving rice terraces. Rice terraces all over Japan are being scaled down and abandoned at an increasing rate as farmers age and fewer people join the agricultural industry. The program seeks to solve this issue by offering city residents the opportunity to become an “owner.” Owners do not actually own a terrace, despite the name, but pay a sponsorship fee in exchange for access to experiences and benefits not possible in urban areas.

An applicant can become an owner in Kashihara by paying an annual fee of ¥50,000 per 100 square meters. This ¥50,000 is split between the land supplier and farming advisor (¥35,000) and the program secretariat (¥15,000). Owners can get hands-on experience such as transplanting seedlings and helping with the harvest. They also get a share of the rice produced on the paddy they sponsor, which they can sell if they choose.

Owner applications are accepted for paddies, dry fields, and fruit trees. Between 15 to 20 groups become owners every year, and include the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and a high school in Tokushima Prefecture. The organizers hope that the system will prompt non-farmers to become more aware of terrace farming and help ensure the preservation of traditional agricultural systems.