

Tottori-to Project: Join us from overseas!

Tottori Prefecture



Background

Tottori Prefecture is located in an area surrounded by rich natural landscape with the mountains and the Sea of Japan. Tottori Sand Dunes, the largest in Japan, are a famous sightseeing spot, where you can experience activities like yoga and paragliding. You can enjoy seasonal nature here in a variety of different ways, by trying marine sports in the highly transparent sea, engaging in outdoor activities in the famous mountain Daisen, where you can see beautiful stars in the sky, and going to hot springs all across the prefecture. You can also enjoy eating and drinking, especially seafood including crabs, which is the largest catch of all Japan, and the locally brewed sake that is made from pure water.

The population of Tottori Prefecture is approximately 570,000 and the number of enterprises here is approximately 20,000. Both numbers are the smallest in Japan. As regards the industries, Tottori is characterised mainly by electrical equipment manufacturing, food processing and agriculture.

Against this backdrop, many enterprises in Tottori have tried to develop new products, aiming to achieve business expansion and continuity, but more than a few enterprises are having problems, such as “lower-than-expected new product sales.”

So far, the Tottori prefectural government has adopted measures for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to subsidise product development costs and to create opportunities to develop markets, for example, by encouraging exhibition attendance on a com-

munity-wide scale. The prefectural government thought that it could mitigate these problems if it could support local SMEs in a way that would help find a solution to the question, “What product should be made in the first place?” This question is a prerequisite for how the product should be sold after it has been produced.

On the other hand, since the Great East Japan Earthquake, more and more people have wanted to contribute to society through volunteering and through pro bono activities, and have become more aware of community vitalization.

Purpose of Project

As a local government, Tottori Prefecture aims to create innovative products from Tottori, which were once difficult to produce, and vitalize both local SMEs and local economies by providing a place where local SMEs with the above mentioned problem of “what product should be made in the first place” and local people who want to contribute to local vitalization can connect with each other and create together.

Outline of Project

This project is to help local SMEs create products which are exciting to all the people involved by borrowing ideas from consumers all across Japan who want to “contribute to local vitalization” and to be “engaged in Monozukuri (manufacturing things) and Kotozukuri (creating events).”

To be more specific, after each participating local SME chooses its own theme to look for ideas, each SME

then posts its theme on the Co-creation Community “Tottori-to”, a website established in order to invite ideas from consumers across Japan. The participants and the people online can all enjoy watching the process through which an idea is presented to the website. This can be described as a “brainstorming” process whose atmosphere is very similar to that of the Japanese popular entertainment “Ogiri”. Participating SMEs, based on the posted ideas, co-create new products with consumers in order to develop sales channels.



Screenshot from the Tottori-to Site (top page)

Progress and Achievements

Tottori was the first prefecture in Japan to start this kind of project in 2014, then in 2015, the project received the “Good Design Award (from the Japan Institute of Design Promotion)” with its system being highly evaluated. The project also received the “Progressive Policy Award (from the National Governors’ Association).”

Major characteristics of the system are as follows:

- (1) Each participating member can utilize their own strengths.
 - Collaboration is possible between consumers from all across Japan (who can make plans) and local participating SMEs (that can utilize their own technology and local resources).
 - Collaboration is possible between the website management company (that owns the co-creation platform and can reach people in Tokyo metropolitan areas and all other areas of Japan) and Tottori Prefecture (reliable as a public organization and familiar with the local situ-

ation).

- (2) There are good reasons it resonates with people.
 - Challenges are tackled not by a single SME, but by the whole region (prefecture)
 - Challenges are tackled by the region (prefecture) with the smallest population in Japan.
- (3) This system is exciting and motivating.
 - [Consumers] can enjoy the community site and expect to make their own ideas come true.
 - [Participating SMEs] are situated in an environment where they are supported and paid attention to, and are able to gain unexpected awareness.

Effects of Project

This project began three years ago, and since then, more than 4,000 ideas have come from consumers all across Japan to 17 local SMEs that have participated in the project. Also, this first challenge in Japan has been mentioned in national and local media more than 75 times, which has led to great publicity for Tottori Prefecture, as well as for the project and the participating SMEs.

Collaborations with consumers from all across Japan have also generated the following new products:

- Thin-sliced mochi rice cake, “Every day - the very day for mochi” [Ikegami, Ltd.]

A new product from a long-established rice cake shop that wants people to eat “mochi rice cake” every day, a part of Japanese food culture which people don’t eat so often. Ideas from consumers have been used to name this new product and to compile a recipe booklet.



Thin-sliced Mochi Rice Cake “Every day - the very day for Mochi”

- “HAKU”, a perfect brand for a special day’s gift, woven using “Hakushu Cotton” [Kisaragi Co., Ltd.] The western part of Tottori was well-known nationwide in the Edo Period as a major production area of Japanese cotton. In order to revitalize this valuable piece of culture, this company has made great efforts to weave towels and other products made from the organic cotton it grows. Inspired and encouraged by ideas from consumers, the company has finally been able to materialize these products.



Home-grown Organic Cotton Towels made from Hakushu Cotton

- Misasa Onsen “Digital Detox” Plan [Hotel Izanro Iwasaki]
This hotel plan offers guests the chance to enjoy the luxury of doing nothing, staying away from digital devices such as smartphones, at an

850-year-old radium hot spring area certified as Japan Heritage. The concept and content of this plan have been created by consumers.



Misasa Onsen (spa) certified as Japan Heritage

Problems and Responses

There are only three currently finished products because each company has taken more time than expected to develop their products. The financing environment and the vulnerable internal systems typical of SMEs are also likely to cause product development delays. Utilizing the existing financial aid, in combination with the development assistance programmes run by experts, the prefecture will continue to support SMEs to launch new products one after the other.

Outlook

This project, started by Tottori Prefecture as a forerunner in Japan has stimulated other local governments to start similar projects. It is hoped that there will be many exciting products in each part of Japan made through co-creation with consumers, which in turn will be firmly established as an activity that enriches people’s lives.

Note that this project utilizes a website and so everyone can join this project as a consumer from either at home or abroad. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if a new product was developed by combining the technology of Japan and Tottori with ideas from overseas consumers who are geographically separate from Japan? Tottori Prefecture is looking forward to people from overseas also joining this project.

Reference URL

Tottori-to Community Site:

<http://bla.bo/teams/tottori>

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Meaning of Terminology/Coined Words Used in this Report

- Tottori-to Project: The last syllable “to” of “Tottori-to” means “with” or “together”, the concept of co-creation
- Co-creation: Means to “co-create” with consumers, products and services offered by companies