

# Nishpa no Koibito (Nispa's Lover)

27

Related sheet: 28

## Biratori's Landscape of Farming

In the low-lying flatlands that spread along the river in Biratori, there have been many greenhouses that have been built to grow tomatoes. This full-blown tomato cultivation started in late 1965. These tomatoes are now being shipped nationwide as a product that represents the town. This landscape tells us about the history of local agriculture that went through many transitions over time in the post-Meiji era.

## The Modern History of Tomato Cultivation

The cultivation of tomatoes in Biratori was triggered by the acreage-reduction policy on rice, which started in 1970.

After much consideration about what crop should replace rice, the local farmers began growing tomatoes in a 6,600m<sup>2</sup> size greenhouse in 1972, when the crop was first shipped out (table 1).

This led to the success of tomato



**Photo 1:** We can see clusters of greenhouses for growing tomatoes (Biratori, Nina, photo taken from North West). Many residents are involved in tomato production as it is the primary industry of the town.

cultivation as the town's primary agricultural product. There were two historical turning points that led to this success. First was the establishment of a joint fruit sorting facility in 1982. With this, a joint sales system was established, reducing the amount of labor needed for sorting the crop.

As a result, the farmers doubled the area for cultivation. The second was the full transition to the "Momotaro" variety of tomatoes in 1990. Due to this transition to a more enduring variety of tomato, the demands from outside of Hokkaido increased rapidly (table 2).

Tomatoes first originated in Mexico and were brought to Europe in the 16th century by the Spaniards. They were then brought into Japan in the late Edo-era. In the Meiji era, the US brought over many different varieties of tomatoes. Despite this long history of tomatoes in the region, it was not adopted into the Japanese diet for a long time.

After the introduction of a variety called Ponterosa, Fukuju 1-go and Fukuju 2-go in the Showa-era, tomato cultivation greatly increased. After that, other varieties such as Ogata (large) Fukuju, Kyoryoku (strong) Fukuju, Oju emerged one after another.

In 1981, Japan saw the introduction of the Momotaro variety, which holds



**Photo 2:** This is the Momotaro tomato grown in Biratori. These fresh tomatoes are packages while still unripe. Tomatoes that don't qualify as the high quality tomatoes become the ingredients for creating tomato juice.

its ripened quality for a long time. This variety became quite popular in Japan and now accounts for around 78% of tomato shares in Japan.

Currently, the top tomato producer prefectures are Kumamoto in 1st place at 13%, and Hokkaido and Ibaraki are tied in 2nd place at 7%.

### Establishing the brand “Nishpa no Koibito (Nispa’s Lover)”

In 1986, in order to establish an image of Hokkaido tomatoes, JA Biratori began using the name "Nishpa no Koibito (Nispa's Lover)" to brand the tomatoes and related processed foods made in Biratori. It is a unique name that includes an Ainu word, *nishpa* (nispa: gentleman, master, affluent person). This was named after a made-up story about a “*nishpa* who ate red, ripe tomatoes every single day to maintain his health, and ended up falling in love with the tomatoes.”

“Nishpa no Koibito Tomato Juice” (photo 3) has become popular for its unique naming, as well as the smooth taste and texture, and has established its position as the top brand in Hokkaido. In addition, there are other products under the same brand name, such as tomato ketchup, jelly, jam, and pasta sauce.

### Distributing the Image of the Town’s Landscape through Branded Products”

The “Nishpa no Koibito” brand’s fresh tomatoes and tomato juice are distributed nationwide as a branded produce similar to the Biratori Wagyu (Japanese cow) Beef.

This means that the image of the local town and its landscape are also disseminated throughout Japan.

The greenhouses for tomato cultivation and the grazing pasture for the black-haired Wagyu represent the local residents' lifestyle. This vibrant local industry also leads to the delicious flavor of the food, which is produced here, by the local farmers.

These products can be purchased at

Table 1: The Chronology of Tomato Production in Biratori

1972: 2 or 3 farmers lead the cultivation of tomatoes in greenhouses of approximately 6,600m<sup>2</sup> in size. They begin shipping commercially for the first time.

1973: The lead farmers convince the surrounding farmers in the area to participate in growing tomatoes. Full-blown tomato cultivation begins after 21 other farmers agree to join.

1982: A fruit sorting co-op is established. This simplified the labor of sorting fruit, doubling the cultivation of tomatoes in the area.

1986: In order to raise the value of products outside of fresh tomatoes, the farmers begin a trial production of tomato juice. Later, this juice is sold under the name, “Nishpa no Koibito (Nishpa’s Lover)”

1990: Farmers switch over to the production of the Momotaro variety of tomato, which had a high market price at the time.

1992: A joint fruit sorting facility only for tomatoes is built (additional facilities built in 1999 and in 1998).

1996: Precooling storage facility is newly built, enforcing the maintenance on freshness and shipment. Due to expanded shipment to the areas outside of Hokkaido, pre-reserved transactions increased and the price became stabilized at a high level.



Photo 3: “Nishpa no Koibito” tomato juice

Table 2 The Expansion of Tomato Exports in Biratori

Year	Market Price (1,000 yen)	Variety
1973	4,671	Fukuju 2-go
1983	102,644	Kyoryoku Kyokuju
1992	518,093	Momotaro
1995	1,027,958	Momotaro
2000	2,161,508	Momotaro
2012	3,901,000	Momotaro

JA Biratori shops (Biratori, Honcho) or direct sales stores (Biratori, Nina), as well as online stores and supermarkets outside of the town.

“Cultural landscapes of the Saru Valley formed by Ainu tradition and modern development”  
Designated as Important Cultural Landscape as of July 26th, 2007

For Inquiries  
Regarding the Landscape of Ainu Culture  
Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum  
Nibutani 55, Biratori-Cho, Saru-Gun,  
Hokkaido, 055-0101 Japan  
Phone: +81-1457-2-2892  
Fax: +81-1457-2-2828  
Published: June, 2014