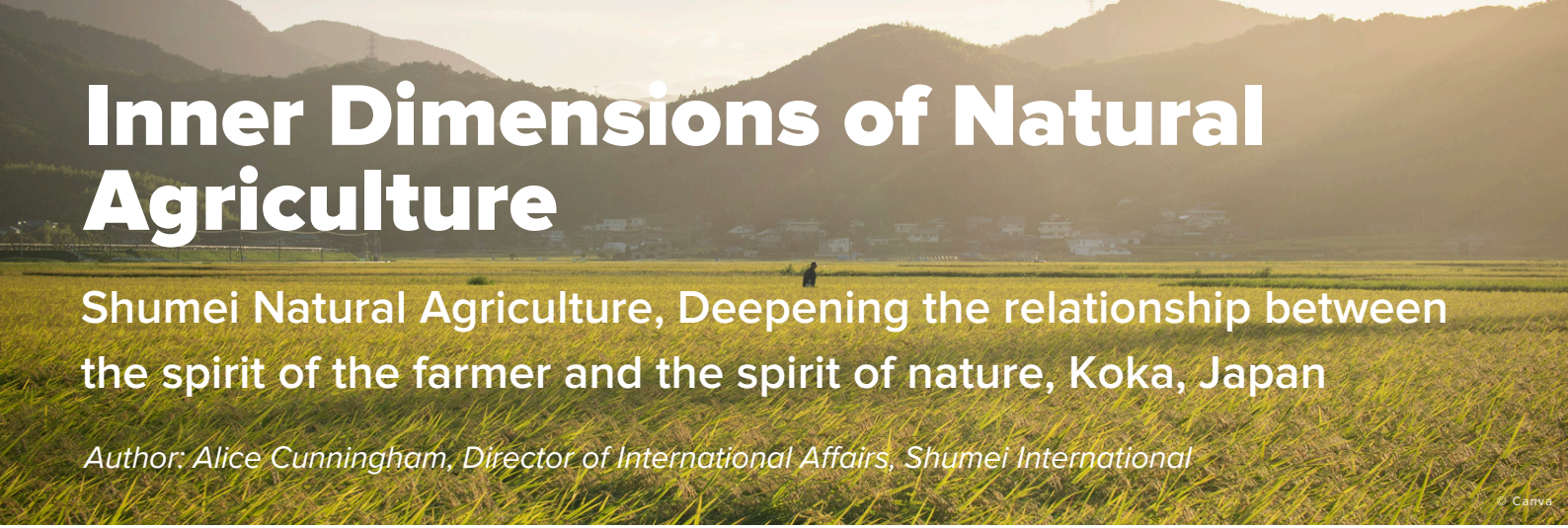




Inner Dimensions of Natural Agriculture

Shumei Natural Agriculture, Deepening the relationship between the spirit of the farmer and the spirit of nature, Koka, Japan

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Gaining traction throughout Japan and globally, Shumei Natural Agriculture is a transformative farming approach that awakens our connection to nature and the sacred dimension of life. This case study will explore how the practice of Natural Agriculture can cultivate profound respect for nature, gratitude, and oneness between people and the environment. By embracing the interconnectedness of all life and striving to live in harmony with nature, Natural Agriculture farmers reconnect with traditional knowledge and their own internal capacities while positively impacting their communities, including those who enjoy the food they produce.

BACKGROUND

Natural Agriculture (NA) is a spiritually based approach to farming, developed by the founder of Shumei, Mokichi Okada, to promote an overriding respect for nature. By cultivating crops without the use of any additives, fertilizers, or pesticides, and with heirloom seeds, emphasis is placed on love, respect for nature, and gratitude, which are seen as essential for growing healthy food.

NA programs encourage participants to recognize themselves as expressions of nature, understanding that nature is alive and responds to thoughts and actions. NA farmers view the natural world as a conscious partner in the growing process and believe that by listening to and observing nature with an open heart, individuals can discover its beauty and divinity.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

Established in 2003, Shigaraki No Sato is an NA demonstration farm based on the concept of Satoyama: living in harmony with nature. It serves as the headquarters for the Natural Agriculture Network and associated programs, and partners with Shumei's Miho Museum and the Miho School to bring NA to wider audiences. The diverse project site sits on 6-acres of land with rice paddies, vegetable and tea fields, bee hives, and two traditional Japanese farmhouses.

The objective of Shigaraki No Sato is to inspire a deeper connection with nature and showcase Natural Agriculture as a way of farming and living in harmony with nature. The demonstration farm serves as a catalyst for inner and outer change, encouraging the practice and support of NA among farmers, visitors, community members, and consumers. Farmers are taught principles of nature and encouraged to spend time alone in nature to allow deep connection and a transformative shift to unfold.

Through training programs and workshops, farmers are guided through conscious and mindful interactions on the land, with seeds and soil, such as planting rice paddies barefoot to heighten the senses. The cultivation of crops without the use of additives requires farmers to relinquish control and place trust in the innate power of nature.

Visitors to the farm learn about a way of life in harmony with nature through the two refurbished 200-year-old Kominkas: traditional Japanese farmhouses. The Kominkas showcase harmony through design and building materials, demonstrating how traditional values, wisdom and aesthetics can be incorporated into modern life. Shumei also offers a “seed to table” experience at the nearby Miho Museum restaurant and farmer’s market, allowing visitors and community members to eat and experience the life force in NA food prepared from local, seasonal and native ingredients.

By engaging in mindfulness, deep listening, observation of the beauty in nature, and reconnection to traditional wisdom, farmers experience a shift in mindset and deeper engagement with nature. Visitors to Shigaraki No Sato experience harmony with nature and its impact on their sense of wellbeing firsthand.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Farmers recount that through practicing Natural Agriculture, they experience significant inner changes, such as a greater sense of connection to nature, self and others, as well as faith, patience, humility, and gratitude. Many also report feeling part of a greater whole and experiencing an overall sense of well-being.

An NA tea farmer said, “It’s about learning from nature; in doing so, we saw the quality of our tea improve. We listen to what the crops tell us, observing and feeling to understand what they need.”

By choosing to rely on the natural resilience of their crops, NA farmers place their faith in the growing cycle, and feel a deep sense of gratitude for nature.

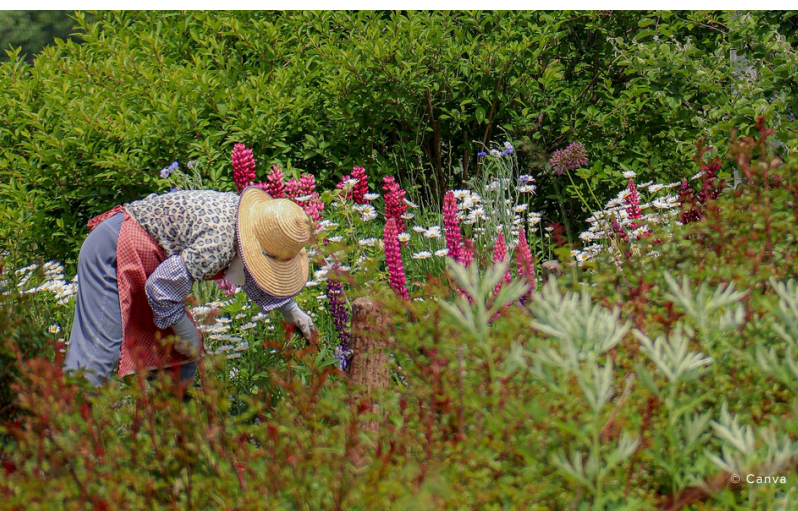
Many NA farmers and consumers have discovered the life force in the plants they cultivate and consume, and this has shifted their perspective. For example, one said:

“When you have a sense that there are spirits in nature, and spirits of plants, you have a different relationship with them...So you have a higher regard for them, when you prep, when you plant, you pray for them to grow like a child, to grow well. And when they grow well, and give you fruits, you give them gratitude, you thank them. So your relationship with them is very different.”

— Farmer

Through its programs and workshops, Shigaraki No Sato has inspired hundreds of farmers to adopt Natural Agriculture. Shigaraki No Sato serves as the center for the Shumei Natural Agriculture Network, a community of over 1000 NA farmers across Japan. In addition to knowledge sharing, network members are in the process of creating an NA seed bank, promoting climate resiliency and community connection through preserving the genetic diversity of native and heirloom seeds.

Scientific studies conducted at Shigaraki No Sato have demonstrated the effectiveness of NA in protecting biodiversity and improving soil health. As a result, Shumei NA farmers are helping to restore abandoned rice paddies in the region through NA approaches and are further increasing biodiversity through the cultivation of more than 300 rice varieties





LEARNINGS

Natural Agriculture emphasizes fostering deep relationships between farmers and nature—resulting in inner change that has been difficult to measure. Shumei is continuing efforts to gather regular feedback from NA practitioners and visitors to Shigaraki No Sato to document inner shifts and outer change.

Interest in the NA approach continues to grow for gardeners and farmers alike, stemming from concerns around agrochemicals and the desire to increase climate resiliency. Additionally, there is a growing understanding of the connection between human health and soil health. Despite this, there is a general lack of interest in agriculture among young people in Japan. Some farmers face challenges in practicing NA consistently or full time, often balancing additional jobs for financial security.

Several larger scale producers are transitioning to NA, demonstrating the potential for scalability. Since Shigaraki No Sato was founded, NA community projects and demonstration farms have been established in Brazil, the Philippines, Zambia, Nepal, the US and across Europe. NA farmers are increasingly sharing the approach and their experiences through virtual tutorials, courses and webinars.

Moving forward, Shumei will continue to seek opportunities to uplift farmer voices and share the message of Natural Agriculture through demonstration farms and experiences that inspire deeper connections with nature.