

2017 Reinventing Japan Project (Short-term)

International Students Summit, RJP Program

Faculty of Agronomy * Department of Horticulture * 4th year

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The experience I had in the RJP program was very enriching for me. I met people from very different cultures from mine, but we still had a lot in common, such as our interest in the present and future of our planet, the well-being of future generations and our indignation because of the inequality in the world.

The main objective of my participation in the program was to learn the reality of agriculture and the countryside in other countries: what kind of problems they have and what are the solutions proposed to solve them.

The first day in Taiwan we went to Sun Moon Lake, a very important lake for Taiwanese people. Then we went to a natural tea farm, where they taught us the process to produce different types of tea and the difference between them. They also told us about the problems they had in the past due to the excessive use of chemical fertilizers and the impoverishment of the soil. They shared their experience and the changes they made in order to make tea production profitable again. Chemical fertilizers decreased significantly and they began to use organic fertilizers as compost, which they produce with the organic waste from the farm itself. This allowed them to reduce production costs and obtain higher incomes. The natural tea farm__ also applied different strategies to deal with the low productivity from their soil.

The second day was very enriching for me, because my session group (agriculture) got together and, throughout the morning, we discuss about similarities and differences related to agriculture in our countries: Djibouti, Malaysia and Peru. I noticed that small farmers from developing countries always have many difficulties in producing food, especially in the last years because of the climate change, which disturbs the cycles of rainfall and plants. However, there are many efforts to mitigate this situation. I also realized how the environment influences on humans, even in the type of activity that people will perform. For example, in Djibouti, the main problem they have is that water is a very scarce resource, so their main activity is livestock farming and the population does not have much knowledge and experience in agriculture. This situation means that they have to import most of the vegetables and fruits they consume from neighboring countries, mainly from Ethiopia, which is not optimal for their food autonomy. In Malaysia, farmers do have some knowledge in agriculture. However, the techniques they use are not the most environmentally friendly, since they often overuse agrochemicals, which are generally the cheapest and those that cause the most damage to human health and the environment. This situation is changing because there are students and big companies in the agricultural sector that are training small farmers in Global GAP practices. In Peru the situation is a bit different, because Peruvians have a tradition in agriculture, especially small farmers who see agriculture as a lifestyle and not as much as an economic activity.

Nevertheless, the essential problems that we could find and that we have in common among the three countries were the following:

- Lack of young generations working in farms. Because people in the countryside are searching for “better opportunities” like quality education, basic services and higher payed jobs, in general, young generations from developing countries living in the countryside desire to improve their life quality.

- Education inequality. Most of the time, smallholders have only elementary education and sometimes they don't even have that, so they can't access to new and quality information. Smallholders need to learn how to promote their products and new sustainable practices.
- It's hard to reach the farmers. Because most of them live far from the centers of development of the country.
- Climate change. Mostly, climate change disrupts the smooth running of the plant cycle. Smallholders can't program their sowing and harvest.

On the third day in Taiwan we practiced our presentations and gave each other feedback to improve it and also made our presentation for the session conclusion. During the afternoon, we randomly assigned groups with people who didn't belonged to our session to discuss the how the theme of this year's ISS was related to the reality of our countries and, by group, we proposed one theme for next year's ISS. After many discussions, we were able to reach a consensus and chose next year's theme, which will be "Students taking action to increase youth involvement in sustainable agriculture and to close the gap between actors in the food system".

The ISS presentations were performed during the fourth and fifth day. I realized with the discussions that there are many differences between a farmer from a developed country and a farmer from a developing one. For example, in Germany people who want to be farmers must attend to school for 4 years mandatory, something that does not happen in developing countries, because many times farmers do not have elementary education, so they cannot have access to information, as I mentioned before. I could also observe that what gets us together is that we all pursuit the wellbeing of our planet and that we know that we must support each other because if the developed countries are apparently well and the developing countries are bad, the developed countries are affected too because many of them buy food from developing countries, due that generally developed countries have large areas of monoculture and often are not for food, but to produce biofuels. Seen it like that one's well-being is transformed into the well-being of another.

The first day after arriving to Japan, we did a tour of the Nodai campus. I learn about NODAI'S University history and it's contribution to Japanese society as a source of research and technology development. After lunch, we had a lecture about "Environment of Subtropical Area in Japan, brief aspects of natural conditions and agriculture in Miyako island, Okinawa". I really liked the class, because I learned about adequate methods to obtain tropical crops during the Japanese winter. It was a very interesting class, it's amazing all the uses that can be given to plastic in the field. By the afternoon, we had a basic Japanese class, it was very fun and I could learn common phrases to try to communicate with Japanese people.

The second day in Japan, we visited the Laboratory of Plant Molecular Genetics, the professor showed us the machines they use to make different experiments, like transgenesis. I liked the professor explanation. But my favorite was the Laboratory of Landscape Botany and Arboriculture; the professor gave us a small resume about the Japanese long and impressive history of traditional technology and philosophy in landscape design. I love landscape design, but is not very common in Peru. I think is very important because usually people in the city lose the connection between nature and humanity, and landscape architecture promotes the science of nature conservation and restores the role of nature in humanity life. By the afternoon, we had a lecture about "Edo Aesthetics and Environmental Resiliency", in this class I didn't have the opportunity to learn about Edo, because it was the first class, and we did a presentation class to know each other better.

The next two days we went to Global Festa Japan 2017 in Odaiba. There we visited different stands related to sustainable agriculture and environment, a lot of Japanese and world organizations that give support to Asian and African countries in this topics. There I found the kizuna Association NGO, that works in the Peruvian Amazon with the Sacha Inch oil, a native nut. I could notice that all organizations have a very similar intervention plans, because all of them try to give training to the smallholders in sustainable agricultural practices and add value to the product, to obtain better inputs.

The fifth day in Japan we had a meeting at ERECON HQ office, there we made a presentation about the agriculture reality in Perú, México and Brazil, and we proposed a project focus in solve a problem related to our country agriculture. After the presentations we made questions and had a discussion time, for me it was a enriching moment because we have different points of view about the problems and the solutions, but at the end we all agreed that all the solutions must be focused in create sustainable systems.

The last day in Japan we visit the Meiji Jingu Temple and the Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, I liked a lot visit these places because I could notice the Japanese landscape architecture style, the trees transmitted a lot of serenity. My favorite was the visit to the greenhouse in the National Garden, I had never been in a greenhouse of that size with all that tropical plants species.

The program helps me to understand that all the solutions that I will propose in the future as an agronomist must have a self-sustainable approach that seeks the welfare of all the actors of the food.

It would be great visit the Japanese rural areas, and see what kind of crops people cultivate and the techniques they use, in order to learn more about the Japanese countryside. I think that one day in the Global Festa Japan is enough to obtain the necessary information that we needed to prepare our presentation at the ERECON office. Maybe we could have visited a Japanese farm one of that days.

During this program I could improve my English and know other ways of seeing things. I could notice that in many countries the countryside is running out of people, it doesn't matter if it is a development country or an underdevelopment country. I think this is a very worrying situation because threatens the security food and depends of the young generations stop this problem. I could notice too, that in many parts of the world people are becoming aware about this problem and others, like climate change, and people is taking action too. So, we can't stop, we must work harder and include more people in the solutions.

Annexed



Sun moon lake

First day



Natural tea farm



Agriculture session group



ISS 2017



Last day



Farewell party

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NODAI Campus tour



Meiji Jingu Temple



ERECON office



Global Festa Japan 2017

