

FY 2015 Re-inventing Japan Project  
Leadership Development in the Fields of Food, Agriculture, and the Environment in  
Latin America (Short-term)

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The reasons why I chose to participate in the Re-Inventing Japan Project were mainly of academic, scientific, cultural and personal nature. Firstly, visiting a top quality Japanese university which has a long history of challenges and success in the agricultural sciences and other related sciences was interesting since I was able to see how the professionals are involved in their commitment towards improving not only agriculture alone, but also how does the university is integrated in such an organized structure that allows projects to be really put into practice. In the scientific perspective, I wanted to see the structure and skilled people that conduct researches in the many fields of knowledge encompassing the agricultural sciences, especially plant biotechnology, which is my favorite subject and still has much to be improved in Brazil. In a cultural perspective, visiting Japan was a rich experience at all times, from the daily relations at the university to the act of visiting any shop, and from the most sophisticated technologies one can encounter to the simplest machines of everyday use. Just the act of observing how passengers go by in a train station is already something entirely different for most Brazilians. Finally, I wanted to participate in this program personally because visiting Japan has been a dream since I can remember reading and being told about it, and I was gratefully happy to see that it was even better than what I had previously expected.

During the program, there were various activities that related to the aims and purposes of this short term program. The students that took part of this part of the project were from Brazil, Mexico and Peru, in a total of four people. Upon our arrival, we met Mr. Iwai and we were introduced to Ms. Yamada, who were both our guides throughout our whole staying at Nodai University and kindly helped us whenever we needed. The first event was a welcome dinner at a local Japanese restaurant where we could meet Mr. Sakata and Mr. Suzuki, both professors of the university. The dinner was great, the place was beautiful and we could have many interesting conversations in an informal and calm way.

The next day, we had an orientation about the Nodai University and about does it operate. The university is very organized, has three campuses and very open to the students. We also had a tour through other facilities and places, such as the library and the Nodai museum, where we could see how the book collection is divided and how does the library system works, and also how the Nodai history was and future goals are, respectively. Later on the same day, we had a visit to the Department of Fermentation Science and to the Department of Bioproduction and Environmental Engineering. In the first one, we were able to understand the science and art of sake production, a few important components from the chemistry behind its aromas and its importance to the Japanese culture.



Additionally, we learned little about the yeast cultivation science, which is already a huge study field by itself. In the second Department, we were able to visit the site where three experimental machines are in use: one for fast organic waste processing and pelleting, one for ethanol and methane production without using water and another one for methane production and storage for use as biogas.

On the following day, had a lecture about tropical agriculture, visited the related facilities and learned which are the tropical species that are currently under investigation by the Nodai students and professors. It was very interesting to see the diversified approach towards this subject, ranging from applied biosciences directly for the crop improvement to economics and rural development. It is a multidisciplinary view that encompasses students from all academic backgrounds and also from other countries. Another remarkable facility was the very small plant tissue culture lab, which proves that this kind of applied plant science does not necessarily need complex and expensive facilities to operate with efficiency. We also visited the Department of Japanese Agriculture and we had a lecture about the theme. There we learned some facts and saw some statistical figures of the present situation, where it came from and which are the prospects in the short and long terms. One interesting highlighted issue was the ageing of the farmers, the scarcity of new farmers willing to keep up with the agricultural activities and how this phenomenon occurs not only in already developed countries, but also in developing countries too, such as Brazil. Regarding this specific lecture, it was very curious and entertaining how the professor Mr. Gojo adapted a traditional Japanese story telling method using flashcards to synthesize greater concepts into keywords and objective sentences. Afterwards, we had an explanation of what the Nodai's *Mercado* is, how it is structured and which are its initiatives to promote and sell the agricultural products generated by the University's partnership with the producers.

On the next day, we had the first market internship at the *Mercado* at Setagaya Campus where we had the chance to participate in the organization of the stands, to meet some producers and to make contact with customers, apart from learning more about the products, most of them entirely new ones.

On the following day we could visit some beautiful places in Tokyo, such as the National Park and the Metropolitan Towers.

After that day, we had a another lecture about Japanese agriculture, but this time with a greater emphasis on the technical aspects of the production as well as on the traditionally consumed agricultural products, such as the Japanese rice varieties and the expensive niche-market-oriented true wasabi. Then, we had an interactive lecture about Japanese language and culture with Ms. Yamada, in which we could learn in an exciting and fun way the how to communicate better with the Japanese people.



From February 23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> we had a trip and visitation to Nagano prefecture, more specifically to Nagawa-machi, where we were very well received at the Rengaya pension house by the owner and by Mr. Higashikubo. At Nagawa-machi, we had various activities, among them the visit to the Obsidian Museum, the visit to the Tate Iwa Japanese Paper Village - where we made soba and washi paper fan from the beginning up to the final product -, and we had a workshop at the city hall with the mayor and with the town's team who are interested in revitalizing the city. Besides, we also visited the Matsumoto castle and the Suwa Grand Shrine, where we could have a glimpse into the Japanese history and into some of the local traditions.

After our arrival back in Setagaya Campus, we had two more days of internship at *Mercado*, but this time the market was set at Hachioji and there were many more people to try to communicate with and it was overall more dynamic than the previous time. Also, we could feel more how the sales process work in daily life.

On February 29<sup>th</sup>, we went to visit the Isehara farm and the Atsugi Campus. At the farm, we saw the different places where a great number of academic subjects can be put to practice, such as landscaping, temperate and tropical fruit production, vegetable growing by the hydroponic method, flower production and some field crops. At the Atsugi Campus, we visited the Post-harvest Science Department, where we had a lecture about fruit quality and its relation with the post-harvesting practices and we could verify the differences between apples

subjected to changes in their harvesting and storing treatments. There was also a visit to the Animal Science Department, where we had an overall view of the many researches and applications for the animal study in Japan, as well as we could visit the laboratories where most of the researches are conducted. Additionally, we visited the Animal-Plant-Human Interaction practice site, where the animals stay and where there are places for the related projects to take place, such as the classrooms with rabbits for children, a hippotherapy area and two gardens designed for highlighting different human senses and for teaching the basics of vegetable growing.

On our last day of activities, we presented our practices during the program and also our personal view about the whole experience. After that we received our certificates and we had a cultural interchange with Japanese students that came back from Brazil, Mexico and Peru. This cultural interchange was very amusing and it was great to see what the perspective of the Japanese students about our own countries and habits was. Afterwards, we had a nice farewell dinner with them and had the chance to taste a traditional okonomiyaki. On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, we went back to our respective home countries.

My personal accomplishments were mainly acquiring a different perspective for my academic life, attaining a dream of visiting a country that I have a deep admiration and trying to speak a little Japanese - which feels absolutely great even with simple situations, such as when you can understand and be understood by someone, or read basic information on train stations, or know what product you are buying. In brief, effective communication equals freedom; and now I have a really tangible and useful reason why learning Japanese.

With this program I was able to learn a little more about culture, science, interpersonal skills and history, generally not in a clearly segmented way, but as a whole and in the sense that each of these areas are the mutually-influencing components of why Japan is so unique.



education are more important for a prosperous society than sheer economical improvements. Facilities and technologies certainly need to be highlighted, but the major focus should always be on people. Personally, I was marveled by the kindness and efficiency of virtually anyone we met, and this is evidence that fostering personal improvement leads to a better society. I intend to focus on this perspective and to try harder to do my best at any assignment or task, always asking myself if there is a better way of doing them. Although some

changes take time, one I can say I have immediately put to practice, even though it is just as a tiny drop in the ocean, was to reduce as much as possible the use of the vehicle horn. Even though Tokyo is an immense metropolis, the urban traffic is quieter than my much smaller home city, so I felt ashamed for this unnecessary sound pollution and stress.

In my opinion, the program was great and I could learn very much from it. It was also very well organized and conducted, so there are no complaints at all. If I had to provide one suggestion, it would be to inform an estimate of the daily expenses for the future students, so they can plan how much to spend and what is relatively cheap, fair or expensive in Japan.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for this unique opportunity. Since I had already lived for one year in the Netherlands and visited some other very developed countries, I had imagined that Japan would be fantastic, but I must admit it was even greater than my best expectations and the most amazing place I have ever been to. I will never forget this amazing experience in Japan, so I have no other words than thank you very much for the program and for absolutely everything.

