



Learning from both program and delegates highlight Japanese experience

By Clemmie Gleeson, United Kingdom

I rarely enter competitions, but the prize for the Alltech IFAJ Young Leaders award was so tempting I felt compelled to give it a go.

Reading about the 2007 IFAJ World Congress in Japan (a country I had wanted to visit for several years) and the promise of visits to farms and the chance to learn about another country's agriculture was really exciting. I was delighted to later hear that I had won one of the sponsored places.

I have visited several Asian countries before – a holiday in Thailand, a research project in Cambodia, and backpacking in India and Sri Lanka. All were wonderful experiences, but I knew that the congress would offer a very different perspective.

My aims for the trip included widening my experience and knowledge of agriculture generally. I wanted to learn about farming in a different climate and culture, and to come home with some interesting stories for ***Farmers Guardian***, the newspaper I write for in the UK.

From start to finish our hosts from the Japanese Agricultural Journalists Association (JAJA) worked tirelessly to show us many different elements to Japanese farming and culture. As well as the promised visits to farms, a dairy and a fruit and vegetable packing plant there were seminars, a briefing with a representative from the ministry of agriculture, and various receptions where we could experience Japanese food and social customs.

Aside from being a brilliant introduction to a beautiful and fascinating culture, it was a very educational trip too which I feel has strengthened my understanding of agricultural policy, world trade and international negotiations.

I was interested by the Japanese government's attitude to small-scale family farms. Masanori Sato from the ministry of agriculture described them as "the foundation of Japanese culture and society" and said it was a way of life they wanted to preserve. Japanese policymakers understand that rice is an 'emotional crop' that farmers want to grow and that consumers want to eat home-grown rice and they are determined to protect it from a flood of cheap imports. Farmers in the UK long for such loyalty from our government which has a 'survival of the fittest' attitude to farming.

Experiences during the week prompted discussions with journalists from other countries, often comparing what we had seen or learnt to what happens in our home countries. There was an enormous amount of knowledge and experience amongst the delegates.

The challenges faced by different country's agricultural industries have common themes, but there are unique challenges too. Learning about all this has helped me to gain a more mature understanding of farming in a global context. It has helped me to form opinions on issues that perhaps I was undecided on, or didn't know enough about.

I would recommend all countries identify young agricultural journalists in their guilds and encourage them to apply for next year's Young Leaders award. I am so grateful for the opportunities it gave me. Thank you very much to Alltech and the organizers of the award for making it possible.