

Experiencing Sustainability with All Five Senses:

KURKKU FIELDS

Opened in Kisarazu, Chiba Prefecture, in November 2019, Kurkku Fields is an experience-type farm-park promoting symbiosis with nature. From Tokyo, it can be reached by leaving the Tokyo Bay Aqualine (Trans-Tokyo Bay Highway) at the Kisarazu-Kita Interchange and driving for 15 minutes through a residential district surrounded by greenery and finally up a small hill. The expansive farm-park lies sprawling right in front of you. At this farm-park, visitors can experience the wonders of sustainability through interaction with nature. Recently I visited Kurkku Fields to hear about its concept, history, and future ambitions.

For the Next Generation

Kisarazu flourished as a port town since olden times and is well-known for its harvesting of seaweed, clams, and other seafood. In recent years, thanks to the opening of the Tokyo Bay Aqualine highway, access to Tokyo and Haneda Airport (Tokyo International Airport) has improved, and the population has increased as people have moved in. With a large-scale shopping mall and other facilities, Kisarazu is considered a pleasant place to live.

While Kisarazu strongly conjures up images of the sea, Kurkku Fields opened to let visitors have fun in the hills. Initially the music producer Takeshi Kobayashi opened the Cultivate Kisarazu Farm in 2010 on the expansive 30 ha (300,000 sq. m) site of an abandoned ranch. Kobayashi's desire was to create agricultural land that would continue to be used in the next generation.

Kobayashi and his team spent the next decade improving the soil so as to cultivate organic vegetables for the production of tasty, safe, and reliable food. As a result, almost all the fields on the farm have acquired organic Japan Agricultural Standards (JAS) certification (the only organic vegetable certification recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries). As well as the cultivation of organic vegetables, the farm-park also engages in the free-range raising of chickens (allowing chickens to roam about freely on level land without being caged in) and organizes various experience-type events for visitors, such as the clearing of land together and the holding of barbecues using food products grown here and other local ingredients.



General view of Kurkku Fields

Everything Connected in a Single Cycle

The expansive land, which is large enough to house six Tokyo Dome baseball stadiums (46,755 sq. m), comprises seven contents: farm, eat, art, play, stay, nature, and energy. Visiting Kurkku Fields, one realizes that these seven contents are all connected in a single cycle.

When I visited, the first thing to arouse one of my five senses was the refreshing chirping of birds—a sound that you rarely hear in the city. Mr. Koma Arai, who is in charge of public relations and marketing at Kurkku Fields, explained to me, “The forest that you can see ahead of us is called Wild Forest. It was created by planting about 1,500 trees of various species gathered from within Boso Peninsula. In the lower part of the forest there is an artificial pond called Mother Pond. This water’s edge helps form an ecosystem that creates a pleasant habitat for wild birds as well.” Mr. Arai went on to give me a very easy-to-understand tour of the farm.



Wild Forest



Mr. Arai of Kurkku Fields



Mother Pond

Use of Solar Energy

On the site there is a small hill, on the slope of which a huge solar panel has been installed. The output capacity of this solar panel is 2 megawatts (2,000 kilowatts). A solar panel placed on the roof of an ordinary house has an output of 2–4 kilowatts, so the amount of electricity generated by this solar panel at Kurkku Fields is the equivalent of about 500– 1,000 times this amount.

The tap water used at Kurkku Fields is drawn from wells, and the miscellaneous water

emitted by facilities on the site goes to a purifying tank below the Dining eating area, where it is decomposed by bacteria power. It then passes through a water purifying system called the biogeofilter, which conducts filtering using the power of plants, such as willows and watercress, and microbes with high nutrient absorbability, before flowing into Mother Pond, which is situated at the lowest point in the center of the site. This water purifying system does not use any chemical agents, and Kurkku Fields does not have any public water supply and sewer services.

The water that collects in Mother Pond is pumped up using solar-generated power and supplied to facilities on the site. Since the water quality is so good, the artificial stream on the site and the biotopes, which are inhabited by plants and creatures, are the home of killifish, freshwater loaches, diving beetles, and so on.



Solar panel



Biogeofilter



Biotope

Cycle

The farm at Kurkku Fields consists of the Organic Farm, where organic vegetables are grown; the Chicken Ranch, where chickens are raised by the free-range method; the Edible Garden, where herbs, edible flowers, and so on are grown; and the Dairy Farm, where water buffalo and goats, which provide delicious milk and cheese, are raised.



Stress-free chicken raising



Organic Farm



Edible Garden



Goats feeding on weeds at Kurkku Fields

The weeds on the site provide feed for the goats, and the dead grass and water buffalo dung are fermented and turned into compost. Among other things, visitors can experience making pizzas using vegetables grown in the fertile soil here. In the Dining area, they can also enjoy eating chiffon cake made with fresh eggs and milk, bread baked with natural yeast, and ham, sausages, and other products processed from the meat of exterminated wild boar and deer. Visitors can purchase these items as souvenirs too.



Chiffon cake made with fresh ingredients (Left)



Bread and rolls baked with organic ingredients and natural yeast (Right)



Pizza baked in an Italian-made oven (Left)



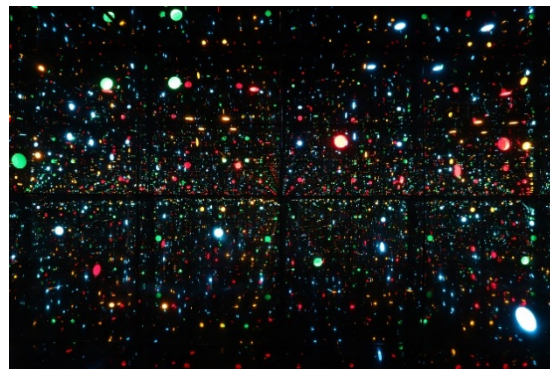
Sausages and ham with vegetables and herbs grown on the farm (Right)

Connections to the Universe Through Grand Nature and Art

One of the most striking sights at Kurkku Fields is a cluster of unique gourd-shaped objects with polka-dot patterns drawn on the aluminum, standing in pools of water shaped rather like golf course bunkers. This work, titled “GUIDEPOST TO THE NEW WORLD,” is by the avant-garde artist Yayoi Kusama. Another of her works, “Infinity Mirrored Room---Illusion inside the Heart,” gives a sensation of the universe. In additions to these two works by Kusama, art by contemporary artists is displayed all over the place.



“GUIDEPOST TO THE NEW WORLD” (Left)



“Infinity Mirrored Room---Illusion inside the Heart” (Right)

Affluence Within Simplicity

Visitors to Kurkku Fields can stay overnight in tiny houses, which recently have begun to attract attention in Japan as well. A tiny house is a small caravan-like dwelling of about 10–20 sq. m, with a simple interior consisting of just a bed, chair, and table. The area at Kurkku Fields called the Tiny House Village has five wheeled and movable tiny

houses, each capable of accommodating two–four guests.

Tiny houses first became a fad in Portland in the United States. They then became the impetus for thinking about housing in view of global large-scale natural disasters, and they are also popular among people who, repulsed by excessive capitalism, want to lead a minimalist lifestyle with nothing more than the bare necessities. It might be a good idea to stay here and think again about what true affluence really means.

(Note: As of June 2020, the tiny houses are closed due to the impact of the Corvid-19 outbreak and other factors.)



General view of the Tiny House Village



Inside a tiny house

Third Place on the Farm

In front of the Tiny House Village there is a space especially for staying guests called the Center House, which is a kind of lounge offering relaxation. The idea of a third place where people can relax (as opposed to the “first place” of home and the “second place” of workplace or school) has gained currency recently, and the interior of the Center House really does have a relaxing café-like atmosphere. The bookshelf by the comfortable antique sofas is lined with books, and visitors are welcome to sit down and read them. In the evening you can enjoy a relaxing time here, sipping a drink while listening to music coming from an analog record.

Barbecue sets are available, so guests can cook and eat food made on the farm right by the tiny houses. They can also light bonfires and enjoy the night life. In addition, as well as toilets, the Center House has a total of five shower booths separated by gender, so guests can use them with peace of mind.



Inside Center House



A small bonfire in front of a tiny house

Links with the Local Community

Finally, I asked Mr. Arai of Kurkku Fields, who had been my guide, a few questions.

Q: I suppose the kind of people you want to come here are those who have an interest in and are highly aware of sustainability and environmental issues and their families, aren't they?

A: We haven't set any target in particular. Children and families, of course, but also we would like ordinary folk who don't have that much interest in environmental problems to come here. And we want local people to know more about us and feel free to visit.

Q: What do you want people to feel when they visit?

A: Through their experience here, we want people to understand the blessings of nature and the importance of nature's cycle and to think about our way of life and the meaning of affluent lifestyles in the future.

Q: What are your plans going forward?

A: At the moment we are thinking about how to continue the business in collaboration with the local community. We hope to conduct projects together with nearby farmers who share our ideas about farming.

Postscript

In recent years the importance of sustainability, which means methods of using resources so that they are not depleted has been increasingly emphasized. Most people, however, have no idea about what specifically they should do and how. Kurkku Fields offers some hints to answer this question. By coming into contact with the seven contents here, visitors will come to realize the essence of sustainability, such as the promotion of

sustainable production and consumption, the reduction of food and food product waste, the reuse of waste, and the utilization of natural energy.

Photo cooperation: Kurkku Fields

KURKKU FIELDS

<https://kurkkufields.jp/> (Japanese site only)