

Delivering surplus vegetables directly from produce stands to urban areas by trains: Mobility transition and food loss reduction through industry-government-academia partnerships

Higashimatsuyama City, Saitama



Project name: TABETE Rescue

Chokubaijyo

Background and Reason for the Project

Higashimatsuyama City, located in the centre of Saitama Prefecture, plays a role as a residential city in the suburbs of the Tokyo metropolitan area due to being about 50 kilometres from central Tokyo and its excellent transportation system. At the same time, the city still retains a verdant rural landscape, and its agriculture has contributed greatly to the lives of its citizens and to the development of the local economy.

The city's agricultural produce stand sales are one of the highest in the prefecture. However, it is customary for the producers to take back unsold goods, and much of it is disposed of even if it still has commercial value. Not only did farmers have to spend time and labour to pick up the unsold produce, but they also had to bear the psychological burden of discarding produce they had painstakingly grown themselves.

CoCooking Co., Ltd. was looking for a way to work together to solve the city's problems through a public-private partnership after receiving an investment from the Higashimatsuyama Entrepreneur Support Fund. The TABETE Rescue Chokubaijyo initiative was conceived based on the

belief that the company's expertise in food loss reduction would be effective in solving the food loss issue caused by the disposal of agricultural products in Higashimatsuyama City. After repeated discussions and deliberations with other related organisations, the decision was made to implement this project.

Project Aims

- (1) Reduce food loss by reselling surplus produce from produce stands
- (2) Increase profits for farmers who sell produce at produce stands
- (3) Revitalization of areas along the Tobu Tojo Line
- (4) Provide education and employment opportunities for students
- (5) Share information with related organisations
- (6) Provide support for single-parent households

Project Outline

TABETE Rescue Chokubaijyo is a joint project of six parties working together to support farmers and reduce food loss. They are Higashimatsuyama City, CoCooking Company Ltd., Tobu Railway, Central Saitama Agricultural Cooperative, Daito Bunka

University, and the Otsuka Ouen Company Ltd. CoCooking purchases surplus produce from five produce stands in the area, including Higashimatsuyama City, after they have closed, and transports it to Ikebukuro Station, a terminal station in the city centre less than one hour from Higashimatsuyama City using the Tobu Tojo Line to reduce CO2 emissions. Once there, students from Daito Bunka University will resell the produce on the station premises to passengers on their way home.



Choosing Produce for Delivery

In addition, surplus produce is also donated to a Kodomo Shokudo, or eatery that serves discounted/free meals for children, to help support single-parent households and thereby reducing the amount of food loss by utilising produce that would otherwise have gone to waste.



Produce Stand at Ikebukuro Station

Features and Innovations

As the private sector, Agricultural Cooperative, farmers, university, and government agencies are all working together to solve a common problem, a significant feature of this project is that all

participants are benefiting from it. It is also innovative in its use of passenger railways for transportation, taking advantage of the geographical proximity of the production and consumption areas.

Results of the Project

TABETE Rescue Chokubaijyo has purchased 183,625 agricultural products, and estimated food loss has been reduced by approximately 55.1 tonnes (as of the end of September 2023). In addition, the use of passenger railways has led to a reduction in CO2 emissions compared to transportation by freight-only means.

This program has not only led to increased income for the producers, but has also been well received by the buyers, who are happy to contribute to the program. Participating student staff members have also established their own management organizations and are responsible for planning, operating, and managing sales and profits, providing a valuable opportunity for them to think about their own career paths.

Surplus produce from TABETE Rescue Chokubaijyo is used by the 'OOC Kodomo Shokudo' run by Otsuka Ouen Company Co., Ltd. as ingredients for lunch boxes, which are distributed free of charge to single-parent families so that all produce is put to good use without being wasted.

These efforts were highly praised and led to the awarding of the 'SDGs Promotion Deputy General Manager (Chief Cabinet Secretary) Award' at the 6th Japan SDGs Awards, which recognises outstanding efforts by companies and organizations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Issues, Problems and Responses

The TABETE Rescue Chokubaijyo conducted two trial tests to implement the project. The first trial failed to generate the revenue necessary for the continuation of the business due to inadequate product volume. The second trial increased the number of produce

stands participating in the project from one to five, which increased the volume of goods and in turn its profits. As a result, the company was able to secure the necessary revenue to implement the project, and full-scale operations began in August 2021. Since then, regular meetings have been held among the parties involved to discuss and improve their efforts, such as responding to periods when produce is scarce, improving sales methods, and introducing electronic payment methods, to further increase sustainability and profitability.

Future Developments (expected effects and project vision and issues)

Currently, all five of the produce stands participating in this project have less surplus produce available on Saturdays and Sundays, and are all closed on different days. For these reasons, TABETE Rescue Chokubaijyo is open three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. However, the parties involved are also considering how to deal with surplus products on other days of the week. The six cooperating parties will continue to work to reduce food loss by identifying issues and making improvements through regular meetings.

Reference URL

<https://www.city.higashimatsuyama.lg.jp/soshiki/16/1473.html>

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