

Night Soil Recycling Systems in the Edo Era

It is believed that agricultural use of night soil in Japan became very popular in the Kamakura Era (1185-1333) as a means of improving agricultural production. During the mid Muromachi Era (1336-1573) it spread throughout the nation, while it really became entrenched as a practice in the Azuchi-Momoyama Era (1573-1603). With the development of urban areas, agricultural use of night soil increasingly spread.

In the Edo Era (1603-1868), owing to the urbanization, not only farmers but also residents in towns tended to construct big night soil storage tanks, so as to offer night soil as suppliers of fertilizer. For collecting night soil, farmers went to towns buying night soil from the residents with money, or exchanging it with vegetables. This kind of night soil recycling mechanism ensured steady supply of night soil which is used as fertilizer necessary for agricultural products. Meanwhile, the products raised by night soil fertilizer were consumed by residents in towns, closer relations between farmers and the residents were formed naturally.

The night soil recycling mechanism continued into the 1960s.

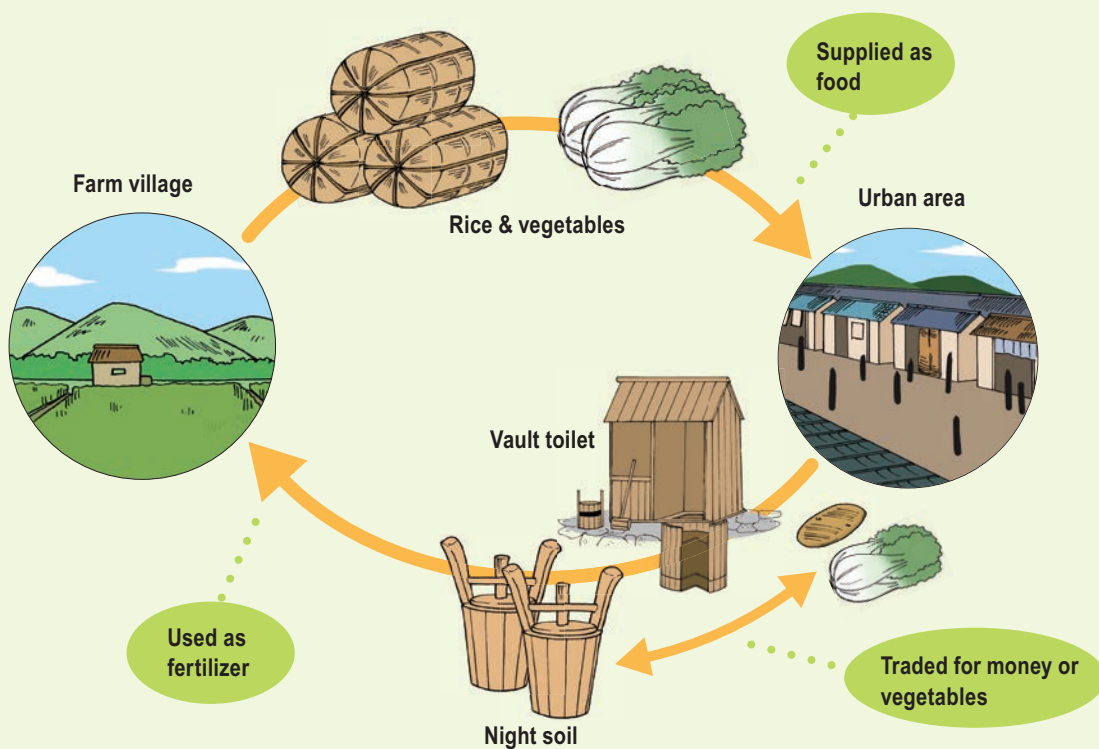


Figure 1 Night soil recycling systems in the Edo Era



Figure 2 The landscape of night soil transportation in the Edo Era⁽¹⁾

Column 1 Value of night soil in Edo Era⁽²⁾

Transportation method	Time of application	Price (per ship)	Price (per oke)	Note
By ship	Spring tillage	3 bu~1 ryo	19-25 mon	1 ship=160 oke, 1 da=8 oke, 1 oke=30L 1 ryo=4 bu, 1 bu=4 shu, 1 shu=250 mon Exchange to present currencies 1 US\$ = 100JPY = 4 mon
	Autumn tillage	2 bu 2 shu~3 bu	14-19 mon	
	Summer/winter tillage	2 bu 2 shu	14 mon	
By vehicle		1 bu (3.5 da~5 da)	25-36 mon	