

# Revitalizing Local Communities Through Oita Prefecture's One Village, One Product Movement



The One Village, One Product (OVOP) movement, known as a project for regional revitalization, began in Oita Prefecture around 1980 and gradually spread throughout Japan. We spoke with an official from Oita Prefecture, the birthplace of the movement, to learn more about it.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)



Above left: Example of a serving of Seki-Saba (Mackerel) and Seki-Aji (Horse Mackerel) sashimi

Below left: Seki-Saba (Mackerel) on sale with its branded label attached.

Right: Oita Kabosu is commonly served with local delicacies such as *toriten* (chicken tempura), squeezing its juice on top to add to the dining experience.



Photos: PXTA

The OVOP movement was proposed by the then-governor of Oita Prefecture, Hiramatsu Morihiko<sup>1</sup>, in 1979. Hirota Yosuke from Oita Creation Promotion Division within the Oita Prefectural Government, spoke as follows about the movement.

“Former Oita Governor Hiramatsu Morihiko, who promoted the OVOP movement, addressed the background of the era and the essence of the movement during a prefectural assembly in March 2003. He emphasized that while Tokyo experiences a growing concentration of people, goods, and information, its residents are increasingly feeling dissatisfied and far

from fulfilled. Meanwhile, rural areas are increasingly struggling with depopulation and anxiety. Against the backdrop of this Tokyo dissatisfaction and rural anxiety, he advocated for inward-looking development to revitalize Oita Prefecture, stressing the use of local resources while preserving the environment. He further explained that this approach has been consistently employed with the framework of the OVOP movement. Simply put, the movement aims to help communities by using their own skills and resources to make specialty products. These products are then branded to revitalize the local economy, all while protecting the environment where these products come

from and remaining in harmony with nature.”

The OVOP movement in Oita Prefecture has led to the creation of many well-known specialty products that are still recognized today. Among them, Seki-Saba (Mackerel) and Seki-Aji (Horse Mackerel)<sup>2</sup> are prime examples of successful branded fish known nationwide. Other examples include *fugu* (pufferfish) from Usuki City<sup>3</sup>. Agricultural products such as Oita Kabosu (a type of citrus fruit) and white onions have also thrived under the Oita brand. In addition to agricultural products, initiatives such as the revitalization of the shopping district in Bungotakada City<sup>4</sup> are also considered to be in line with the concept of the movement.

“Former Oita Governor Hiramatsu, a long-time advocate of the movement, detailed its evolution. He highlighted the initial phase, spanning from 1979 to 1988, characterized by the emergence of new spe-

cialty products like Oita Kabosu. In the subsequent period, from 1988 to 1994, there was a notable emphasis on branding for products such as Seki-Saba (Mackerel) and Seki-Aji (Horse Mackerel). He described the third phase, from 1995 to 2003, as a time marked by increased international exchange with Asia, Europe, and North America,” Hirota explained. “Looking ahead, he envisioned a phase of ‘inheritance and circulation’ within the private sector, focusing on innovation and talent development. He stressed that the regional strength and human resource capabilities nurtured through the practical activities of the OVOP movement would form the bedrock for Oita’s future development as the new Toyo-no-Kuni<sup>5</sup>, or ‘land of abundance’. Hiramatsu concluded by urging the continuation of the movement’s spirit, encouraging proactive engagement from prefectural residents, and emphasizing the motto ‘Continuity is Strength’ as the driving force behind the prefecture’s progress.”

The OVOP movement continues to serve as a model overseas to this day. Its principles undoubtedly endure as the cornerstone of regional revitalization efforts. ㊦



Photos: PIXTA

The shopping district of Bungotakada City was revitalized by replicating the townscape of the 1960s, which has attracted tourists.

1. Hiramatsu was born in Oita Prefecture in 1924 and passed away in 2016. He served as a bureaucrat in the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (now the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), and other government agencies, before becoming the Vice Governor of Oita Prefecture. Elected as the Governor of Oita in 1979, he held the position for 24 years across six terms until his retirement in 2003. Advocating for the OVOP movement from the onset of his governorship, he helped raise awareness of Oita Prefecture, which was relatively unknown at the time.
2. The name given to horse mackerel and chub mackerel caught by single-line fishing in the Bungo Strait, which marks the boundary between the Seto Inland Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Known for their delicious taste and firm texture, they are recognized as premium fish. The peak season

for Seki-Aji (Horse Mackerel) is from July to September, while the peak season for Seki-Saba (Mackerel) is around December to March.

3. Usuki City is in the southeastern part of Oita Prefecture, and in 2021, it was certified for membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the field of gastronomy.
4. A town in northern Oita Prefecture, established in 2001 as a tourist destination where visitors can enjoy the atmosphere of a shopping district around the mid-1960s. In 2017, it was honored in the Asian Townscape Awards.
5. Located in the northeastern part of Kyushu, this refers to the area corresponding to the eastern part of Fukuoka Prefecture and the entire area of Oita Prefecture today. Before being divided into Buzen and Bungo around the end of the 7th century, it was referred to as Toyo-no-Kuni.