

Speech for Japanese Agricultural Training Program
“Class of 2010”

Good afternoon, graduates, distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen.
Welcome to the graduation ceremony of the Class of 2010.



I. Thanks to Those Involved in JATP

I would first like to extend thanks to everyone involved in the Japanese Agricultural Exchange Program, especially the host farmers, Big Bend Community College, the Big Bend Community College Foundation, UC Davis, and the Japan Agricultural Exchange Council. Special thanks to Mr. Yoshikawa, Director of the US Branch of the Japan Agricultural Exchange Council. He will be returning to Japan in

October after taking care of the trainees for many years both in Japan and the United States

On behalf of my country, I thank you supporters for aiding these young people in furthering their abilities and gaining experience. We will be needing assistance in the years to come to keep the program strong, so please let us continue looking to you for help.

II. Invaluable Experience in America

Graduates, congratulations for making it through all 18 months of the Japan Agricultural Training Program! You are now undoubtedly looking back and thinking of all of the joys and challenges you faced during that time. Coming to live America, learning a new culture, and being surrounded by English every day could not have been easy, and maybe there were times you wanted to return home, but you stuck it out.

Thanks to your efforts and the efforts of those supporting you, you have had a unique opportunity of seeing life in the United States first-hand. Not many people have this chance to go abroad to work and study for 18 months! The lessons you have learned and the wisdom you have gained through your hard work and the kindness of your friends, coworkers and host families will not only change your lives, but also the lives of those around you for as long as you live.

III. Japanese Agriculture at a Crossroads

Japanese agriculture is at a crossroads. As you may know, in 2010 the average age of Japan's 2.6 million farmers reached 65. There are not enough young people to inherit farming as an occupation. Some are even calling this a time of crisis for Japanese farming.

It is up to you to turn this challenge into an opportunity. Farming in Japan cannot continue as it has in the past. Due to developments such as the possibility of joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership Free Trade Initiative, or TPP for short, even agriculture is becoming international. Your experiences in the United States give you a unique advantage. You have learned about farming from innovative people not conforming to tradition. They not only farm, but also engage in manufacturing goods from their products and encouraging agricultural tourism. You need to bring these ideas back to Japan. Farming will need to mean something different to your generation than it did to your parents and grandparents. Make it yours! Embrace tradition and innovation both!

IV. Continue Growing in Japan

Metaphorically speaking, you have taken the change this program has given you and sowed it like a seed. During your stay here you have watered and fertilized it. Don't abandon this seedling when you go back to Japan! Help it grow into a mighty tree! Pass on the benefits of your stay here to your friends, neighbors and coworkers when you return

home. Become important innovators and leaders in your respective fields and *fields*! As you shared Japanese culture with the people close to you here, share your insights into the lifestyle and culture of the United States with people in Japan. In this way you will be grassroots ambassadors –a perfect title for all of you involved in the Agriculture Training Program!

V. Closing

Have a safe trip back to Japan tomorrow. Thank you for your work thus far, and the work you will do in the future.

