

2017 Re-inventing Japan Project (Long Term)

Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina, Department of Agronomy

5rd Year Edwin Llatas

Tokyo NODAI Department: International Agricultural Development

From the moment I knew there was an opportunity to go to Japan to study for a semester, I did not think twice to apply. The idea of being able to live by myself what it is to study in Japan and to know firsthand their culture, gave rise to a great sensation of excitement and interest. I have this interest since I was in high school. Originally and as in many other cases, I started to get to know Japan because of its technological breakthrough as well as its strong customs that are rooted in it. Perhaps the second is the cause of the great success of the first. The interest to know how was the Japanese thought, led me to read a great series of documentaries, movies among other sources which showed Japan as a magnificent society that managed to get up quickly after everything that happened during and after the world wars. But this was not all, the perception of community, the importance of teamwork, the common good, respect for others, punctuality and order were some of the points that made me have great interest in Japan since many of these cases They do not happen in my country.

These social and cultural factors were the main reasons why I wanted to come to Japan, however, I also had great interest in seeing how agriculture was developed in contrast to what exists in my country. Also, I was always very interested in learning the Japanese language and it was at the beginning of January 2017 that I was able to start studying it and to this day I still do it.

This is how this journey started for me and it was thanks to Re-inventing Japan Project (Long Term) that I could have the first look for myself of this society

During my stay at Tokyo NODAI, I took the following courses: Ecology and Food Production. Food and Health 2, Comparative Developing Agriculture, Comparative Food Production Technologies and Japanese.

Each of them has a system of classes, participation and evaluation different from the others. For example, the Ecology and Food Production course was based on presentations by students on different chapters of two agroecology books during half of each class and the second half with reflections by the teacher and comments from all the students (allowing us to share different views and experiences in our countries).

On the other hand, in Comparative Food Production Technologies, we had different professors every two weeks which allowed us to witness different topics by professionals from different areas of agriculture and related fields. Thus, having a great variety of presentations developed not only in Japan but in much of Asia and Africa. Similarly, in Food and Health 2, we had many guest professors who told us about topics in which they had developed a large number of research and experiments and thus have first-hand information.

In addition to the classes throughout the semester, we had the opportunity to make some outings in a couple of courses in which we could go to the National Institute of Health of Japan where they showed us the research they are developing now and the most important problems that are happening .

As we had classes related to agriculture, we also had Japanese language classes in order to improve our level of understanding, reading and conversation allowing us to enjoy and perform better during our stay in Japan. The main topics of the classes were day-to-day situations in which, as foreign students, we could be involved (requesting health insurance, processing study certificates, going to a health center, etc.). During these classes we expanded our vocabulary, studying kanji and improving our reading speed in Japanese. All these classes were very helpful when meeting Japanese people who did not know our languages or English like when we went to supermarkets, libraries, etc.

Similarly, from October, I had the opportunity to join the International Student Forum, which was a group of both foreign and Japanese students in which issues of agricultural and social relevance were discussed and also allowed for cultural exchange. Here I not only had the chance to practice my Japanese but also to be able to exchange ideas with people from different countries in a very pleasant space between students. This is one of the two places where we had more interactions with Japanese students since many of them had an English level good enough to have a conversation since our level of Japanese was still insufficient.

Similarly, from October, I had the opportunity to join the International Student Forum, which was a group of both foreign and Japanese students in which issues of agricultural and social relevance were discussed and also allowed for cultural exchange. Here I not only had the chance to practice my Japanese but also to be able to exchange ideas with people from different countries in a very pleasant space between students. This is one of the two places

where we had more interactions with Japanese students since many of them had an English level good enough to have a conversation since our level of Japanese was still insufficient. Along with some of them we had the opportunity to go to some places in Tokyo and surroundings as Yokohama and Shibuya during Halloween where we could observe a variety of costumes and we also be a part of the celebration (as you can see in the following picture).



In the same
became our

was here where we spent most of our time. The other students who were members of the laboratory as well as the teachers welcomed us with open arms. All offered their help in whatever we needed in order to make our stay more comfortable. They are the ones with whom we finally form really strong bonds of friendship and those who together with us visit a large number of places within Japan. One of the activities we did together was to go to Mount Takao to see the change in color of the leaves because we were in the fall. It really was a show of colors. Especially for me that I cannot witness this type of change in my

way, our laboratories
second homes since it



country due to weather conditions.

In addition, during November we had the opportunity to attend the Harvest Festival in which the students of all the faculties presented themselves and showed us different performances. The sports and cultural clubs also offered certain products and presentations within the buildings of the university and surroundings showing part of their activities or offering food in order to obtain funds.



Also, the laboratories presented some of their research to the public. These presentations were in charge of the students themselves who were in charge of a large part of the organization.

Among these activities is the trip that we made the whole laboratory in December to Shizuoka in order to learn more about the management of crops such as citrus and Jabochicaba (a

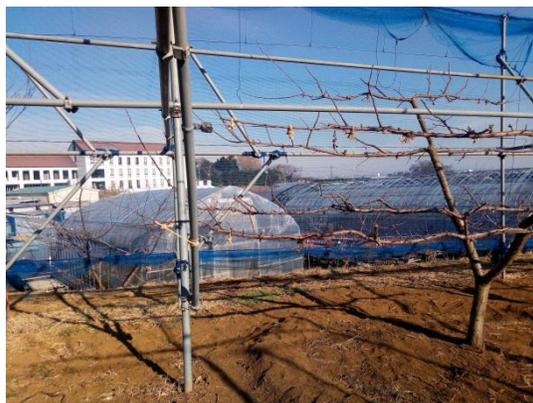
tropical crop of Brazil). We were there for 3 days where we not only learned more about this topic but we were able to spend more time together and get to know each other better.

During the month of December also, we spent Christmas and New Year together being a way a little different from the usual in our countries but being just as warm. Being able to have friends like them was quite comforting given the fact that we were very far from our families. In spite of this, we were able to have great dinners and even organize a gift exchange which was quite fun as we tried to guess what the other wanted

Once past the new year's Eve, we once again approached the Meiji Jingu temple to thank for the new year that had just arrived as is customary in Japan..



Once the month of January arrived, I went to one of the agricultural experimental fields of the university with my teacher counselor who kindly explained to me the projects developed there and the research that had been done. It was one of the most educational outings I've had since many of the systems used for some fruit crops such as pear or apple, were completely new to me. The explanations in English by my teacher were quite clear and even resolved many of the doubts that were arising as I saw the field.





During the month of February, exchange students from Latin America had the opportunity to participate in the internship organized by CIP and ERECON which took place in the ERECON premises and surroundings in the Chiba area. ERECON is a non-profit organization which seeks to improve the quality of life of people and the environment by promoting an adequate management of natural resources. All this, in order to achieve the sustainable development goals. The ones that were established to fight against the most important problems that the world is facing today.

During the first visit to the ERECON offices, we had the opportunity to meet both the administrative and organizers of the organization who told us some of the experiences they had (mainly in Asia). Subsequently, we had an interactive class regarding the use of organic fertilizers, specifically compost. Understanding compost as a natural fertilizer based mainly on the aerobic decomposition of plant and animal material which, through microbiological processes, passes to simpler and inorganic organic forms that allow them to be absorbed by the plants or beneficial for the microbial life of the soil.

In spite of the above, ERECON is composting only with easily degradable plant material which favors a rapid composting process which is important in cold conditions such as the winter that occurs in Japan. Because the students that participate in this internship study careers related to agriculture, it was possible to clearly understand the topic, which allowed us to talk more deeply about it.

Among the things we discussed was the use of different plant and animal materials and the importance that this had at the time of decomposition. This is where we talked about the carbon / nitrogen ratio. This is an excellent parameter to have an idea of the decomposition speed and nutrient availability that the compost will have.

Once the talk was over (which was the theoretical part of the topic), we set out to go to the composters that ERECON has. In this, we arranged to remove the compost in such a way that the material that was in the base, would happen to be in the superficial part. This in order to oxygenate the system and allow microorganisms to work properly. Due to the strong winds, snow and rains that could occur during the winter, the compost was covered with a plastic. Which also served as a heat insulator to allow the composter to remain at an adequate

temperature. In addition to this, the compost was in a construction of concrete which was rectangular in shape and had an entrance that was covered by woods. This design allowed to partially isolate the compost from the outside, thus reducing the heat loss (especially in the winter season), an easy disposal of the compost once finished or the incorporation of more plant and / or animal material.



In the photo you can see the structure where the compost was made, its dimensions, the wooden entrance and the participants of the internship.

One of the following activities that we carried out during the first days was the visit to a group which generated charcoal in a traditional way. These people, most of them of an advanced age, made charcoal with wood collected from the areas surrounding the place (in Chiba). This wood was left to dry in the open air for several months and then passed into the construction to make the coal. This process lasted for weeks. This started by lighting a flame inside the construction and later it was sealed so that the oxygen was diminishing inside and later with the high temperatures that it had inside, to be able to generate the charcoal.



In addition to charcoal, they obtained as a byproduct the wood oil which according to them was quite useful as a biopesticide and as a biostimulator for the microfauna of the soil (in both cases it required to be diluted).

Because the burning and generation of smoke is considered a bad practice and being aware of it, this group has developed a system in which they capture much of all these emissions. These are trapped in water that is recirculating so that a large amount of it is not used. This shows that ancestral practices can be adapted to current needs. The objective of this group is to spread and maintain the practice of making charcoal in a traditional way for the following generations.

In addition, one of the last visits we made was to an agricultural field which was a nonprofit organization (mainly managed by elderly people). These people mainly cultivated vegetables and one could observe a great diversity of these throughout the field. The management was almost entirely organic due to the vision shared by all of them. Among the practices that were carried out was the use of plastics to cover the crops (especially in the periods of snowfall and rain), the use of manual irrigation (because each plot was small). In addition, one of the storage systems they had was based on a hole made at a depth of one and a half meters which allowed maintaining an adequate temperature for some tubers such as potatoes. Protecting it like this, from the snow that was covering the fields during the month of February.

Finally, during the last day of the internship, each student that participated, we presented a project which developed ideas that could improve the environmental quality, social and resource management in our countries. This presentation allowed us to analyze the situation in which at least one of the zones of our country is located as well as the possible actions that can be taken to solve some problem or situation that they face. Posing it by ourselves favored

the power to exploit everything learned in this internship as well as all the knowledge acquired in all our years studying at the university.

During all the time I have been in Japan, I have completed my academic semester in very good shape, I have learned a lot in the courses and I have learned a lot of Japanese which will help me a lot in my classes that I will continue in Peru since I have the objective to be able to take the certification exams of the Japanese language in the future. In the same way, I get a very clear idea of how Japanese society works and the social and behavioral rules that exist. Also, field trips have been excellent to see all the knowledge acquired in the classroom or even more because it allows a greater number of questions to appear and can be resolved with the help of teachers.

I trust that everything I learned in Japan will be of great help in my professional life since many of the topics seen in class have been quite innovative as also seen in field trips which can be adapted to Latin American conditions. Similarly, the improvement of my Japanese will allow me to continue with my plans to apply for international scholarships. Especially to be able to return to Japan to study a master's and / or doctorate in the future because although the classes are in English, being able to speak in Japanese allows a better socialization and communication with the Japanese, which would facilitate the stay in the country. Besides, living in a country as different as Japan, has given me a different perspective because one country is more developed than another and it is the good habits and the way of thinking that have led Japan to be what it is. , a great nation. Being able to share a room with someone from another country (in this case with a guy from the Netherlands) has allowed me to be more open to new ideas and to be able to reconcile opinions to allow a harmonious coexistence.

Some of the recommendations I could give to the students that will come in the future is that they learn Japanese as much as they can before coming because not all Japanese are able to communicate in English. Similarly, I would recommend that the programs at each university where the scholarship is awarded promote their students who come to Japan, study Japanese before this.

Another recommendation is that they try to find out as much as they can about the customs and traditions in Japan so as not to have very strong cultural clashes.