

Conserving Groundwater through Sustainable Rice Cultivation

## NOK Supports the Kumamoto Groundwater Foundation's Rice Paddy Owner Program

As part of its efforts to preserve regional groundwater, NOK Corporation (Headquarters: Shibadaimon, Minato-ku, Tokyo; Representative Director, President and Group CEO: Masao Tsuru; hereinafter "NOK") has supported the Public Interest Incorporated Foundation Kumamoto Groundwater Foundation's Rice Paddy Owner Program since 2019. This year, on Saturday, October 12, 35 employees and family members from NOK Kumamoto Plant (Aso City, Kumamoto Prefecture) participated in a rice harvesting event held in rice paddies located in Ozu Town, Kikuchi District, Kumamoto Prefecture. By joining local producers in harvesting rice nurtured by the area's rich soil and water, they contributed to groundwater recharge<sup>\*1</sup> equivalent to approximately 4,500 tons.



Participants in the 2024 Rice Paddy Owner Program rice harvest

Global water resource shortages are increasingly recognized as a critical issue, and the effective use of water resources is essential for achieving a sustainable society. Within the NOK Group, we assess water risks in each country and region where we have production bases and promote water conservation activities tailored to each area's specific needs.

The Kumamoto Groundwater Foundation's Rice Paddy Owner Program is an initiative where producers who own rice paddies in groundwater recharge areas<sup>\*2</sup> and corporate and organizational partners in owner agreements collaborate in rice cultivation. This process allows water stored in the rice paddies to seep underground, promoting groundwater recharge. Each year, NOK Kumamoto Plant takes ownership of a

737 m<sup>2</sup> rice paddy in Ozu Town, Kikuchi District, and assists with a portion of the farming activities. Approximately 150 kg of the rice harvested this year will be donated to a food bank in Kumamoto City. A Groundwater Recharge Certificate will be issued around November, indicating the amount of groundwater nurtured through rice cultivation. Based on the paddy area, this year's recharge amount is expected to be approximately 4,500 tons (4,495 m<sup>3</sup>), equivalent to last year's results.

Note 1: Groundwater Recharge: The process by which rainwater and other sources seep into the ground and are stored as groundwater within aquifers.

Note 2: Recharge Area: Land areas, such as fields and forests, where water can easily penetrate the ground

### ■ Participation in rice harvesting for the Rice Paddy Owner Program

Employees and their families are invited to participate in the rice cultivation experience each year. This year, 49 people joined the rice planting in June, and 35 returned for the harvest.

On harvest day, under clear autumn skies, participants received guidance from local producers on handling sickles and harvesting techniques. They spent about an hour gathering rice and experiencing the process through to threshing. Many participants, having also joined the planting earlier in the year, eagerly anticipated the harvest and enjoyed seeing the mature rice plants they had helped cultivate. It was a fulfilling autumn day spent taking in the peaceful rural scenery and connecting with the producers.



Rice harvesting



Rice planting held in June



Groundwater Recharge Certificate (FY2023)

### ■ Comments from participants

• Nobuyuki Umezaki

**Systems Department 5, IT Management Division, IT Headquarters, NOK Kumamoto Plant**

“My child experienced rice harvesting for the first time and saw a combine harvester up close, which was

very educational. Picking up fallen grains, my child wondered aloud if they would make a bowl of rice and learned much about how our food is produced. This was our first time participating, and we plan to join again next year."

• **Yoshifumi Kogai**

**System Development Section, Production Engineering Department, Precision & O-Ring Division, NOK Kumamoto Plant**

"This was my second time participating in rice harvesting. Starting early and working with my feet firmly on the ground was refreshing, and the scent of freshly cut rice added to the enjoyment of the experience. Afterward, I savored a meal of rice, appreciating both the crop and the efforts of the producers, feeling a satisfying sense of tiredness from the day's work."

• **Haruka Tsurusaki**

**Administration Section, Operations Department, Precision & O-Ring Division, NOK Kumamoto Plant**

"I could show my 3-year-old son the rice up close and let him touch it. When I told him, 'The rice is inside these little grains,' he looked at them curiously, still skeptical. He loves vehicles, so he was thrilled to see a combine harvester, and he happily talked about getting to sit in it even after we got home. For me, it was a refreshing change of pace to be outdoors and active in the fresh air."

■ **Sustainability activities through support of the Rice Paddy Owner Program**

High-quality water is essential in the manufacturing process of our products at the NOK Group. NOK Kumamoto Plant, located in the prefecture's Aso City, draws on the area's abundant water resources, utilizing groundwater as industrial water to produce seal products.

With around 80% of Kumamoto Prefecture's drinking water sourced from groundwater, protecting this resource is vital to sustaining local communities and industries. For years, NOK Kumamoto Plant has engaged in local activities to preserve groundwater, such as lake and marsh clean-ups. However, the recent increase in water-consuming factories in the region has made proactive groundwater conservation an even more pressing challenge.

In response, NOK has supported the Rice Paddy Owner Program since 2019 to contribute to groundwater conservation. Collaborating with local producers who also depend on this precious water resource, the Program repurposes fallow rice fields to maintain these paddies, which naturally recharge groundwater while also supporting local rice production, a key industry. Through this, NOK also contributes to addressing local challenges, such as labor shortages in agriculture. Additionally, the Program helps preserve the beautiful satoyama\* landscapes in Aso.

In the future, NOK Kumamoto Plant will continue to work alongside government bodies, local environmental conservation groups, and residents to protect the region's valuable groundwater resources.

\* Satoyama: Traditional Japanese rural landscapes where agricultural land, forests, and human settlements coexist in harmony with nature.

## ■ Overview of NOK Kumamoto Plant's participation in the rice harvest for the Kumamoto Groundwater Foundation's Rice Paddy Owner Program

- Date: Saturday, October 12, 2024
- Location: Rice paddies in Maki area, Ozu Town, Kikuchi District, Kumamoto Prefecture
- Participants: 35 employees of NOK Kumamoto Plant and their families

## ■ About the Kumamoto Groundwater Foundation's Rice Paddy Owner Program

- Organizer: Public Interest Incorporated Foundation, Kumamoto Groundwater Foundation
- Overview: A program that supports rice paddy and groundwater conservation through rice cultivation. Corporations and organizations participate as sponsors (owners) and join in activities such as planting and harvesting. After the harvest, they receive rice proportionate to their cultivated area along with a Groundwater Recharge Certification indicating the amount of groundwater nurtured through rice cultivation.

## ■ Other environmental conservation and community contribution activities by NOK Kumamoto Plant

NOK Kumamoto Plant actively participates in regional environmental conservation efforts. Employees volunteer for various initiatives, including cleaning Lake Ezu with the Kumamoto Environmental Conservation Association and assisting with controlled burns organized by the Genya Kumiai\*. NOK Kumamoto Plant also supports regional environmental initiatives as a sponsor and member of organizations and programs such as the Aso Grassland Supporters for Corporate Partners, Aso Green Stock, and the Ministry of the Environment's Nature Restoration Project, collaborating with government agencies and residents to support conservation activities.

- Annual Lake Ezu cleanup to protect groundwater resources in collaboration with the Kumamoto Environmental Conservation Council (around November each year)
- Donation of rice harvested through the Kumamoto Groundwater Foundation's Rice Paddy Owner Program to those in need via Food Bank Kumamoto (around November each year)
- Participation in the controlled burns organized by the Aso City Genya Kumiai to maintain Aso's grasslands and biodiversity (each February or March)
- Sponsorship of Kumamoto's summer festivals, including the Hinokuni Festival and Otemoyan So-odori (each August)
- Promoting grassland preservation activities in Aso as a certified business organization under the Aso Grassland Supporter Program (since 2022)

\* Genya Kumiai: Local association for managing the local environment.

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### ■ About NOK Group

The NOK Group is dedicated to "Essential Core Manufacturing — The manufacture of pivotal products that shape society." Through this approach the Group demonstrates its commitment to providing greater safety and comfort, the cornerstones of a prosperous society. The NOK Group consists of 93 companies located in 15 countries and regions with approximately 38,000 employees. Product development is built upon a robust base of foundational research, resulting in large-scale, stable and high-quality production. Moving forward, the Group will continue to provide technologies and products for all industrial areas including automobiles and other mobility sectors, electronic products — centered on PCS and smartphones- office automation equipment, medical and healthcare devices, industrial robots, and satellites.

### ■ About NOK Kumamoto Plant

NOK Kumamoto Plant produces O-rings and other seal products; one of NOK's core products designed to seal gases and liquids. These seal products are widely used in various applications, including automobiles, construction machinery, agricultural equipment, and residential systems.

Location: 2089 Nagakusa, Aso City, Kumamoto Prefecture