

2020 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – 3rd Prize】

The World on RICE! (Original in Japanese)

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To myself ten years ago:

My 2020 self probably can't afford to think about the future, because my head is preoccupied with my university entrance exam and my impatience with the fact that I still don't have a boyfriend. But please, don't stop learning now. I say this because, in 2030, at age 27, I'm able to feel happy, thanks to the things I have learned so far.

As a matter of fact, nowadays the world is undergoing an unprecedented boom in rice. The problem of decreased rice consumption and what was described as the westernization of food are already things of the past. Today, rice is eaten all over the world, and it's so popular that it has shot to the top among the world's three major grains. How did this happen? For this, we have to talk about the amazing work by people in the integrated course at Senior High School at Sakado attached to the University of Tsukuba.

As an adult, I've pursued a career in agriculture, a field that I love. I started working toward the dream I've held since I was in elementary school—to develop the best rice in Japan. Through many years of research and rice cultivation, and together with others who studied rice production in the high school's agriculture course, we developed a new variety of rice called Tsukusakamai. Tsukusakamai shook Japan by beating out the special AA rank in the taste rankings of the Japan Grain Inspection Association—a rank that even the Koshihikari variety had not attained. Naturally, this achievement was praised by many agricultural institutions and won many awards. But here is the important thing. Collaborating with graduates of the school's international studies course, we used the prize money to donate Tsukusakamai to developing countries that were unable to grow rice. Since it is the best rice in Japan, Tsukusakamai put a smile on the faces of people in many different countries. We also worked to spread the name of Tsukusakamai within Japan. With the help of graduates of the business course, we worked to increase the consumption of rice

by promoting Tsukusakamai on TV and in supermarkets. However, things didn't go that smoothly. In a world where tempting foods like pizza and tapioca stand out, rice didn't get much of a spotlight. I had thought several times about giving up, when suddenly, the rice craze happened. The strong point of Japanese rice—that it goes well with any kind of food—meant that it adapted well to foreign cultures where the rice had been donated, and it won people's hearts. This phenomenon crossed the seas, and finally, in 2030, the rice craze came to Japan.

This rice boom has changed Japan significantly. First, with regard to the problem of people's diets. Rice improved the situation of people eating too much flour, and since it is often cooked in a pot, it taught people the pleasure of sitting down at the table with one's family instead of eating alone. The second change was in agriculture. The rice craze triggered an explosion in agricultural development all over the world. Even in Japan, with its concerns about the aging population, 'smart agriculture,' which places little burden on people's bodies, was developed and implemented throughout the country, thanks to everyone from the engineering course. In addition, since the rice boom arrived, Japanese food has been attracting more attention all over the world. In the West, the term *ichiju-sansai* (a meal of soup, rice, and three dishes) has come into fashion and caused a social phenomenon.

The rice craze has affected the whole world, warmed the hearts of the entire planet, and delivered the happiness of delicious food. And we cannot forget that this phenomenon required the support of many people from different academic disciplines, not only agriculture. These include the international studies course to connect Japan with other countries, the business course to connect producers and consumers, and the engineering course to develop various kinds of machinery and improve the work of cultivation. Through the cooperative efforts of all these specialized courses that make up the integrated course, we were able to affect the whole world.

My 2020 self is probably not so attracted to studying agriculture, which doesn't usually get much attention from society. And yet, just as Tsukusakamai connected the world through delicious food, the seemingly unremarkable field of agriculture can bring people great happiness. There are still a lot of problems in the world. Poverty and war are not completely gone, but rice—the food I love—was able to bring the entire planet together in one bowl. That's why I want you to take pride in learning my beloved subject of agriculture. And never take it for granted that you are able to say "itadakimasu" and "gochisosama" (words spoken before and after meals in Japan) every single day.