

By YOKO HANI

Staff writer

Some 30 years ago when the country was expanding rapidly economically and it paid little attention to its neighbors, a Japanese group started a training program for future farm leaders from Asia's developing states.

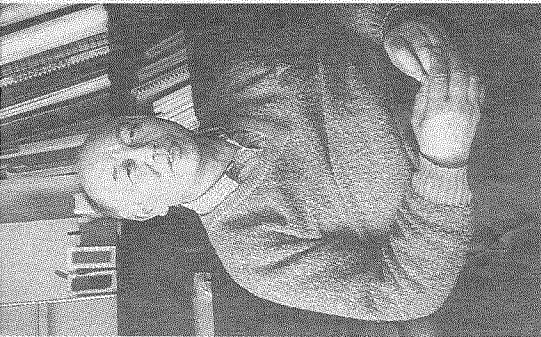
Today, Asian Rural Institute, which was originally affiliated with a theological school in Tokyo, provides a nine-month training course for up to 40 people each year.

JAPAN IN ASIA

The training is held in a 6-hectare field and nearby woods in Nishinasuno, Tochigi Prefecture.

Principal Hajime Kikuchi says the project was started to teach Asians advanced agricultural techniques, the request coming at the inaugural meeting of the East Asian Christian Conference in 1959.

The Japanese schoolmaster of Noson Dendo Theological



Hajime Kikuchi

School, which propagated Christianity in rural areas, began the course the next year at the school in Nasu.

Kikuchi said the people at the time felt obligated to compensate Asians for the damage and suffering Japan had inflicted on them during the war.

About 12 years later the institute was formed and has

been operating the program ever since, open to trainees, regardless of religion, from 40 countries in Asia, South America and Africa.

More than 600 trainees have graduated, including social workers, pastors, teachers and government officials, dedicated to helping the poor in their countries, Kikuchi said.

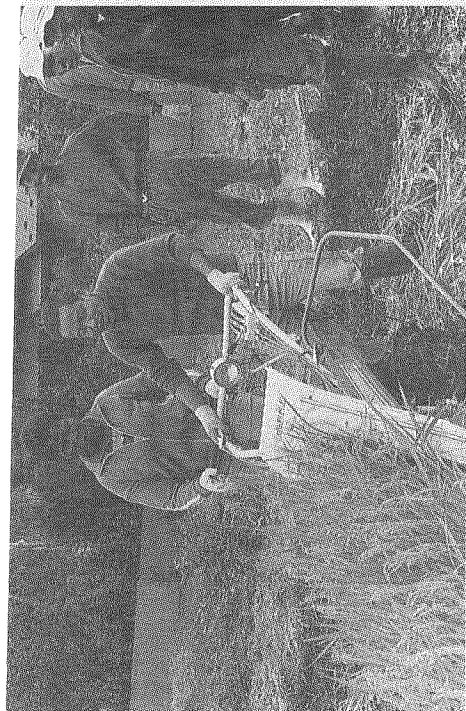
"All of them confront very serious conditions at home, such as poverty and rigid class systems," he said. "They seek ways to improve the situation. We offer them our program, believing that people can attain their goal of self-sufficiency if they can afford land of their own and enjoy sunshine."

The program offers a variety of courses, from organic farming, food processing and farm management to public health, sanitation and leadership training. Students who can't pay tuition are provided an allowance made possible by donations from many well-wishers.

No academic degree is given, but the trainees acquire solid skills, knowledge and experience to return home and work with efficiency.

Sayed Sherifdeen Alavi, an official of the Social Development Society in Sri Lanka, said he hoped to spread the poultry farming techniques he learned at the institute to help farmers at home increase their income. In Sri Lanka, many rural residents don't have jobs, he said.

"Before coming to Japan, I was thinking that I was going to learn modern techniques of farming," he said. "But I learned here more about ecological farming, and also pollution and environmental problems."



TRAINEES AT ASIAN RURAL INSTITUTE harvest rice plants.

The trainees find living in Japan an eye-opener. They see both good and bad.

To Zimik Mingthingla from India, Japan is "a very safe, secure and equal country. . . Its people are wonderful."

However, she felt the Japanese tend to be preoccupied with concerns that people in India more or less ignore.

"In a sense, we are satisfied with what we are and what we have," she said. "But Japanese people seem to have anxiety problems even though they live in a rich country."

Midha Sunil Kumal, an agricultural coordinator from Bangladesh who applied to receive training in organic farming, said Japan can teach his country much.

"We want more and more people from Japan to come to Bangladesh to give us various (useful) ideas," he said.

The growing number of illegal workers from developing countries coming to Japan is a problem that can only be solved when the Third World provides secure jobs at home, Kikuchi said, noting such

matters are affected by political and economic trends worldwide.

The institute's long-range goal is to help people become self-sufficient.

Kikuchi, whose specialty is dairy farming, recalled a flight he made some time ago on Pakistani International Airlines to Kenya.

On plane, he noticed butter from Denmark and the Netherlands served with the meals. He wondered why Pakistan, a developing country, had to turn to a developed country for such a product.

He said he wants to instill in trainees the enthusiasm to be more self-sufficient, such as producing their own butter, as well as other products, for their country's national airline.

"We Japanese also came through this very difficult stage," he said, noting that today's domestic dairy industry owes in part what it is to a handful of far-sighted and hard-working farmers.

"Thus, I encourage people of the Third World by telling them they can do the same."