

Japan city girls hit rice paddies, in style

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TOKYO — Tokyo's most fashionable city girls have ventured into unfamiliar territory, crouching in muddy rice paddies to help make Japan's dying farms cool again -- and now they can do it in style.

Shiho Fujita, a 24-year-old model, has led a group of kawaii (cute) 'gal farmers' to do their bit to revitalise rural Japan, where many farms have closed as their owners have aged and their children have run off to the cities.

Her biggest problem so far: she didn't like the clothes.

"Since there are no farm clothes I like, I have come up with the idea of designing cute ones myself," Fujita said.

Her new overalls, targeting girls in their 20s, are made from stretch denim to be comfortable in the field and, crucially, have pockets for their target group's key accessories, a mobile phone and an iPod.

Fujita, who has grown rice in northern Akita prefecture, also said she wants to design plastic gloves for girls with long fingernails, and new farm tools to make farming more accessible and fun for young city dwellers.

Japan, the world's second-largest economy, now imports 60 percent of its food, and many worry about future food security if climate change rocks global food supplies or energy costs swing international grain prices.

The new overalls, made by leading Japanese jeans maker Edwin, will be available both for men and women from February for 13,000 yen (147 dollars).