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## COOPERATIVES IN JAPAN

During IYC Launch Event for Asia - Pacific, at United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan

### Contribution of cooperatives to Japan's economy

- 40,716 cooperatives in Japan.
- 108.35 million—number of Japanese who are members of cooperatives.
- 46.5% of adults in Japan are members of cooperatives.
- 38.9% of all cooperative members are women.
- Combined annual turnover of all cooperatives is approximately \$186 billion.
- Around 20% of the total deposits are held in cooperative banks.
- More than half of the total output from farming, forestry, and fisheries is sold through cooperatives.

\*All figures are from 2022

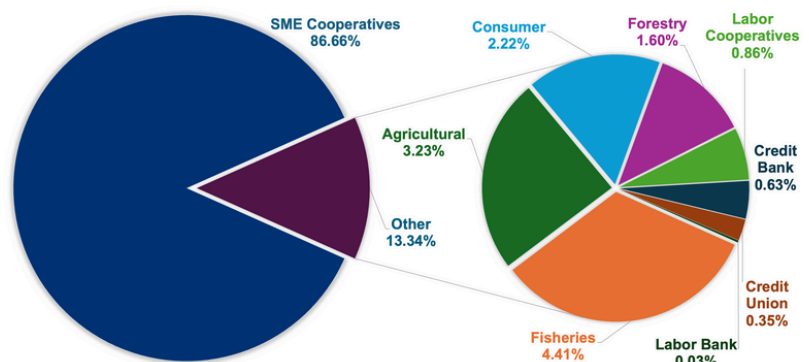
### Did you know?

- The Japan Joint Committee of Cooperatives (JJC; established in 1956) was reorganized into the Japan Cooperative Alliance (JCA) in 2019. The JCA is the apex organization to promote collaboration among Japanese cooperatives.
- The VNR 2025 Japan report notes that cooperative members show higher awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and have advanced sustainability through environmentally friendly agriculture, forestry carbon credits, fisheries resource management, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) finance, and consumer co-ops' 2030 environmental targets.
- There are 21 cooperatives from Japan among the top 300 largest cooperative and mutual organizations in the World Coop Monitor 2023 as per turnover. Nippon Life Insurance Company (10th rank) is among the top 10.
- In sector-wise categories ZEN-NOH (2nd rank) and Hokuren (8th rank) are among top10 in agriculture, Nippon Life (2nd rank), Zenkyoren (3rd rank), Meiji Yasuda Life (6th rank) and Sumitomo Life (10th rank) are among top 10 in insurance, Aichiken Welfare Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives (4th rank), Hokkaido Welfare Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives (6th rank) and Japan Culture and Welfare Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives (7th rank) in education, health and social work.
- There are 17 ICA members from Japan (list on page 4).

Cooperatives in Japan play a central role in the economy, supporting rural sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, while contributing to urban life through consumer, financial, worker, and Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) cooperatives, and building inclusive and sustainable communities across generations.

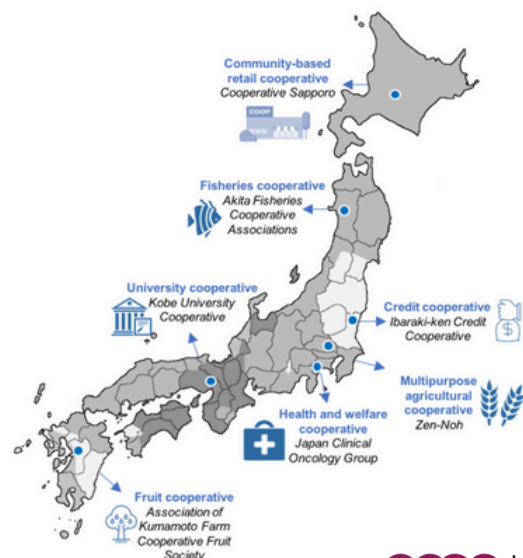
### Sectoral Presence of Cooperatives

Cooperatives are present in the following sectors in Japan:



### Geographical presence of cooperatives in Japan

Cooperatives are present in over 34,000 locations in Japan. The map below shows a representative sample of cooperatives that are present across different locations in the country.



## Evolution of the cooperative movement

### → 1800-1945

- The roots of the cooperative movement in Japan date back to early 1800s when mutual organizations of the socially vulnerable were formed for the first time.
- Agriculture, consumer, credit, fishery, and forestry were the main types of cooperatives prevalent during this period.
- The cooperative movement came to a halt during the Second World War (1939-1945).

### → 1945-2000

- The period immediately after the Second World War (1945 onwards) witnessed the growth of cooperatives in diverse sectors due to the severe food shortage and inflation in the economy.
- The Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union (JCCU) was established in 1951 to formalize consumer cooperatives, which were important distribution channels for the supply of essential goods and food products.
- Agricultural cooperatives were set up by the government as a tool to address the black market in food products.
- In 1954, the JA-Zenchu was set up as an independent national administrative body for agricultural cooperatives.
- The workers' cooperatives in Japan emerged during the 1970s as a means to provide jobs to the middle-aged and jobless trade union members.
- The Japan Workers' Cooperative Union (JWCU) was established in 1986 with the objective to transform businesses that were formerly established to support the middle-aged and jobless workers into organizations managed by worker members.
- In 1991, the Japan Institute of Co-operative Research was established as the only research institute on workers' cooperatives in Japan.
- In 1995, the first older persons' cooperative was established by and for senior citizens. Such cooperatives have spread throughout the country to meet the needs of an increasingly ageing population.

### → 2000-present

- In 2000, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification was introduced for the first time, authenticating the forest owners' cooperatives as resource managers of forest land under multiple ownership.
- In 2000, the Worker Cooperative Legislation Civic Council was founded and a legal movement began to formulate the law on 'Co-operatives of Associated Work.' In 2002, JWCU adopted the new principle of 'Co-operatives of Associated Work,' whereby people work together as individuals in cooperation and solidarity, without being employed by others.
- In 2010, HeW Co-op was established to represent cooperatives that are engaged in medical and welfare businesses.
- In 2016, agricultural reforms were introduced by the government to increase farmers' income by reinforcing competitiveness in the agricultural sector. This has been a cause of concern for agricultural cooperatives, as it has a direct implication on the functioning of cooperatives involved in farm input supply and dairy products.
- In 2019, the Japan Cooperative Alliance was formed as the apex organization to unite cooperatives across the country and to strengthen the movement based on common values and interests.
- In 2020, Japan's National Diet adopted the Worker Cooperatives Act after 22 years of advocacy by the JWCU. The law was promulgated on December 11, 2020, and came into effect on October 1, 2022, providing a formal legal framework for worker cooperatives in Japan.
- In May 2025, Japan's National Diet adopted a resolution to promote cooperatives during the International Year of Cooperatives, recognizing their role in sustainable communities and affirming the ICA Statement on Cooperative Identity.

## Law on Cooperatives

- There is no common legal framework for cooperatives in Japan, and each cooperative type is regulated by specific industry legislation. The cooperatives in Japan are supervised by different ministries, which also regulate the respective legislations. The existing laws for cooperatives in Japan are as follows:

Legislation	Cooperatives	Supervisory Ministry
Agricultural Cooperatives Act, 1947	Agriculture	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF); and Financial Services Agency (FSA)
Consumer Cooperatives Act, 1948	Consumer	Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW)
Fisheries Cooperatives Act, 1948	Fisheries	MAFF and FSA
SME Cooperatives Act, 1949	SME	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry
Act on Cooperative Banking, 1949	Credit	FSA
Shinkin Bank Act, 1951	Shinkin Banks	FSA
Labour Bank Act, 1953	Labour Banks	MHLW and FSA
Tobacco Growers Cooperative Act, 1958	Tobacco Growers	MAFF and FSA
Forest-Owners Cooperative Act, 1978	Forest-Owners	MAFF
Norinchukin Bank Act, 2001	Norinchukin Bank	MAFF and FSA
Worker Cooperatives Act, 2020	Worker	MHLW

- There are other legislations pertaining to organizations classified as cooperatives by the Corporate Tax Act (such as the Act for Cooperatives to Promote Street Associations), Japanese Act on Promotion of Non-Profit Activities by Cooperatives (1998) among others.



## Cooperative Landscape of Japan

Traditionally, agricultural and consumer cooperatives have been well-known in Japan. In recent years, small and medium-sized enterprise cooperatives, financial cooperatives, workers' collectives, workers' cooperatives, and cooperatives for the elderly have also started thriving. Cooperatives in Japan operate across diverse fields, including healthcare, insurance, education, food, ecology, transport, electronics, housing, and research and development.



PC: [PRtimes](#)

### Nishi-Uwa Agricultural Cooperative (JA Nishiuwa)

The Nishi-Uwa Agricultural Cooperative (JA Nishiuwa), headquartered in Yawatahama, Ehime Prefecture, was founded in 1993 through the merger of 15 local cooperatives. As of March 2024, it has 10,566 members, capital of about \$19.5 million, and employs 427 staff (257 full-time and 170 part-time). Its annual business revenue reached \$51.5 million.

JA Nishiuwa plays a central role in the region's citrus sector, marketing renowned brands like Hinomaru and Maana mikans, and managing multiple branches, agricultural centers, and fruit grading facilities. Beyond sales, it provides financial, mutual aid, and purchasing services, while supporting sustainable farming and community life. With an average staff tenure of 19 years and strong training systems, the co-op reflects both stability and deep regional roots, vital for revitalizing agriculture in Ehime.

### Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative Union (SCCC)

Founded in 1965, the Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative Union (SCCC) has grown into a federation of 33 cooperatives in 22 prefectures with around 420,000 member households. Guided by ecological and social principles, it declared itself GMO-free in 1997, introduced returnable containers that cut nearly 2,500 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually, and built strong social welfare programs and over 600 workers' collectives. In 2022, SCCC launched the Seikatsu Club Energy Business Association to promote a nuclear-free, 100% renewable society, investing in nearly 30 wind, solar, and biogas facilities and expanding "Seikatsu Club Denki" for member households. In March 2025, it received the Newsweek Japan SDGs Award 2024 (Economic Category) for its "Planned Labor Participation" program in tomato farming, where members join as paid workers to sustain local agriculture.



PC: [Seikatsu Club](#)



PC: [Okayama](#)

### Okayama Medical Cooperative

Founded in 1952, the Okayama Medical Cooperative has grown into one of Japan's leading community-based health and welfare cooperatives. As of August 2025, it has 59,533 members, capital of about \$12.3 million, annual revenue of \$76 million, and employs 1,080 staff. It operates two hospitals, nine clinics, dental services, group homes, visiting nursing stations, and day-care facilities for the elderly.

Guided by principles of equality, trust, philanthropy, and safety, the co-op delivers accessible medical and nursing services without differential bed fees and is ISO9001:2015 certified. In 2025 it adopted a Gender Equality and Next-Generation Action Plan (2025–2029) to raise women's share in management to 50%, support diverse work styles, and expand childcare and eldercare leave. Recognized as a Family-Friendly Company, it promotes a workplace culture that balances work and family life.

### Osaka Prefecture Forestry Association

The Osaka Prefecture Forestry Association (Osaka Shinrin Kumiai Rengōkai), created in 2001 through the merger of 16 forest unions, represents nearly 7,000 forest owners, employs about 50 staff, and has capital of roughly \$1.3 million. Guided by the philosophy "Protect the mountains and grow the forest," it manages forestry, timber sales, recycling, and disaster recovery across Osaka. On July 14, 2020, it also helped establish the Osaka Cooperative and Non-Profit Sector Liaison Council (OCoNoMi Osaka) to strengthen collaboration across cooperatives.

Committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the association obtained Sustainable Green Ecosystem Council (SGEC) Forest Management/Chain of Custody (FM/CoC) certification in 2017 to ensure sustainable forest practices and reliable timber supply. It promotes decarbonization through biomass power, encourages forest recreation, and advances forest education (ESD) for children and volunteers, linking sustainability with community resilience.



PC: [O-forest](#)



- Japan's SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles (2016), issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) as the national strategy for the 2030 Agenda, highlight the role of cooperatives alongside other civil society actors.
- The Japanese cooperative movement has served as a model for others in the region and beyond. Between 2010 and 2019, JCCU and the ILO jointly organized the African Cooperative Leaders' Study Tours in Japan, which trained 43 senior cooperative leaders from 16 African countries.
- In May 2019, JA-Zenchu and JICA signed a Basic Agreement on International Cooperation to share Japan's agricultural cooperative expertise with developing countries, using agricultural cooperatives as a model for improving productivity, farm guidance, and food value chains. Under this framework, a 2024 training program in Japan brought participants from Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana to study Japan's cooperative systems and development methods.
- Following the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese cooperatives have continued to advocate for a world without nuclear weapons. In 2016, JCCU launched the "Hibakusha Appeal" signature campaign, which collected 2.86 million signatures and was submitted to the UN in 2020 to call for a treaty banning nuclear weapons.
- At the C20 Summit held in April 2023 in Tokyo, Japan, cooperatives were included in the C20 Japan policy pack. This pack emphasized the need for G20 countries to engage with various stakeholders on issues like youth.

## Engagement with ICA-AP

- JA-Zenchu and JCCU are one of the first ICA members from the East Asia region.
- In 1964, ICA's first important regional activity, the Top-Level Co-operative Leaders' Conference was held in Tokyo.
- The ICA-Japan training courses in collaboration with the MAFF, the Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation (IDACA), and JA-Zenchu which started in 1986, continue till date and benefit agriculture cooperatives in the region and Africa.
- The Japanese cooperative movement along with other cooperatives in the region supported ICA in setting up an office in New Delhi in 1967 and Singapore in 1999.
- In the 1990s, experts from JA-Zenchu and JCCU were seconded to the Regional Office in Delhi.
- In 1992, the 30th ICA Congress was held in Tokyo. It was the first Congress of ICA to be held in Asia.
- The Japanese cooperative movement has supported ICA-AP in promoting consumer and university cooperatives and advancing gender and youth inclusion in cooperatives.
- ICA has been actively represented by Japanese cooperative leaders in the Regional (Ms. Chitose Arai; 2021- present) and Global Board (Toru Nakaya; 2022-present).
- Japan, China, Korea, and Malaysia supported the establishment of the Malaysia Business Office in 2013.
- In September 2023, JCCU celebrated the 25th anniversary of the ICA-AP Committee on Women. It has been a prime mover of the Women's Committee activities.
- In July 2024, JCCU sponsored the Asia-Pacific Women CEOs in Cooperatives Summit organized by ICA-AP focussing on 'Empowering Leadership: Navigating the Future of Cooperatives with Women at the Helm'.
- On 19 February 2025, Japan hosted the Asia-Pacific launch of the International Year of Cooperatives at the United Nations University in Tokyo, co-organized by ICA-AP, the IYC2025 Japan Committee, and the ILO Office for Japan. The event gathered around 700 delegates in person and online.

## What are cooperatives?

Cooperatives are people-centred enterprises owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realise their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations.

## Cooperative values

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

## Cooperative principles

The seven cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training, and Information
6. Cooperation among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

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## About International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific

ICA-AP is one of four regional offices of the ICA. Established in 1960 in New Delhi, India, it unites, promotes, and develops cooperatives in the region. ICA-AP's 119 members from 29 countries spans a variety of sectors, including agriculture, credit and banking, consumer, education, fisheries, forestry, housing, and insurance.

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