

# sustainable japan

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AI-powered platform bringing accountability to corporate claims

## PocketSeed powers honest sustainability in the AI age

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### Leaders & Readers

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 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

AI: Will it save us? Destroy us? Is there a middle way? Its transition from R&D spaces into the public sphere has pushed a sophisticated tool to an unsettled frontier. The rapid advances being made far outpace the legal and ethical frameworks the public relies on for accountability. Some see AI as a miracle that will lead us into the future, others as an unregulated evil. A case can be made that both sides carry an element of truth.

AI's potentials for scientific advancement and to provide the public with unprecedented access to massive amounts of neatly packaged information are astounding. Also astounding are the concerning potential for it to be used to mislead and the significant amounts of energy and water needed for the data centers that train generative AI models. But AI is surely here to stay, so what kinds of

systems can provide accountability? And can it be used to support positive environmental impacts?

Mitch Hammer's journey in business led him down this line of questioning. Originally from Australia, where he received his master's in international business, Hammer's career has taken him to Dubai and the United Nations, and 11 years ago to Japan, where he built a path in sustainability and technology. One key problem he encountered across his projects was the credibility of sustainability claims.

Vague language, mixtures of data with and without proper context, varying levels of corporate accountability and loud opinions can bombard consumers. Hammer sought to cut through the noise by developing the concept for the AI and blockchain-powered trust network PocketSeed together with co-founder Alex Knight, the company's CEO.

PocketSeed is a platform with an in-depth system of checks and balances designed to create structure, verification and accountability for corporate sustainability reporting. By giving businesses a tool to communicate responsibly to consumers, stakeholders, auditors and beyond, PocketSeed seeks to offer transparent evaluations of sustainability claims and potential solutions to address gaps in data or mismatches between claims and facts. "We don't want to police these systems; we want to package communication responsibly in a way that everyone can use and understand," Hammer said.

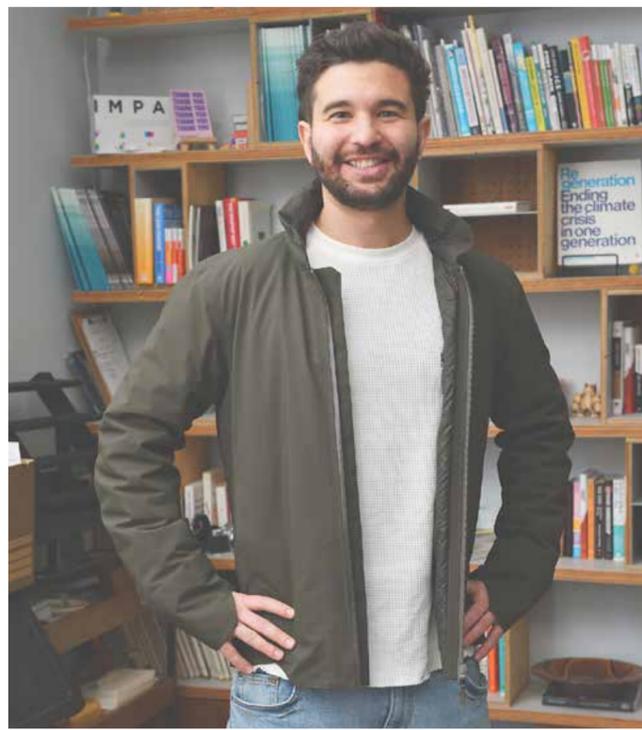
Very few people read the long dense sustainability reports that companies release. There are also inconsistent

regulations around vague claims and the misrepresentation of data, whether intentional or accidental. In this era when AI is increasingly embedded into our everyday lives, why not use it to provide structure based on verified data, hold companies accountable for their sustainability claims, create a straightforward path to compliance and better inform consumers?

By removing obstacles to creating clean, credible and reasonably readable sustainability reports, businesses using PocketSeed not only provide their stakeholders and the public with responsible reporting, but they can also ensure their claims are grounded in accessible evidence through a multilayered verification system. Claims are evaluated against open standards, source traceability and internal consistency. "It's really complex, how you treat communication," Hammer said. "We don't want to say, 'just trust us.' We want to say, 'This is responsible.'"

PocketSeed verification is designed specifically to substantiate sustainability claims. By evaluating them against underlying data, AI software can introduce structural checks that help limit greenwashing. "You can't tweak the report based on sales targets or marketing KPIs," Hammer said. "But there's an incentive for companies to do the right thing if there's a trail of evidence available—there's no legislation forcing them to do it or talk about it."

When the PocketSeed framework evaluates claims from different vantage points, inaccuracies and disagreements between systems are flagged. The platform provides potential solutions, such as adjusting the language of a claim to help prevent misleading consumers, displaying gaps in data needed to substantiate imperfect claims and showing businesses dense information in a user-friendly format. That way, labeling issues and inconsistent sustainability claims can be caught and resolved before marketing campaigns and products go out into the world.



COSUFI

### Pioneer in CO2 blockchains

Mitch Hammer is originally from Australia, where he received his master's in international business. He worked for the Australian Consulate in Dubai, specifically with the Trade Commission, before coming to Japan about 11 years ago, intrigued by the differences in Western and Japanese business styles. His first position here was with the sustainability consulting company DGI, where he was introduced to the sector. He had the opportunity to be one of the first to bring environmental commodities onto blockchains tracking CO2 emissions. His work included helping large Japanese companies calculate their impact, implement reduction strategies and adhere to international frameworks. Due to his work with DGI, which continues, he was invited to the United Nations General Assembly to represent the company. He and co-founder Alex Knight started PocketSeed in 2024, and the company has gone through many iterations before developing into the current platform.

ethics as a guiding motivation rather than an inconvenience.

AI's availability to the public sphere is often referred to as a "gold rush" or "the wild west." Practically speaking, it is too late to ask, "Should companies use AI?" The question has become, "How can businesses use this technology responsibly, and how can we reduce the negative impacts as much as possible?"

PocketSeed shows a possible way forward, one where accountability in a rapidly shifting technological landscape is both reasonable and accessible. Within the chaos of the "gold rush," a voice of reason to provide responsible structure, alongside a distinctly human desire to make the world a bit better using the tools at hand, becomes an anchor. If more of our leaders take the same care demonstrated by Hammer in the pursuit of progress, today's polarization around AI could shift into a standard of a more responsible and lower-impact approach to technological innovation. In closing, Hammer urged consumers to "dig a bit deeper into why things are being said."

The platform even generates a QR code that consumers can scan online or on a product to access the evidence used to verify a company's claim. For example, if a food item claims to be fair trade, the QR code lets consumers see the reasoning and evidence that substantiates the claim, such as third-party verification and exact payment structures for workers. "The problem with random data is it can tell many different stories if it doesn't have context," Hammer said. PocketSeed seeks to remove the vague "just trust us" that many labels imply and thereby build trust in products and businesses. It also motivates businesses to practice what they preach by providing evidence for their claims and a clear path to necessary adjustments. Public and internal accountability, when backed by evidence and verification, are healthy assets to a responsible path forward as AI continues to advance.

While industrywide transparency around

the environmental impact of AI remains inconsistent, Hammer is already pursuing solutions before the formal launch of PocketSeed. He said: "As we are still early-stage, the impact is relatively small, but that's not a free pass out. We plan to monitor, calculate and report on our impact, implement reduction plans and work out where to minimize impact as the platform progresses."

In addition to the PocketSeed platform, the company also supports several notable real-world sustainability initiatives in collaboration with other organizations. To date, initiatives facilitated by PocketSeed have contributed to the removal of 500,000 plastic bottles from the ocean, offsetting 13.3 million kilograms of carbon emissions, and deployed 14,424 kelp plants, and in the next 12 months it plans to plant 6,000 trees. These real impacts, along with transparent reporting, show what is possible when tech founders take responsibility for their impacts and treat



Mitch Hammer and PocketSeed co-founder Alex Knight COSUFI

# Fukushima coast rebuilds toward an innovative future

### ESG/SDGs

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 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In the Hamadori area along the Pacific coast of Fukushima Prefecture, which suffered immense damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, and the nuclear disaster following the accident at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station, efforts are underway not only to help original residents return to their former lives, but also to attract new people, foster new technologies and industries, and build the future of this region.

The area allows visitors to witness both remnants of the disaster, preserved as they were at the time of the earthquake and tsunami, and communities growing around new commercial, industrial and academic facilities. Ukedo Elementary School in the town of Namie, where tsunami damage has been preserved inside the building, is one place where visitors can learn about the horror of disasters and the importance of swift evacuation.

The school lies 300 meters from the coast and 15 kilometers north of the power plant. The 82 children and staff members who were inside the building when the earthquake hit quickly headed to Ohirayama, a small mountain 1.5 km away that had been designated as the evacuation site. Despite the tsunami that struck the building about 40 minutes after the earthquake, submerging the first floor up to the ceiling, they were all safe. Since 2021, the school has been open to the public for an admission fee of ¥300 for adults.

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum is

located about 2 km south of the school, in a district in the town of Futaba that was also washed away by the tsunami. An evacuation order issued for people living in a 20-km radius around the plant was partially lifted in the district in 2020. Following decontamination work, facilities including the museum were constructed. Visitors can learn about what happened in the disaster and after the nuclear accident, the long-term impacts on the town and its people, reputational damage and recovery efforts. The Fukushima Reconstruction Memorial Park is near completion along the coast near the museum and is scheduled to open on April 25.

Steadily progressing along the path to recovery, efforts are also being made to boost the production and promotion of agricultural products and processed goods.

Just south of Futaba, the town of Okuma had a population of approximately 11,500 before the disaster. The evacuation of the entire population continued until 2019, when the order was lifted for some areas of the town. In one of these areas, Fun Eat Makers, an agricultural facility that produces, processes and serves vegetables, opened in 2025. The facility uses hydroponic technology to grow vegetables such as lettuce and tomatoes. They can be purchased there and at markets in neighboring areas, and can also be enjoyed at an on-site restaurant that offers meals using fresh vegetables from the farm and other locally produced ingredients.

Okuma was originally known for its fruit, including kiwifruits and pears. In 2019, a project to revive kiwi production began, spearheaded by locals and young people from outside the area. One of the outsiders was Takuya Haraguchi, a university student at the time. Captivated by the fresh sweetness of the kiwis grown by a former Okuma kiwi



The Fun Eat Makers complex in Okuma is dedicated to agriculture, food and lodging experiences. CONNECT AROUND

farmer and his techniques for cultivation and ripening, Haraguchi established ReFruits Inc. in Okuma in 2023. The company engages in kiwi cultivation and the manufacture of kiwi-based products, as well as providing visitors with agricultural experiences. ReFruits aims to restore Okuma's prosperity as a kiwi production area and is gradually expanding its kiwi orchards.

South of Okuma, the town of Tomioka also lay uninhabited for six years due to evacuation orders. In 2016, experimental grape cultivation began in the town. By March last year, 16,000 grape vines—matching the town's predisaster population—had been planted. Shubun Endo, the representative of Tomioka Winery, reflected that when the project was launched, many people said it would be impossible to cultivate grapes there for the first time ever—and in a place that had once been deserted. "Thanks to some of the local people who found hope in winemaking in this place, and people who came to help from outside the town, we

were able to get this far," Endo said. Wines produced there can be purchased at the winery's shop or enjoyed alongside local ingredients at its on-site restaurant.

The disaster-affected towns are dedicated to supporting local businesses and attracting outside companies in various ways. F-BICC (the Futaba Business Incubation and Community Center), located next to the museum, offers rental offices, meeting rooms and co-working spaces. Creva Okuma is a similar facility run by Okuma, standing right in front of Ono Station, that houses a rental hall, meeting rooms, a co-working space and offices currently rented to about 30 companies and organizations. The nearby Kuma Sun Terrace is a commercial facility housing stores, cafes and restaurants.

Okuma also has the Okuma Incubation Center, which is used by about 160 companies and organizations. The building, once an elementary school, was renovated to incorporate security systems and various services for tenants while preserving elements both

outside and inside that evoke nostalgia for local residents.

Among the diverse industries growing in this region, the key fields expected to support local livelihoods as well as lead in technological research and development are energy and robotics.

Okuma is home to a bioethanol plant operated by the Research Association of Biomass Innovation for Next Generation Automobile Fuels (raBit). To avoid using food crops such as sugarcane and corn, the association aims to establish technologies to produce cellulosic ethanol using nonedible raw materials such as wood and rice straw. Along with identifying and addressing challenges unique to each feedstock and improving efficiency in the bioethanol production, the research also focuses on solving issues involving the use of bioethanol in vehicles and developing a model to predict how much fuel a feedstock can produce.

Namie is implementing the Namie Hydrogen Town Plan. The town is also home to the Fukushima Hydrogen Energy Research Field (FH2R) along its coast. The FH2R is equipped with a 10-megawatt hydrogen production unit powered by solar energy generated there. According to the New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO), a national research and development agency, the production unit is one of the largest in the world. Various demonstration projects are underway to deliver and utilize the hydrogen, including installing overhead pipelines; developing low-cost, lightweight and compact cylinders; and operating buses that run on hydrogen fuel cells.

The city of Minamisoma is home to one of the two sites of the Fukushima Robot Test Field, which fully opened in 2020 to provide environments and technologies for testing robots, promote exchanges among domestic and international robot researchers and operators, contribute to the development of security and social-implementation frameworks for robots, and nurture the next generation of human resources in this field.

The other site is just south in the town of Namie. Having two sites makes it possible to test-fly unmanned aircraft over longer



Indoor water tank testing facility where underwater and surface robots can be tested. FUKUSHIMA ROBOT TEST FIELD

distances. The Minamisoma site also has other facilities related to unmanned aircraft, including a wind tunnel for testing flight performance and a site for testing durability. Its underwater and maritime facilities include fields that simulate flooded residential areas as well as dams, rivers and harbors. Its facilities for infrastructure-inspection and disaster-response robots include mock buildings and sites to enable testing in realistic environments.

Robot research and development is also conducted at the Fukushima Institute for Research, Education and Innovation in Namie. Its other research areas include agriculture, forestry and fisheries, energy, radiation science and medicine, the industrial application of radiation and the collection and dissemination of data and knowledge on nuclear disasters. The institute engages in various sponsored research projects in these fields and aims to expand collaborations with overseas universities and research institutions to comprise up to 30% of all projects.

The impacts of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident in the Hamadori region have been long-lasting, yet the speed of recovery since the evacuation orders were lifted has been remarkable. And the things people are doing there now have implications not just for Fukushima—they have the potential to contribute to the sustainability and resilience of Japan and around the world.

The Sustainable Japan section highlights issues related to the environment and a sustainable society. For more information scan the QR code.



The exchange space in the Okuma Incubation Center's entrance hall OIC 2026