

Promotion of Sericulture in Regional Areas of Japan

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The importance of the sericulture industry in Japan has decreased drastically in the last decades. The amount of cocoon production in 2001 was only 1,200 t, which is merely one seventeenth of that in 1991, i.e. 10 years ago. In addition, cocoon production in Japan accounts for only 0.2% of the total production of the world.

The Japanese government and prefectures continue to support the promotion of sericulture in certain regions of Japan. Recently, in the orientation of Japanese sericulture emphasis has been placed on the productions of cocoons and silk with high quality and unique characters, which distinguish them from those produced in other countries. These cocoons and silk have been designated as "Brand cocoons and silk." The production of "Brand cocoons and silk" is only possible in Japan by the application of technology which has been developed over a long period of time in the process from silkworm rearing to silk tissue production. The production of "Brand cocoons and silk" is the only way for Japanese sericulture to compete with cheap cocoon and silk-related products imported from foreign countries.

Governmental and prefecture research institutes are supporting the production of "Brand cocoons and silk" by the development of the fundamental techniques in sericulture.

Main regions for the production of "Brand cocoons and silk" are Gunma, Yamagata, Fukushima, Tochigi, Saitama, Chiba, Nagano, Gifu, Ehime, Miyazaki, Kagoshima prefectures, etc. These prefectures were formerly known as traditional areas with prosperous sericulture.

Three strategies have been adopted for promoting the production of "Brand cocoons and silk" as follows: 1) Production of special and high value raw silk by use of unique silkworm strains which can produce a characteristic thread; 2) Addition of new useful characters during the process of filature; 3) Addition of high value to silk-related products by integrating the process from cocoon production to selling of the silk products. These strategies are chosen by the sericulture industry in the respective regions, depending the conditions and technical background of the region. In this presentation, I will outline the present status of regional promotion of sericulture in Japan.