ASIAN FARMERS VISIT JAPAN
The Asian Farmers’ Exchange Program is AsiaDHRRA’s major initiative in sustaining the dialogue, sharing of knowledge, and building of linkages among farmers and NGO leaders in Asia. Specifically, the project aims to:

1. Facilitate the sharing of experiences and insights on local productivity systems development, rural enterprise development, and farmers’ network building and strengthening;
2. Establish linkages between and among farmers’ organizations and cooperatives from Asian nations; and
3. Initiate preliminary discussion on future united regional advocacy efforts on issues such as food security, sustainable agriculture, and farmers’ cooperation.

Ultimately, the program’s main success criterion is the formation of a strategic Asian rural alliance for greater advocacy and for the benefit of the poor Asian farmer.
EXCHANGE PROGRAM

SEPTEMBER 2001
The Participants of the Japan Leg of the Asian Farmers’ Exchange Program
Being the second biggest economy in the world next to the United States and an Asian country at that, Japan is the perfect place to see what could have been the "perfect" agricultural set-up for Asian farmers. Its agricultural sector has been receiving the highest support and subsidies. At the same time, it is going through a transition from being a highly protected sector into a liberalizing one.

Thus, it was only appropriate that an exchange program among Asia farmers was conducted and the design and programs of the Asian Farmers’ Alliance was finalized in Japan. The farmers and development workers of this country served as inspiration for other farmers’ groups on what they could look forward to, not necessarily as a model but as a source of hope for prosperity and a better life.

For these, we praise and thank God for allowing us to have safely gathered so many people in so different countries. We also thank him for helping us strengthen the solidarity and cooperation among the Asian farmers and DHRRA members who have participated in the fourth leg of the Asian Farmers’ Exchange Program held in Tochigi-ken, Japan.

We, the DHRRA family and participants of the exchange program, would also like to express our sincerest and deepest gratitude to our hosts, the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) and to JaDHRRA, for sharing with us their hospitality and for helping us arrange the exchange visit.

We also would like to especially thank ARI for giving us a taste of the alternative lifestyle that they have been advocating and a glimpse on the real "soul" of Japan.

However, the farmers’ exchange program would have not been possible without the support of the ASEAN Foundation and Misereor of Germany. To both partners we also would like to express our appreciation and gratitude.

Again, thank you and hoping to see you all in the near future and wishing you all success in your struggles and endeavors.

God bless!

BOSCO WEN RUEY LEE
Vice Chairperson for North Asia, AsiaDHRRA
The roads were wide and smooth, long and straight. Reflecting the strength and resolve of the Japanese people, their roads do not go around mountains but run straight through them with tunnels so long that the nauseating gas fumes from car exhausts could not escape from the middle sections of these tunnels.

These roads and highways kept company the participants of the fourth leg of the Asian Farmers’ Exchange Program held in Tochigi-ken, Japan from 24 August to 3 September 2001. For eleven days, they traveled through rural Japan to see and learn about its farmers, cooperatives, agricultural technologies and policies, as well as, its culture and heritage. Twenty-three farmer-leaders and eighteen NGO workers coming from Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam came together for the exchange visit.

Travel they did, from Narita to Tochigi-ken, to the Sionai area at Yamagata-ken, and then back. The long bus rides were quite enjoyable and interesting, providing a perfect and "cost-effective" means of seeing the Japan's countryside, which according to Fumiko, one of the ARI staff who was also our guide and friend, is the "real" soul of Japan, distinguishing it from "materialistic" Tokyo.
After touching down at the Narita International Airport and going through the long lines at immigration, we were finally able to set foot on Japanese land when we stepped out of the gates of the airport and crossed the road to our awaiting hosts and transportations who would soon be bringing us to the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Tochigi-Ken, our host organization.

We were glad to see old friends like Yamagata san and Kisaku san, and some new faces like JB Hoover who welcomed us at the airport. With just a few greetings and introductions, we were immediately whisked away as we still had a five-hour trip ahead of us from Narita to the ARI campus.

Arriving at ARI, more greetings and welcomes transpired as new and previous participants to the FEV meet and had a late dinner. After a short orientation on the house rules of the Nasu Seminar House, which was built on the donations and actual labor of Christian students, it was off to bed. Having endured the long international and domestic travels, everyone was ready for bed, or should we say the traditional Japanese tatami mats laid out on wooden floors.

Japan is an archipelago in eastern Asia lying between the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan. It is made up of four main islands and more than 1,000 small islands extending in an irregular crescent from Sakhalin (Russia) to Taiwan.

According to the Kojiki, a collection of Japanese-Shinto legends, the islands of Japan were created by the female god, Izanami, and the male, Izanagi. As the legend goes, Izanagi stirred the "ocean of chaos" with a jeweled spear until it curdled, creating the islands of Japan. The islands of Japan are the projecting summits of a huge chain of mountains. The four main islands are Hokkaido, the northernmost; long, narrow Honshu (called the ‘mainland’); Shikoku, the largest; and Kyushu, the Southernmost. The combined area of these islands is about 362,000 square kilometers. The country's total area total area is 377,688 square kilometers.

Because it is made up of mountains and valleys and has rocky soil, only about 11% of Japan is arable and only 27,820 square kilometers (1992 estimate) with irrigation. Despite that, Japan has among the world's highest crop yields per land area sown and is self-sufficient in rice. However, with regards to other food requirements of the country, Japan still has to import about 50% of its requirements of other grain and fodder crops. In terms of fisheries, Japan maintains one of the world’s largest fishing fleets and accounts nearly 15% of the global catch.

If the legendary Japan was created from water, it could be said that modern day Japan was created from the fire and ashes of war (World War II). At the end of World War II, Japan was greatly devastated with all the large cities (with the exception of Kyoto), the industries and the transportation networks were severely damaged. A major food shortage also continued for several years.

However, government-industry cooperation, a strong work ethic, mastery of high technology, and a comparatively small defense allocation (1% of GDP) have helped Japan advance with extraordinary rapidity to the rank of second most technologically powerful economy in the world after the US and third largest economy in the world after the US and China.

Shonai

The area called Shonai is located in the Yamagata prefecture in the Tohoku area of Japan. It is composed of two (2) major cities (Tsuruoka-city and Sakata-city), 11 towns and a village near the Sea of Japan. It takes an hour by plane or 4.5 hours by train to travel from Tokyo to Shonai. Being primarily an agricultural area, the main products of the Shonai area are rice, beef, and fruits. Shonai is famous for “Dadacha-mame,” a variety of green soybeans, and “Shonai-kaki,” a variety of the Persimmons fruit, which is exported to other countries.
Orientation, Country Updates, Rules and Chores

25 August 2001

The official start of the Farmers’ Exchange Visit (FEV) mainly involved orientations on campus rules and the different chores that everybody had to do while in the ARI campus and throughout the field visits. Chores to be done in schedules and turns included washing the dishes, cooking, and cleaning of seminar room.

Dr. Yoshikuni Yatani of JaDHRRRA also gave a national situationer on Japan highlighting the interconnectedness of all creatures on earth and the growing consciousness among Japanese people to preserve the environment and their distinct culture. Similarly, each participating country also reported updates on their country situations and what their respective organizations have, so far, done with regard to their country plans and commitments under the previous FEV programs.

At the end of the day, a welcome dinner, actually a feast, consisting of kara age (breaded chicken), sobas (noodles), a variety of tempuras (breaded vegetables and shrimps), among others, was prepared by ARI for the FEV participants.

26 August 2001

Off to Shonai

After Sunday religious service and breakfast, the group hit the road again for the Shonai region in Yamagata prefecture. The trip took more than six hours passing through two prefectures or provinces. Thanks to the good and straight roads and tunnels, otherwise, the trip would have taken much longer.

While traveling to Yamagata, one can obviously notice how well the Japanese people planned the use of their lands. Flat lands were used for rice production while maintaining pockets of “forests” as source of wood for local communities. No built up structures, except for public comfort rooms and bus stops, can be found along the highways. Rivers and forests in the hilly and mountainous parts were preserved. From the bus, one can actually still see waterfalls and people fishing along the rivers.

Before proceeding to our accommodation in Shonai, the group first proceeded to the Matsugaoka Pioneer Memorial Museum and Silk Museum at Tsuruoka City. Here on display are the traditional farming tools and equipment of Japanese peasants dating back to the times of the samurais, daimyos and shoguns.

Upon arrival at Shonai, we were greeted by one of the city’s councilors, who arranged for our stay at the Fujishima Rural Improvement Center (FRIC). We were also met by Shunetsu san who was one of the FEV
participants in the Indonesia leg of the program. It was the height of the harvest season then so he could not join us for the whole duration of the exchange visit. We were, however, scheduled to visit his family’s farm later during the field visit to learn about their production and marketing of green beans the tekei way.

At Shonai, we joined up with a group of ARI students led by Miura san, Executive Director of ARI, who were also going on a field trip.

**Impressive Japanese Discipline**

Having been on Japanese soil for only a few minutes one could already notice one outstanding trait of the Japanese people - discipline. Policemen were in uniform complete with helmets, reflectorite vests, rubber boots and overalls and standing still at designated spots. Traffic rules were strictly being observed not only in highly populated urban areas but also in the countryside. If these conducts of Japanese cops mirror those of the rest of the citizenry, it is no wonder that Japan has emerged as a superpower so swiftly from the rubbles of World War II.

**Bento Boxes and $1.50 Cola**

Along the way to the ARI campus in Tochigi-ken, our group of FEV participants had to stop at a Seven-Eleven convenience store to have a first taste of Japanese culture and cuisine - the Japanese bento or lunch boxes. Too hungry for just Sushi (fermented rice rolled in seaweeds) the men in our group had pork or chicken with rice while some had cold Soba or Japanese noodles.

The group was surprised, if not shocked, at how expensive food and other commodities were in Japan. For one, a can or bottle of cola costs around 140 yen or about US$1.50!

However, those bento boxes priced at about 300 to 500 yen were worth it, as I’ve never seen Ka Oca, A Filipino participant, so happy after finishing one. He was praising how good Japanese rice tasted the rest of the way.

**Public Markets**

As night caught up with us, and still some 30 minutes away from ARI, we again had to make a stop over at a public rest area. The comfort rooms were located in a building, which could have passed for a classy restaurant. We were told that it was actually a government building that also served as public market during weekends where farmers in the area could bring their produce to sell.

As in the other public establishments we have seen so far, rest rooms were sparkingly clean and laser-automated.

**Mock Policemen and Patrol Cars**

Traveling through the towns of Japan at night revealed an interesting traffic device -- electric posts dressed-up with reflectorites to look as policemen and patrol cars. They were supposed to serve as deterrents to speeding at night.

**Tatami Mats and Futon**

Tatami mats are traditional Japanese beddings laid out on the wooden floors of the house, particularly in the living room and the sleeping quarters. They are good for the back and the futons that usually come with it are very comfortable and great space savers as they could be easily folded away during day time when not in use. By the way, neither shoes nor slippers are allowed on the tatami mats or in any part of a Japanese home or office for that matter.

**No Curfews?**

We were quite surprised that during the orientations, no specific rule was mentioned regarding curfews. But after a few days of stay at the ARI campus we soon realized why. It was simply because people staying at ARI had nowhere to go at night. The campus is a long way from the nearest main road and the nearest town proper. Also, there was no local public transportation anyway.
On the third and fourth day of the exchange visit, the group visited several model farmers and local consumers’ cooperatives in the Shonai area. Visits and interactions with local farmers were also done to give the FEV participants a direct assessment of the situation.

Unique about the cooperatives in Shonai was the interfacing of the operations and activities of the three cooperatives to attain benefits for all stakeholders.

**The Shonai Agriculture Cooperative Farm**

Established in 1989 in Mikawa town in Yamagata prefecture, the Shonai Agriculture Cooperative Farm is relatively a small farmer’s cooperative with 32 members covering 20 households but makes an annual gross sale of some US$ 2.2 million.

Its primary ventures cover alternative marketing and food processing, in particular rice cracker and cake production. Alternative marketing initiatives of the cooperative involve the creation of alternative markets not only in Shonai but also in urban areas like Tokyo, Konbe, and Osaka. The Shonai Agriculture Cooperative Farm, as much possible, tries to directly market their goods to consumers, a marketing system known locally as tekei.
Agricultural Land Reform in Japan

From 1946 to 1950, agrarian reform was enforced in Japan by the United States occupation forces following World War II as a means of breaking the power of the large landowners who had been the pillars of the militaristic developments in Japan during the pre-war period.

Just after the war, when the Occupation Forces had not yet taken any clear stance on land reform, the Japan Ministry of Agriculture independently drafted a land reform bill. The bill, which was to be known as the First Land Reform Bill, served as a revision of the Farmland Adjustment Law of 1938 and contained the following main revisions:

1. compulsory transfer of all land owned by absentee landlords and all tenanted land of other landowners, whose individual holding exceeded 5 hectares;
2. replacement of traditional land rent in kind to equivalent cash rent, calculated on the basis of landlords rice price (which was considerably lower than the producers price); and
3. reorganization of the Farmland Committees.

The said bill was proposed to the Diet on December 4, 1945 but was almost rejected due to the resistance by the conservatives. However, on December 9, 1945, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) issued a memorandum ordering the Japanese government to prepare plans for an agrarian reform program. Thus, the said bill was eventually passed into law by the Diet.

However, the SCAP found the bill with many deficiencies and did not approve it. Among the deficiencies found were the limited landholdings to be covered by the law. Only 900,000 hectares of tenanted land owned by only 100,000 landlords were to be subjected to compulsory transfer since landholdings of village landlords, at that time, rarely exceeded 5 hectares. The definition of "absentee landlord" was also unclear and could have provided landlords with loopholes for evading the land reform law.

After discussions between the SCAP and the Ministry of Agriculture, the first bill was revised into a more "drastic" land reform plan (called the second land reform plan) and was finally passed into law by the Diet on October 11, 1946.

The main provisions of the said law were the following:

1. Compulsory purchase of land - All farmlands owned by the government absentee landlords were to be subject to compulsory purchase by the government. "absentee landlord" was defined as those who did not reside in the same village of the leased out land.

All tenanted lands of village landlords in excess of 1 hectare (4 hectares in Hokkaido prefecture) were also subject to compulsory purchase. Owner cultivated lands in excess of 3 hectares (12 hectares in Hokkaido) were to be purchased, if their cultivation were deemed inefficient in terms of land productivity.

2. The Purchase condition - The purchase price was set at around 760 yen per tan for paddy land and 450 yen per tan for upland. Payment to landlords was made in National Bonds with a 3.6% interest and redeemable within 30 years. The purchase price of the tenants was the same as the landlords selling price. Payments could be made in cash or in annual installments within 30 years at 3.2% interest.

3. The Land Committees - The Land Committees were set up at the village, prefecture and central level. The Village Land Committees were composed of 10 members (5 tenants, 3 landlords, and 2 owner farmers) and were responsible for drafting the purchase plan. Such plans were to be approved by the Prefecture Land Committee and lands were purchased directly by the government.

4. Other regulations - The said law also introduced other regulations aimed at controlling tenancy relations and enhancing tenants rights. For instance, all rents were to be paid in cash and the level was fixed. Tenancy contracts could not be terminated nor refused renewal without the approval of the Land Committee.

The total costs of the program reached more than 1 billion yen in the first three years (1946-1948) of its implementation, of which 60% were used for the operations while the rest represented institutional costs. From March 1947 to end of 1948, a total of 1.63 million hectares of farmlands were acquired by the government, which were also immediately sold to cultivators.

As a result of the implementation of land reform in Japan, most of the farmlands under tenancy were transferred to the cultivators. Before the reforms, in 1941, almost half of all the farmlands were cultivated by tenant farmers. By 1995, only 9% of such lands remained tenanted.

Also, 80% to 90% of the lands owned by absentee landlords (which covered some 560,000 hectares) were
also transferred. About 70% to 80% of the lands leased out or own-cultivated lands by village landlords (these areas covered some one million hectares) were also transferred.

In order to secure the gains of the land reform program and prevent the revival of landlordism, the Agricultural Land Law (Nochi ho) was enacted in 1952.

The said law strictly controlled the markets on farmlands. Transactions of farmland were subject to the approval of the local authorities. Landlords were not allowed to sell their leased out lands other than their tenants. The legal maximum on farmland holdings was set at 3 hectares (12 hectares in Hokkaido). Corporations were not allowed to own farmlands. Land rent was also strictly controlled at very low level.

Tenancy rights were also heavily protected, it was almost impossible for landowners to evict tenants. Absentee ownership was not allowed, though village landlords were allowed to retain a hectare of tenanted land.
To intensify relationships between the cooperative and consumers, the cooperative also organizes seminars and fellowships to facilitate the sharing on the price of products, problems in organic farming, and food issues between consumers and producers.

The cooperative has also organized its members into smaller groups to handle the processing of raw products into processed snacks and rice cakes. These groups start out as home-based food processors but eventually could expand into processing factories.

**The Kyoritsusha Consumer’s Cooperative**

On the other hand, the Kyoritsusha is a consumer’s cooperative with a membership of 92,967 with annual gross sales of US$ 197.77 million. Established in 1955 as a consumer cooperative for residents of Yamagata, it started its operations in Turuoka City but has now expanded throughout the Yamagata prefecture.

The cooperative serves as the direct buyers and distributors of the produce of members of the Shonai Agriculture Cooperative Farm. The farmers’ products are sold at the chain of shopping centers (called “COPIA”) that have been established by Kyouritsusha throughout the prefecture.

Unlike the typical co-operatives, Kyouritsusha has been active in many citizen movements involving anti-nuclear issues, and environmental and conservation activities. It has also supplied, as produced by its partner farmer cooperatives, organic food for its clients and members.

**Tagawa Agriculture Cooperative (JA)**

Third in this interconnected structure of cooperatives in Shonai is the Tagawa Agriculture Cooperative (JA), which is a general farmer’s cooperative established in 1996 with a membership of 19,789 covering 7 cities and a village in the Shonai area. It also makes an annual gross sale of US$ 159.5 million.

The Tagawa Agriculture Cooperative is engaged in promoting the production and marketing of “safe and healthy food”, in particular “Shonai Rice”, to consumers all over Japan. This is partly in reaction to the entry of cheaper but not guaranteed safe imported rice as a result of the liberalization of Japan’s rice market.

Aside from packaging and marketing its members’ products, it also provides subsidies, loans and insurance to farmers. It also provides technical support and education to farmers regarding appropriate farming methods.
The following day, it was time for visits and interactions with local farmers in the area. Among those visited included Mr. Shito’s organic rice farm, Mr. Kato’s home vegetable garden, and Mr. Sato’s cattle farm.

**Only One Bathroom?**

If there is anything about Japanese culture that really baffled many foreign participants is the tendency for buildings to have several toilets, segregated for men and women, but have only one bathroom each for both male and female even if the building has a capacity to house up to 80 people.

As a result, FEV participants who are not accustomed to this Japanese practice of taking baths together with several other people, had to sign-up for a scheduled time slot when he or she can take a bath alone during the day or in the wee hours of the morning.

brought out by the participants. It was thus surprising to know that his products and farm have been certified as "organic" by a national organic certifying body.

In his persimmon orchard, the participants were shown the mulching method being used for the portion of the orchard cultivated organically. However, the farmer-participants made the same observations that they had with Mr. Shito’s paddy fields. His orchard was located on a hill with the organic persimmon trees planted on the lower part of the hill while the non-organic trees were at the top of the hill. Thus, there was a very big chance of the organic persimmon trees being contaminated with chemicals through leaching as water from the non-organic trees may flow unto the organic trees when it rains.

... A Backyard Vegetable Farm...

At Mr. Kato’s home vegetable garden, the participants were shown how he produces fermented feeds for chickens using indigenous microorganisms and corn.

He also shared how government has been encouraging farmers to plant portions of their paddy fields to green soya beans (at least, 30% of their paddy fields) in exchange for double to triple the subsidies they are currently receiving for planting rice. These, apparently, are the measures being employed by the Japanese government to mitigate the impact of its liberalization of the rice sector. The objective is to lower local rice production so as to sustain the high domestic prices of rice in the light of increasing supply of imported rice.
... and a Cattle Farm.

The group also visited Mr. Sato’s cattle farm, which had some of the most modern methods of cattle raising. The participants were requested not to enter the newly cleaned barns for fear of contamination but they noted the strict compliance with the standards on safety and sanitation.

One major observation the group made while traveling from Tochigi-ken and going around the farms was that no piece of land stood idle. Every inch of rural Japan is used. Even lands adjacent to houses and commercial establishments are planted to rice. During the 6-hour travel from Tochigi-ken to Shonai one could also not find lands left unplanted.

Rock Avalanche Catchers and Public Comfort Rooms

While traveling from Tochigi-ken to Yamagata-ken, one cannot help but notice metal structures that looked like fences installed at the side of mountains and cliffs along the highways. These structures would stretch for kilometers and seemed to be mere fences. Apparently, these were structures designed to catch boulders falling from cliffs to prevent them from descending unto the highways.

Another remarkable structures along the highways were the public rest rooms, which again were fully laser-automated and sparkingly clean. Each public rest room was being maintained by a caretaker who, like the policemen at the Narita airport, were in full gear and just stood steadily at one spot while whistling a jolly tune. However, once people leave the premises, he was quick at cleaning the place.

Expensive Trash

During the visits to the farms, the group had to stop at the house of one Japanese farmer to have lunch. After eating, the group was advised to bring with them the disposable bento boxes and mineral water containers they had just used.

Apparently, it was customary for people not to leave their trash in other people’s houses because the host family would have to pay for the trash when collected from them. Trash is actually weighed and its collection paid for in Japan. Penalties are also imposed on trash that are thrown in undesignated areas or are put out for collection outside the designated time for collection.

No wonder Japan is so clean and that the people in Mr. Kato’s community were more than happy to give him their biodegradable wastes (i.e. left-over foods, etc.), which he uses for his fermented chicken feeds.
It was now time to go back to ARI at Tochigi-ken. But just before doing that, the group went for some sight seeing and hiking up a holy mountain.

Thinking that the climb was going to be just for a few meters up a hill, the whole group, both young and old, decided to go hiking up the mountain.

At first, there were a lot to see and the path was still relatively flat. There was a century-old pine tree, a 500 year-old pagoda, and several Shinto shrines.

But just right after the 500 year-old pagoda, the path takes a sharp turn to the left and then there it was -- the stairway to heaven, a 2 kilometer climb up the mountain at a 45-degree angle. The stone-curved steps made the climb a little "easier" compared to what monks a few hundred years back had to endure when they had to climb the mountain, as part of their training, without the steps.

The climb, which was quite a challenge and took more than two hours, was a real experience both physically and spiritually. It reminded us how much we could push ourselves beyond what we conceived as our limitations. It also taught us to appreciate God’s creations and things that we have usually taken for granted -- such as a sip of water from a spring at the top of the mountain.

At the top of the mountain were majestic and ancient Shinto temples where people prayed and made their

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**Fortunes, Wishing Blocks and Trees**

It has been customary for visitors or pilgrims to Shinto shrines to purchase wooden blocks or special papers where they can write their wishes. These wooden blocks and sheets of paper, after saying a prayer, are then hanged in a designated place in front of the temple. For the sheets of paper, they are usually tied or pinned to a tree.

Small pieces of paper with fortunes written on them could also be bought from the temple. Unfortunately, they were written in Japanese, which we could not read. Our Japanese friends valiantly translated for us as we listen in awe.

**Cleansing and Refreshing at the Temples**

As a rite of purification or cleansing, it was also customary for temple pilgrims to first refresh or drink from a special water fountain, which usually is supplied by a spring, before entering the grounds of a Shinto shrine. Thus, many of the Japanese pilgrims were surprised to see some of the participants of the FEV splashing water from the fountain on their sweat drenched faces to cool off after the hard climb up the holy mountain.
30 August 2001

Day of Reflections and a Visit

The sixth day of the FEV was an official rest day. The morning was devoted to writing down one’s reflections and insights on the three-day field visit to Shonai. Most of the participants found the field visit a truly unique and eye-opening learning experience.

A short sharing session was also conducted to process the participants’ experiences.

Varying Practice of Organic Farming Under Varying Contexts

Japanese farmers have a different understanding of organic farming from other organic farmers in other countries. Clearly, what the farmers visited by the group were actually practicing is Less External Input Sustainable Agriculture or LEISA. While LEISA cannot be considered pure organic farming, it is a first step towards it.

Such a claim, however, which is being backed-up by a national organic farming accrediting body, is simply unfair and dangerous for the consumers of these products. And if these products are exported, they also impose unfair competition to other nations who are strictly abiding with international organic farming standards.

A Government Highly Supportive of Farmers and the Agricultural Sector

Most of the cooperatives visited by the group were highly subsidized and funded by the Japanese government, which partly explains their success. These cooperatives get their capitalization and receive very low-interest loans from the government. In a sense, Japanese agricultural and consumer cooperatives can almost be considered semi-government. Such a system only shows the importance the Japanese government is giving to its agricultural sector and in ensuring food security in the country.

Globalization Impacting on Japanese Farmers Too!

Even developed countries are not immune to the ill effects of globalization and trade liberalization as imposed by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Local cooperatives and producers are also being hurt by the encroachment of multi-national corporations (as in the case of the entry of the shopping mall giant JUSCO and the entry of imported rice), which is part of their concessions with the WTO. Clearly, this is one example where the battle in the globalization arena is not really between the poor and rich countries but between the haves and the have-nots, regardless of what country you are in, or more specific, the extremely rich versus the not-so-extremely rich and the poor.

The Japanese experience also illustrates the absurdity of trade liberalization paradigm. Here was a country self-sufficient in rice production but is being forced to import rice and, subsequently, destroy its capacity to produce rice.
Prior to World War II, Japan has already adopted protectionist policies for agriculture sector. In the 1930s, Japan already implemented rice policies to maintain domestic rice prices through government marketing and controls of imports.

However, a more aggressive protection policy on the agricultural sector was sought after World War II as the local economy, including the agriculture sector, was badly ravaged and food shortages lasted for several years afterwards.

Thus, it became the objective of the Japanese government to achieve the following:

1. Parity of farm and non-farm incomes;
2. Self-sufficiency in major food stuffs; and
3. Improvement of farm productivity.

To achieve such goals, the Japanese government adopted the following commodity protection instruments:

1. Import Restrictions - These apply either through explicit quotas or through state trading. Rice imports are controlled through state trading via the Food Agency, which also controls wheat and barley. While another state trading organization, the Livestock Industry Promotion Corporation, controls beef, butter, and powdered milk.
2. Price Support Policy - Which includes Price Stabilization Programs (for meat, and dairy products) with buffer stock operations supporting domestic prices between ceiling and floor prices, where the stabilized price zone is higher than the equilibrium price so that the buffer stock creates a loss that is financed by government, partly through import levies on beef. Deficiency Payments (DP) are also used for soybeans, rapeseed and milk products. Milk products DP is partly financed from state trading profits in the marketing of milk.
3. Capital Subsidies - By 1984, some 40% of total agricultural investment was funded from government subsidies, while 80% of land infrastructure (farm ditches, irrigation improvement, farmland consolidation, farm rent subsidies, as well as major drainage schemes) was so funded. These percentages increased more or less in line with the rate of nominal protection on output. It is estimated that net subsidies (net of farmers tax payments, which are minimized through various unspecified means) amount to 35% of total agricultural GDP.

Below, is a table that indicates the different protection instruments that has been used per commodity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>Direct Subsidy</th>
<th>Quantitative Restrictions</th>
<th>Import Duties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat &amp; Barley</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coarse Grains</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>very limited</td>
<td>No (for livestock feed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>yes (indirect)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>yes (indirect)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>yes (indirect)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Witnessing Solidarity among Japanese Farmers

The farmers, especially those from the developing countries, just found it amusing to hear the heads of the cooperatives and the farmers complaining about the hard-times and competition they were experiencing and facing. Amusing in the sense that the level of support and subsidy they were still receiving from their government was still very much bigger than what cooperatives and farmers in developing countries receive. “In our country, farmers worry what they will eat for the day and yet is still able to laugh at his predicament. Here, their subsidies are reduced and they already complain,” said one farmer.

However, we have to give it to the Japanese farmers and cooperatives for not taking things lying down. The Japanese cooperatives are uniting and putting up a fight against encroaching multi-nationals. And the Japanese government is developing measures of continuing support and protection for its farmers (e.g., imposition of 900% sales tax on imported rice if

The Asian Rural Institute (ARI)

“That we may live together”

The Asian Rural Institute (ARI), a non-traditional and faith-based training center, was founded in 1973 by Rev. Toshiro Takami to provide rural leaders from all over the globe practical “hands-on” training in leadership and in food production within a rural community setting.

Since its foundation, ARI has trained more than 900 people from 47 countries in the skills of leadership, community organization, sustainable agriculture and simple community living.

ARI is guided by its mission statement, which states that:

“The mission of the Asian Rural Institute is to build an environmentally healthy, just and peaceful world, in which each person can live to his or her fullest potential. This mission is rooted in the love of Jesus Christ.

To carry out this mission, we nurture and train rural leaders for a life of sharing. Leaders, both women and men, who live and work in grassroots rural communities primarily in Asia, Africa and the Pacific, form a community of learning each year together with the staff and other residents.

Through community-based learning, we study the best ways for rural people to share and enhance resources and abilities for the common good. We present a challenge to ourselves and to the whole world in our approach to food and life.”

ARI’s motto is: “That we may live together.”

Located 170 kilometers north of Tokyo in Tochigi Prefecture of Japan within the town of Nishinasuno, the six-hectare ARI campus consists not only of classrooms and dormitories but also farm fields, gardens, livestock pens, fishponds, compost production areas, and other facilities.

ARI’s rural location also means that it can draw on the expertise of local farmers who cooperate with ARI’s program - which focuses on the development within an individual a wide range of skills rather than on intensive specialization.

At ARI, emphasis on learning and work as a “community” is also taught. Every student and staff is required to take turns in the chores (i.e., maintaining the gardens and animal pens and fishponds, cleaning, cooking and washing dishes). Also, both teaching and learning from each other is practiced.
sold in the local market, increased support for crop diversification, etc.) as compared to other third world governments who aside from refusing to put up a fight are even embracing the whole neoliberalization ideology even if the livelihood of its poor farmers are already being ruined.

A Lost Farming Generation?

It was also sad to see very old farmers (we saw farmers, both men and women, who were 60-80 years old) still working in their farms because the young ones preferred to work in the cities and factories where “the pay is higher but the work is much less difficult.” The average age of Japanese farmers in 1993 was 55 years old and its total number fell from 8.1 million in 1970 to 3.4 million in 1993.

An Evening of More Reflection and Sharing

In the evening, after a short visit downtown, Dr. Yoshiro Takami, Honorary President and founder of ARI, gave a talk on the history of ARI and its training program. (See related box story).

After Dr. Takami’s talk, the group was off to ARI’s bazaar. A room-full of used clothes donated to ARI,
Day seven of the FEV was "ARI Day."

The day started at around 6:30 in the morning with a tour of the 16-hectare ARI farm where ARI students had their hands-on training on farming. The farm also provided for the food requirements of the campus. The farm had paddy fields, charcoal kilns, fishponds, chicken pens, pens for cows, pigs and goats, compost and biogas production areas, and a vegetable garden.

After breakfast, FEV participants had a choice of attending a series of lectures or making bokashi or organic fertilizer.

The lecture series covered the following topics:

1. Organic Farming and Alternative Marketing by Mr. Fumio Takahashi of Green Earth Farmers;
2. Alternative International Trade by Mr. Kazuo Kobayashi of Negros Campaign; and

The lecture series was capped by a panel discussion on alternative marketing and on agriculture and rural development.

Meanwhile, more than half of the FEV participants were off to make bokashi. It involved collecting dried chicken manure from the chicken pen. Then, it was mixed with clay subsoil, rice husk charcoal, rice brown and water. The FEV participants took turns in mixing the said materials. At the end it, the heap was covered and left to "ferment" for 10-14 days.

The FEV participants were also shown how rice husk charcoal was made. It mainly involved the use of a "stove", which is basically an oilcan with a chimney. Fire is started in the stove and then dry rice husks are piled around the stove until the rice husks turn black.

The day ended with a fellowship dinner with each country preparing a local viand. After dinner, each country rendered a special number ranging from local songs (or for some chants) to traditional and modern dances.
AFA Business Meeting

The last two official days of the FEV were spent on discussions on the Asian Farmers' Alliance for Sustainable Rural Development or AFA in short. The discussions started with AsiaDHRRA Chairperson Guillermo Cua giving a talk on strategies for rural solidarity building.

Refresher on the Context & Steps Undertaken in the Alliance Formation

Mohammad Subandi of API then presented the context and history of the proposal to form the farmers’ alliance. As presented by Mr. Subandi, the alliance formation process developed throughout the earlier exchange visits. During the first FEV held at Suwon, South Korea in November 1999, the participants raised the importance of solidarity among Asia’s poor rural communities. As a result, a joint declaration was issued for the formation of a solidarity group that will advocate for the rights of the small farmers especially in the light of globalization’s onslaught on agriculture.

This was further reiterated during the second FEV held in the Philippines last July 2000 where an Ad Hoc Committee composed of farmer-leaders from five national organizations was formed and acted as interim adviser in the formulation of the next program’s design and agenda.

Then on March 2001, during the 3rd FEV held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, the alliance was formally organized after an Asian peasant agenda was forged by the participating farmer-leaders from the twelve participating countries. A working committee was also given the task of drafting a discussion paper that details the plans for the alliance formation process. The committee, composed of farmer-leaders from Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, met in Baguio, Philippines last June 2001 and came up with the details on the alliance formation process, which were to be presented in these discussions.

Of Vision and Reasons for Being

After laying down the basis for unity and therefore the need for the alliance, the rest of the members of the working committee took turns in presenting key elements of the alliance. First, Mr. Phromma Kengkla of NFAD-FAD and Mrs. Hoang Dieu Tuyet of VNFU presented the proposed vision, mission
and goals of the alliance as well as its proposed programs. Then, Ka Aning Loza of PAKISAMA then presented the proposed membership criteria, privileges and functions.

**Alliance Formation Process Consensus**

After the presentations, sub-regional workshops were held to discuss the alliance formation process. The following consensus points were made during the plenary:

1. The formation of an alliance of farmers in Asia is important;
2. Given all the outputs, points and concerns raised during the plenary discussions, it was agreed that there was a need to allow for more consultations, deeper analyses and reflections to ensure a strong alliance formation process;
3. The concerns of the northern farmers and farmers’ organizations were to be reflected in the final form of the alliance;
4. The task of follow-throughs regarding the alliance formation process was given to the working committee; and
5. Mandate was given to AsiaDHRRA in starting the development of a follow up program for the alliance and to raise resources for this.

**ラ钣 10  3 September 2001**

*Sayonara and Arigato!*

At three in the morning, participants of the exchange visit have started to board the ARI bus for the trip to the Narita International Airport for their flights back to their respective countries.

Some were still half-asleep due to the previous night’s revelry, while many were already excited to be home again with their loved ones. However, all were thankful for the opportunity to have seen, smelled, tasted, breathed, and lived the “real” Japan even for a few days.
List of Participants

**Cambodia**
- Mr. Ouk Sokha
- Mr. Sou Sery Da

**Philippines**
- Mr. Ananias Loza
- Mr. Oscar Castillo
- Mr. Ernesto Lim, Jr.
- Mr. Guillermo Cua

**Indonesia**
- Mr. Mohammad Subandi
- Mr. Mamock Sugijatno
- Ms. Dwi Astuti
- Mr. Soetrisno Kusumohadi

**South Korea**
- Mr. Sang Jun Youn
- Mr. Sung Lee

**Japan**
- Mr. Yoshikuni Yatani
- Mr. Kisaku Uchida

**Taiwan ROC**
- Mr. Chien Chih Wu
- Mr. Tzong-chig Chiu
- Mr. Tsai Wei Su
- Mr. Bosco Lee

**Lao PDR**
- Ms. Bounthith
- Mr. Sengpaseuth Simmanivong

**Thailand**
- Mr. Phromma Kengkla
- Mr. Thawatchai Khayanying
- Ms. Napasri Maneewong
- Mr. Paiboon Chareonsap

**Malaysia**
- Ms. Parvathi Letchumanan
- Mr. Siliveraju Gurulingam
- Mr. Kok Pak Choy
- Ms. Chan Kah Chi

**Vietnam**
- Ms. Hoang Dieu Tuyet
- Mr. Bui Quang Toan

**Myanmar**
- Mr. Basilio Maung Than Taut

**Nepal**
- Ms. Bindu Shree Shrestha
- Ms. Sunita Yonzon

**Staff**
- Mr. Rolando B. Asuncion
- Ms. Dulce D. Carandang
- Ms. Marlene D. Ramirez
Welcome!
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AsiaDHRRA is a regional network of 11 development organizations from 10 Asian countries working in the rural areas.

AsiaDHRRA Secretariat
2nd Floor Partnership Center
59 C. Salvador Street, Loyola Heights, 1108 Quezon City, Philippines
Phone: (632) 436-4706, (632) 426-6739
Fax: (632) 426-6739
Email: asiadhrra@asiadhrra.org
URL: http://www.asiadhrra.org

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Technical Support and Staff:
Rolly Asuncion, Jet Hermida, Sam Maduro and Josie Dalino

Monograph Production
FEV Japan Documentor: Rolando B. Asuncion
FEV Japan Monograph Writer: Ernesto Lim, Jr.
Editors: Rolando B. Asuncion and Dulce D. Carandang
Cover Design and Illustrations: Jeric Sadullo
Imaging, Design & Lay-out: jet hermida@raket typo/grapiks
Photos: Dulce Carandang and Rolando B. Asuncion