

An international school of agriculture

By Karli Flinta-Murphy, Canada



It was touching to see the group of elementary school children bowing to their teacher in unison and saying “Domo arigato” (thank you) as each child boarded the yellow bus at a Miso (soybean paste) factory in the Miyagi prefecture of Japan.

The teacher returned the honour, bowing back to each one. The respect the Japanese have is outstanding – not just for each other, but for their land, their livestock and for the products they produce.

While reporting on agriculture in Canada, I mainly focus on farming in one part of my large country, which is the province of Manitoba where I live. I rarely write about global issues.

The Alltech IFAJ Young Leaders in Agricultural Journalism Award gave me the opportunity to see what farmers and consumers do in other parts of the world. With this new awareness, I will be able to broaden the horizons of my readers in Canada with a new perspective on agriculture, as well as highlight the important role of a nation’s culture.

I hoped to not only learn about the Japanese, but also about all the other member countries of the IFAJ. There is no better congress where farm journalists can discuss the issues that affect each other’s countries, learn from these issues and bring that knowledge back to their homelands.

Not much of a world traveler, I felt as if I traveled the world in seven days. Meeting with the various editors and reporters from Australia, Asia and Europe was like being a student in an international school of agriculture.

I had no idea how much of a pest kangaroos are to ranchers down under and that they are eradicated to keep the population down. It was good to hear the family farm is still the norm in the U.K. while in Canada large commercial operations are making it hard for smaller ones to compete. I learned how each country in Europe produces products unique to its individual culture and traditions. It was also beautiful to see how the Japanese tied their rice production so closely with their faith and who they are as a people.

It was humbling to hear the views of Canadian agriculture and the products our farmers produce. Quality is important to consumers in the countries to which we export and I realized Canada’s quality is viewed among the highest in the world.

This award enhanced my knowledge of each participating nation’s farming practices, inspiring me to travel more, continue learning about different countries and hopefully attend IFAJ’s congress in Austria and Slovenia next September.

Since visiting Japan, I intend to write more about international trade with Canada, focusing on how the practices of Canadian producers affect consumers in other countries and what farmers and industry in Canada must do to further their reputation for quality and food safety worldwide.