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Voluntary - Public

**Date:** 2/1/2010

**GAIN Report Number:** JA0501

## **Japan**

**Post:** Tokyo ATO

### **A Brief History of the Japan Agricultural Exchange Council**

**Report Categories:** Agriculture in the Economy

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**Report Highlights:**

*As part of the Partners in Agriculture celebration, FAS/Japan is writing a series of reports on the special agricultural relationship between the United States and Japan. The first report is on the Japan Agricultural Exchange Council (JAEC). Thanks to the partnership between the U.S. agricultural attaché and two distinguished Japanese agricultural leaders, Japan has sent over 12,000 young farmers to live and work in the United States since 1952.*

**General Information:**

In August 1951, towards the end of the U.S. Occupation, Japanese Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) officials, led by Shiroshi Nasu and Tadaatsu Ishiguro, visited Wolf Ladejinsky, the U.S. agricultural attaché, at the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) headquarters. This was not an ordinary group of visitors. Shiroshi Nasu was the most influential agricultural scientist in the country at the time who would eventually become the Japanese Ambassador to India. Tadaatsu Ishiguro was the war time Minister of Agriculture and the most visible Japanese politician involved in agriculture. The MOA officials wanted to discuss with Ladejinsky the possibility of designing a program where Japanese farmers could live and work in the United States.

Ladejinsky thought that creating leaders in the farm community was essential for the long-term success of the new land reform program in Japan. For example, village land committees, consisting of mostly peasant farmers, played an important role in implementing land reform in Japan. Ladejinsky believed that an exchange program could help develop new agricultural leaders in Japan who understood the United States. Ladejinsky set up a meeting between Earl Warren, the Governor of the State of California, who was visiting Japan at the time and MOA officials. The Governor immediately supported the idea and suggested that University of California at Davis serve as the coordinator of the program in the United States and that Earl Coke, Director for the Agricultural Extension Program at the University, serve as its director.

In 1952 the Association for International Collaboration of Farmers (AICF) was created, with Nasu becoming the President of the organization and Ishiguro acting as the senior advisor. The objectives of the one-year program were to help Japanese farmers learn about agricultural techniques in the United States, encourage democracy in Japan, and bolster a mutual understanding between the two countries. In 1952, forty-six Japanese farmers went to California during the first year of the program. The program was expanded in the 1960s to include a number of other states in addition to California. Eventually the program expanded even further, where Japanese farmers were sent to work in Canada, South American and Europe.

During the first few years of the program, Nasu and Ishiguro thought that there weren't enough young farmers participating (a limit of two from each prefecture) and that the length of the training period was too short at one year. With the help of the United States Government and the State of California, in April

1956, a new Japanese program was created called the California State Agricultural Training Program (CATP), where Japanese farmers would live and work in California for three years. Over the next nine years, 4,100 Japanese farmers lived and worked on farms in California. The Japanese farmers were sent to the United States in large groups. Japan was short of foreign currency during the 1950s and early 1960s, and these Japanese farmers were requested to send part of their salary back to Japan to help fund the program. Almost \$17 million dollars was sent back to Japan from California during this time period.

Naotada Yaeo was a 25 year old Japanese farmer who decided to participate in the California State Agricultural Training Program in 1958. Yaeo was fascinated with the United States and wanted to go to the country with the most advanced agricultural technology. He was part of a large group of young Japanese farmers who were sent to a farm near Indio, California in the Coachella Valley of Southern California desert region. The 54 young farmers lived and worked on a grape farm for three years from 1958 through 1960, living in a dormitory on the farm. While the work was difficult, the Japanese worked as a team with a lot of autonomy, and significantly improved the quality of the farm. The Japanese also became famous in the area for their ability to work in extreme heat. In fact, they became so famous that the Los Angeles Times interviewed them. There was also a lot of free time to visit Palm Springs, Los Angeles, San Diego and, of course, Disneyland.

Yaeo fondly remembers how friendly, helpful and hard working the Americans he met were. He was also impressed how effective California farmers were and loved the term “time is money.” When I met him, Yaeo’s showed me his prize possession, the photo album of his life in California, which was made from a carton that was used for packing grapes on the farm.

His work in California also made him life long friendships with both Americans and his Japanese colleagues. Many of his colleagues went on to successful careers in Japanese agriculture, thanks in part, to their experience in California. One of these successful colleagues was Yoshihiro Maeda. He was born in 1934 and participated in CATP program in California. When he returned to Japan he started an egg business with 500 layers. Maeda’s business expanded over the years to over 100,000 layers and he is now the largest egg producer in Kagoshima prefecture. He owns outlet stores for his eggs and also sells fertilizers.

CATP ended abruptly in 1965 when U.S. Department of Labor adopted new labor policy designed to restrict entry of Mexican migrant workers. Even though CATP was very different from the Mexican Bracero Program, the U.S. government stopped the Japanese program to be fair to the Mexicans. The Japanese government wanted to continue a similar program to replace CATP. Thus, when the U.S.- Japan Trade and Economic Joint Ministerial Conference was held on July 12, 1965, the two countries agreed to initiate a new program to send Japanese farm workers to the United States for two years. The organization responsible for administering this new program was called the Japanese Agricultural Training Council (JATC).

Hisaki Horiuchi went to the United States on the JATC program in 1967 and 1969. He lived and worked on a small dairy farm in Colorado. Unlike the CATP program, under JACT Horiuchi was the only Japanese farmer to live with the American host family. He also was able to attend English language school at the start of his program as well as to study Animal Science at the end of his stay in the United States. Horiuchi learned to operate an assortment of farm machinery and, to his surprise and delight, he learned to drive a stick-shift pickup truck. Horiuchi was impressed with the work ethic of the American farmers he met and he was so moved by his stay in the United States that he later began to work for the Japanese exchange program.



A JAEC trainee at a dairy farm in Washington State

In 1988, AICF and JATC merged into a new organization called the Japan Agricultural Exchange Council (JAEC). Yoshitaka Shiibashi was one of the first participants in the new JAEC program. He spent over two years (1989-91) in the United States.

Shiibashi worked at a nursery in Saitama and he believed that western influence in plants was increasing in Japan and he wanted

to learn as much as he could before the trend took off in his country. For his first six months, Shiibashi went to language school at Big Bend Community College in the State of Washington and then took agriculture training in Idaho. Afterward, he spent 18 months at the San Gabriel Nursery in Los Angeles, California. He became proficient in bedding plants, landscaping trees and hydrangea, poinsettia and day lilies.



JAEC trainees after the training completion ceremony held in Seattle

Shiibashi worked in customer service at the nursery. With his limited English, the most difficult task was answering the telephone. He had more than a few awkward moments when he was not able to understand what the customer wanted, but his English did improve after several months. Even though he worked in Los Angeles for 18 months he didn't meet a movie star, which disappointed him. However, during his time at the nursery, Shiibashi was able to travel to most of the west coast and Las Vegas (twice), which he really enjoyed. He spent a few months at the end of his assignment again at Hartnell College studying Horticulture.

Today, Shiibashi runs a small nursery in Saitama. He finds it ironic that bonsai trees have become less popular in Japan but that he receives orders from other countries in Europe, China and the United States. He is also still active in JAEC. He is responsible for the pre-departure training program, which takes place twice a year.

From the start of the Japanese training program in 1952 to 2008, 12,279 young Japanese farmers have gone to the United States. Today, JAEC even offers programs where farmers from around the world come to Japan to live with Japanese farm families. In 2006, the two-year program and the one-year program were merged into a new one and a half year program.



JAEC trainees at a feed grain farm in California

Thanks to the efforts of Wolf Ladejinski and visionaries like Nasu and Ishiguro, JAEC has achieved its objectives, especially bolstering a mutual understanding between Japan and the United States. Perhaps Edwin O. Reischauer, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan in the 1960s, summed the program up the best when he said: "This exchange of 'know-how' has been of benefit to agriculture in both countries. At the same time, perhaps the most lasting value of the program has been its contribution to mutual understanding between the rural populations of our two countries. In getting to know each other through daily association and discussion, your young farmers and our farmers have learned the great truth that free peoples, however much they may differ in culture and history, basically have much more in common than they have points of issue. The prospects for world peace are greatly enhanced by such people-to-people contact and the understanding that results."<sup>[i]</sup>

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<sup>[i]</sup> "Biography of Shiroshi Nasu," The 1967 Ramon Magsaysay Award for International Understanding.