



Thirstea Sustainable Awards 2017
ITO EN

Best Environmental Initiative

- **Describe the initiative**
- **Articulate its objectives**
- **Summarize impact it had and what were its outcomes? Please supply supporting evidence, if possible.**
- **Describe how the initiative is innovative.**
- **Describe how the initiative can be replicated.**

Tea producers have always been family operations, but the future of this extraordinary industry and tradition is under threat. A retiring generation of aging tea growers and lack of young farmers continuing the family business has led to a boom in abandoned, unusable tea fields across the country. The average age of Japanese farmers is now 65, and while tea farms were traditionally passed to younger generations, the allure of modern careers in technology, marketing and more, mean fewer young farmers are entering the trade. Once a field is untended it is nearly impossible to restore due to cost, so these lands go wild.

To help create new jobs and revitalize dormant farms ITO EN launched the Tea-Producing Region Development Project in 2001. The project is rooted in the brand's passion and firm belief that preserving Japan's green tea culture is important to all citizens of the planet, and as a company, it has a unique responsibility to ensure not only socio-economic stability for tea farmers, but environmental protection and sustainability for future generations. By partnering with regional farmers and governments, it's earmarked nearly 1,000 hectares for tea plantations as of 2016, procuring raw tea leaves for ready to drink teas, and reconnecting young people to the soil through education on sustainable agricultural techniques, modern harvesting equipment, and community involvement.

The first pillar of the company's "Program for Revitalizing Tea-Growing Regions" was strengthening ties with the largest producers. ITO EN buys the entire production of contracted tea farmers, providing incentives that have increased producing areas on contract farms from 850 hectares in 2011 to 1200 hectares, primarily in major tea growing areas located in the southern half of the country. The company's goal is to add 5,000 acres (2,000 hectares) of new production.

In addition to the strengthening of cooperation with prefectural tea industrial research organizations, ITO EN is striving to strengthen cooperation with agricultural material related companies,

universities, and farming cooperatives in relation to fertilizers and other agricultural materials. As a result, the development of industrial clusters is steadily progressing in tea-producing regions.

The company has also engineered a way to transform 49,000 tons of used tea leaves into 50 million cardboard boxes for its own products annually. To further its mission of sustainability, ITO EN developed a proprietary recycling method for used tea leaves from its brewing process; an environmental synthetic resin was created from the leaves that can be used to make eco-friendly products such as construction material, public benches and household goods. ITO EN has also achieved amazing results by reducing the PET bottle's mass by 0.16 g, making the company's PET bottle one of the lightest in the beverage industry.

ITO EN's various CSR initiatives focus on making an immediate and tangible impact on local communities that boost the economy and the environment. The company has created a unique value chain that is proprietary to its production process, and through the overall flow of operations from procurement to production, logistics, product development, sales and distribution and marketing, ITO EN has continued to ideate and execute world-changing outcomes.

These initiatives can be replicated by identifying similar areas of the world where tea farms have been abandoned and implementing this program model. Educating both farmers and producers on the importance of these resources and practices will allow the tea industry to prosper for future generations – both agriculturally and environmentally.

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