

# Japan plans futuristic farm in disaster zone

January 5 2012, by Shingo Ito

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People watch the rising sun on January 1, in the tsunami-struck Yuriage district of Natori city in Miyagi prefecture. Japan is planning a futuristic farm where robots do the lifting in an experimental project on land swamped by the March tsunami, the government said Thursday.

Japan is planning a futuristic farm where robots do the lifting in an experimental project on land swamped by the March tsunami, the government said Thursday.

Under an agriculture ministry plan, unmanned tractors will work fields where pesticides will have been replaced by LEDs keeping rice, wheat, soybeans, fruit and vegetables safe until robots can put them in boxes.

Carbon dioxide produced by machinery working on the up to 250-hectare (600 acre) site will be channeled back to crops to boost their growth and reduce reliance on [chemical fertilizers](#), the Nikkei

newspaper said.

The agricultural ministry will begin on-site research later this year with a plan to spend around four billion yen (\$52 million) over the next six years, a ministry official said.

Land in Miyagi prefecture, some 300 kilometres (200 miles) north of Tokyo, which was flooded by [seawater](#) on March 11, has been earmarked for the so-called "Dream Project".

The tsunami, sparked by a 9.0-magnitude quake, inundated the country's northeast, killing more than 19,000 people, according to the latest figures.

It also badly polluted the land, leaving it laden with salt and depositing oil on fields, with around 24,000 hectares of once-fertile farmland damaged by the tsunami, earthquake and fallout from the damaged Fukushima [nuclear plant](#).

Meltdowns at reactors at the plant sent radiation into the air, sea and [food chain](#), badly denting public trust in local produce.

The atomic disaster and the ravaging of farmland were the latest blows to a struggling and ageing farm industry that is also facing the threat of renewed competition from abroad as Tokyo eyes a Pacific-wide free trade pact.

High-tech companies such as Panasonic are to be invited to get involved in the project in a bid to give a much-needed boost to the beleaguered sector, the ministry spokesman said.

"We hope the project will help not only support farmers in the disaster-hit regions but also revive the entire nation's agriculture," he said.

Among other companies expected to join the project are Fujitsu, Hitachi, Sharp, NEC, Yanmar, Ajinomoto and Ito-Yokado Co., according to the Nikkei business daily.

The paper said total investment, including funds from the private sector, would be around 10 billion yen.

Management of the land during the six-year project is expected to be entrusted to local farming corporations and production will begin once salt has been removed from the soil, the Nikkei said.

Once the six-year lease period is finished, the government plans to urge local farmers to consolidate their farmland under the farming corporations, the paper added.

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