
FOREWORD

Cooperation between the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine

- JICAと帯広畜産大学の連携 -

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The Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine is the only national University of veterinary medicine, animal husbandry and agriculture, which was found in 1941 as Obihiro Veterinary Medicine High School. Up to the present, the university has sent about 17,000 graduates out into the world in total. Our main objective is to develop professionals in the surveillance of food safety in the process from animal and plant production to food processing and also to make scientific contribution to the local and international community through applied research and development activities. In 2002, the university was designated as one of the 28 organizations selected from the life science field, including medicine, physics, agriculture and pharmacy, in the Center of Excellence Program for the 21st Century established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (program for designating the top 30 research bases in each area of research).

The university is characterized by the practical science-oriented development of human resources where the results of basic studies achieved by the wisdom of professors are applied and extended by the cooperation of students. According to this principle, we have invited a good many foreign students, which has helped our students naturally learned in an environment of international exchange. Therefore, many of our graduates aim at working as Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). We also have many professors who have experience in international cooperation activities. In 2002, we received a commendation from the Minister for Foreign Affairs for our track record in international cooperation. Then in 2005, the JICA and the university concluded a comprehensive tie-up agreement, which made

us the first university having such agreement in Japan.

The joint projects of the JICA and the university have produced a number of achievements. In 2006, in order to carry out the projects more systematically, we proposed a cooperative and unifying project to the MEXT as our budgetary request for fiscal 2007, and this proposal was accepted by the Ministry. The project will work to achieve cooperation and unification of the JICA's international development education, technical assistance, surveys and researches mostly in the developing world and the results attained by the university in research promotion, human resource development and international cooperation. It is expected to produce good results that would forward Japan's development aid (e.g., anti-infection measures, rural development), such as education of people from developing countries, human resource training, and return of joint study results to local residents. High hopes are thus laid on the possibility of developing the human resources at home and abroad who could work on the international scene in the area of food security, which would be difficult to attain within the country.

Needless to say, food is essential for the life and survival of the human race. It is important as the basis of a healthy and full life, and the government has the basic responsibility for guaranteeing the people a stable food supply. But the world population is rapidly increasing and the number of people suffering hunger and undernourishment, which has already reached 800 million, is likely to grow further in the future. To Japan, which heavily depends on imported food, it is

important to secure and reinforce the food supply ability of domestic agriculture with the aim of raising its food self-sufficiency rate. The consumption of stock farm products will increase in the developing world, too; because the production of these products requires a large quantity of forage grains, the world's food demand will show a large increase.

Let's take domestic animals, the sources of animal protein, as an example. Over 70 percent of the animals raised all over the world is found in the developing world, but the productivity in this region is only 30 percent that of industrial countries. The main reasons for this are the underdevelopment and perishing of animals due to various microbial infections. Because more than 50 percent of these microbial infections are parasitic infections, mostly protozoan diseases, international scientific cooperation for developing nations are focused on the steps to eradicate parasites and protozoan diseases. As the global free trade system is expanding and the international distribution mechanism of animals as well as milk and meat products is streamlined and becomes more speedy, the recent moves of international scientific studies are the projects for establishing advanced diagnosis and prevention methods of zoonotic infections, mainly protozoan diseases, and those for creating the international standard of food safety. In Japan, starting from the problem of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE; mad cow disease), food-related social issues have occurred in quick succession, which include the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), bird flu and other infections caused by animal food and the events of moral degeneracy, such as the

false labeling of producing districts and the use of prohibited food additives. To cope with the social unrest about food safety produced by these problems, the Japanese Government declared that it would be essential to establish social systems for food safety, including the formulation of basic food safety principles, creation of organizations for ensuring food safety, review of related laws and ordinances and adoption of risk analyzing methods. To attain these objectives, it is indispensable to promote advanced scientific studies on food safety and also to develop the professionals who can work internationally to monitor food safety.

Against the background mentioned above, we newly established a graduate doctoral course specializing in animal and food hygiene, the discipline uniting veterinary medicine and animal husbandry, first in Japan, and started the education of advanced human resources in 2004. In other words, we began, in cooperation with the JICA based on our past achievements, to offer scientific support to the developing world in the area of food security, i.e., increase in food production and guarantee of food safety. We also made it one of our priority purposes to further the program aiming at educating international-level people for food security.

In Japan, international cooperation activities have been performed mostly on an individual level. Because of this, it seems that JOCVs and JICA experts were often unable to find jobs after they came back to Japan although they had much experience in overseas activities and a high awareness of the issues, while the problems at the site of their work re-

mained unsolved. In the university, too, activities for international cooperation were not very systematic but were on the level of respective researchers, and the application of these activities to the curriculums was not sufficient.

In the cooperative and unifying project mentioned above, a lecturers' organization will be created by the researchers with correct knowledge of and high-level experiences and achievements in international cooperation, and human resource development will be carried out for undergraduate and graduate students as well as for young researchers using curriculums on international cooperation. In addition, the project will accept JOCVs and JICA experts into our graduate school to educate researchers, university lecturers and professional engineers with a high awareness of international cooperation activities. We believe this is the only way to develop real human resources who can take part in international cooperation systematically and continuously. In 2006, we introduced a special graduate admission system for the JOCVs and JICA experts experienced in international cooperation; we grant a student loan to these people and exempt them from repayment of the loan if they participate in international cooperation activities after completion of the graduate course, thereby promoting the development of international cooperation specialists.

The university will continue its activities for food safety in the future in concert with the JICA in the field of veterinary medicine, agriculture and animal husbandry. If you have interest in our initiatives, please visit our website:

<http://www.obihiro.ac.jp>