

## Japan prepares for first IFAJ congress in Asia

**The 2007 International Federation of Agricultural Journalists congress in Japan promises to be an exciting and surprisingly low-cost event which will give delegates a rare opportunity to explore Asian agriculture and important export markets for many countries.**

The first IFAJ congress to be held in Asia, it will run from September 17 to September 23. The two-centre event will start in Tokyo and move to Sendai, the City of Trees.

Organisers have promised registration fees of less than 1000 Euros for six nights shared accommodation, booked during the early-bird registration period. Further discounts are being developed for young journalists and journalists from developing countries.

They are promising to provide plenty of opportunities for journalists looking for worthwhile news stories and interviews, covering topics such as wagyu beef production and food-service industries using imported beef, dairy, cereal and soybeans.

There will also be a pre-Congress tour – in and around the old capital area of Kyoto, at extra cost.

JAJA president Kazumasa Nomura outlined the program during a special presentation at the 2006 congress in Norway, which concluded with a ceremony in which the Norwegian organisers officially handed over the IFAJ flag to Japan. Mr Nomura led a large contingent of Japanese delegates to the Norway to help promote the 2007 congress and learn lessons which will help them stage their event.

“The IFAJ is changing rapidly towards being a more diverse organisation, because the whole picture of world agriculture is changing. We are very happy to show you a different style of agriculture from that of traditional western style,” he said.

“It is impossible for you to be a real international agricultural journalist unless you visit and cover the Asian agriculture. It is simply because Asian agriculture is too important to ignore. It feeds three-fifths of the world's population.

“The theme of the Congress is *Explore the land of Mizuho*. Mizuho means ‘ear of rice’ in Japanese. With a history of more than a thousand years with rice, we call our country the land of Mizuho. Every September is the time to harvest for rice. In 2007, you will discover the secrets of the land of Mizuho.

“During your tour you will visit Satoyama, a small village located in a valley that is surrounded by hills and woods of miscellaneous trees. Although it was driven to the verge of extinction from the 1960s to 1990s because of land development, there are still numerous villages like Satoyama, where people are living in the environment and sharing the gifts of nature, such as insects, frogs, and birds.

“Rice paddies have played an important roll in maintaining satoyamas. Why? You will see the reasons during the excursions of the 51st congress next year.

“Not only secrets of rice, but also secrets of high quality Wagyu beef production will be covered during the congress. Is it true you feed a big volume of beer to cattle to have more



marble? Is it true a price of one head of high quality beef cattle destined to a slaughter house is sometimes higher than that of a car made by Mercedes?

“Good questions, ladies and gentlemen. Just come and see,” Mr. Nomura said.



*Above: Japanese delegates promote the 2007 congress in a special presentation at the 2006 IFAJ congress in Norway.*

On the way to Norway, the Japanese delegation saw lots of Japanese food in Europe where Japanese restaurants are mushrooming.

“But we can tell you most of them are not serving real Japanese food, even if it looks like Japanese food, smells like Japanese food, tastes like Japanese food, and costs like Japanese food.

“I promise you. We will serve you real Japanese food during your stay,” Mr Nomura said.

The congress will be divided into two parts. Registration will take place in Tokyo, where delegates will stay two nights and visit a food market. Japan is the biggest net food importer in the world, so there will be stories related to readers and viewers from countries exporting farm products to Japan.

A mini session will be held at the campus of the Tokyo University of Agriculture, covering more than a dozen themes, including the secrets of producing Wagyu, trends in the Japanese food business' and high-technology farming.

Delegates will then move north by Shinkansen, a world famous bullet train, and stay in the Miyagi prefecture. There, they will enjoy a traditional Japanese hot springs and cultural events, as well as seeing the latest technologies applied to modern Japanese farming such as an unmanned rice planting machine equipped with GPS.

The congress will conclude with a symposium to discuss international agriculture, food and tradition from a journalists' point of view. There will also be a visit to a local public television station.

**Registration for the congress will open in early 2007. Further information is available at the event's official website <http://www.knt.co.jp/ec/2006/ifaj-e/>**