



# ARI Retreat

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My name's Ngan, a JDS fellow from Vietnam. Surely, a lot of curiosity arose in your mind about an agriculture tour in Tochigi, Japan. Let me share the interesting experiences I had on this trip.

The fact is, the countryside of Japan is peaceful where there are many people working hard for clear purposes. The Agriculture Rural Institution (ARI) regions are making efforts to contribute to society through high-quality agricultural products without contamination from radioactive and chemical substances.

My group has 24 members including the leader, Paul. The scientific working program held over four days helped us understand the value of labor in today's life. I worked from 6:30am to 4pm and had lunch together with ARI staff and other international volunteers. The work that I undertook includes: collecting leaves, applying the compost to the soil, collecting stones in the fields, consolidating rice husk, and making chicken feed. In addition, there is other work here such as big feed, vegetable washing and slaughtering chicken.

What impressed me the most here were the people and their hard-working spirit.

I love the morning meeting from 9:10am to 10am every day because this event helps workers continue to nurture belief in their work. They attended shared prayers, exercises, and lectures including presentations and dialogues. Additionally, there was respect shown through reviewing the work of the previous day, giving announcements, reports, introduction of newcomers, and reminders to all members of the organization. Therefore, I highly appreciated the scientific works and their creativity.

Luckily, at the time we arrived, we had a total of 16 countries represented. Volunteers worked very seriously and carefully and it is valuable that they love this agricultural work. I was fascinated during the round table talk on the first night because this was a chance to communicate with friends from all over the world such as Haiti, Estimo, Brazil, etc. whom I have never had the opportunity to meet and understand their culture. This trip has significant meaning for me because of the chance for making more new friends and understanding others' lives. Moreover, I understood that volunteers came here to learn and share knowledge in order to apply clean farming models to their countries. This will

contribute to the development of their country when they return.

Not only that, I am also more interested in the warmth felt in working groups, including cooking and cleaning together in the mornings and evenings. It seemed there was no distance between us in terms of the geographical and cultural differences. I love all dishes cooked by friends from the Philippines, Thailand, China, and Korea. We also had time to sit and listen to each other in order to share funny stories, music, tones and languages from different countries. I have never forgotten these wonderful memories.

To sum up, my biggest harvest in this trip is that I understand the value of labor. When you work here, you experience this value with dirty hands, dirty cloths, and sweat.

However, everything you do is rewarded by your labor, including meals with vegetables planted by your own hands, and a good night's sleep after a day of hard work. It helped me to get rid of the walls of my apartment and library and enjoy more fresh air and learn more new stories.

The second interesting thing is good friends. After ending of the trip, 24 of us, and even the people working in rural camps, have still continued to meet each other and exchange photos and stories on Facebook or via email. It has motivated us to keep returning to the farm again in the future. This means that all of them had success of this trip.

I would like to say thank you to the JDS program and my travelling companions. Especially, thanks to Paul, who is the best leader with attentive preparations and who took care of all of us carefully. Thank you Paul very much. Wishing happiness and health throughout your life to all.

LE Thi Thanh Ngan

