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## **Seniors urged to eat Fukushima rice to help farmers, protect young people (Japan Times, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2012)**

A Tokyo senior is waging an individual effort to get elderly people to eat rice grown in Fukushima Prefecture to help local farmers struggling with rumors that their crops are radioactive, and to make sure the grain isn't consumed by more vulnerable younger generations.

Consumers have shunned Fukushima rice due to radiation fears stemming from the triple-meltdown crisis that started last March at Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima number 1 atomic plant. "The elderly must eat Fukushima rice," Hino resident Hidekazu Hirai, 68, told The Japan Times on Monday. Compared with young people, the elderly are believed less prone to the harmful effects of radiation.

Hirai has entered a sales contract with a rice wholesaler in Fukushima Prefecture and is calling on seniors to place orders by fax or online via social networking sites, including Mixi and Facebook.

"I just want to make sure people know I am not doing this for business purposes, but as a volunteer. I am not making money," said Hirai, who has visited Iwaki, Fukushima, to remove debris as a volunteer eight times in the past year.

The orders handled by Hirai have amounted to 1,700 kg so far, he said. About 700 kg was bought by an elderly care facility in Tokyo, he said.

That, however, is a minute amount compared with Fukushima's 240,000-ton annual rice yield. The rice, harvested in the fall, is normally sold out by February, Hirai said. This year, 40 percent of the harvest was still in stock in February, he said.

He said his reason for doing this is not only because he wants to help Fukushima farmers, but also because he wants to make sure elderly eat as much Fukushima rice as possible to prevent children from accidentally eating the grain.

There are no regulations obliging restaurants and makers of "bento" (boxed lunches) to list the origins of the rice they use, and this may lead to children eating Fukushima rice, he said.

"Therefore, why don't the elderly, whose potential for suffering health damage from radiation is lower than it is for youths, eat all of the Fukushima rice?" he asked.

Farmers are required to check radiation levels in their rice. If the level of radioactive cesium exceeds 500 becquerels per kilogram, they are banned from selling it.

Hirai is also a member of the Skilled Veterans Corps for Fukushima, a group consisting of elderly people who have experience working at nuclear plants. He said that another reason for promoting Fukushima rice is that he wants to gain support from residents so he and other group members can be asked to work at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant so that younger, more vulnerable, workers don't have to.

An official said that the group has 675 members ranging in age from their late 50s to 80s.

Those interested in buying the rice can order by faxing (042) 643-6264.

## Questions

1. Would you eat Fukushima rice? Why? Why not?
2. Restaurants and boxed lunch makers are not obliged to list the origins of the rice they use. Do you think they should be? Why? Why not?
3. Is it a good idea for the elderly to eat Fukushima rice to protect the young?
4. Is there a better way to resolve this problem?
5. Do you think there are sufficient regulations regarding the provision of food to schools?
6. What other ways are there for us to support Fukushima farmers and residents?
7. What do you think about Mr. Hirai's suggestion that older people should work at the Fukushima nuclear plant?
8. After reading Mr Hirai's story, are you more or less likely to order Fukushima rice? Why?

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