

“Thank you for the love of all” – Iwate Prefecture School Agriculture Club Convention Opinion Presentation (July 30, 2012)

A student of Iwate Prefectural Tonoryokuho High School, who is receiving a Kirin “kizuna” scholarship, made an appearance in the Opinion Presentation Section at the Iwate Prefecture School Agriculture Club Convention on July 3, 2012, which is the Iwate Prefecture primary for the National Future Farmers of Japan Convention. The Kirin SCJ “kizuna” scholarship started awarding stipends from October 31, 2011, to high school students enrolled in prefectural agricultural high schools and those on agricultural courses of prefectural high schools in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. This is a scholarship from Save the Children Japan and the Kirin Group that have a desire to cherish the opportunities to learn of children who will support the future development of the disaster-hit areas.

The Future Farmers of Japan, which is the sponsor organization of this convention, is an association of School Agriculture Clubs (SAC) that were created in 1948 as independent and voluntary organizations of agricultural high school students under the new high school system established after the war. The National Future Farmers of Japan Convention is an occasion to present various opinions such as the thoughts on agriculture, ideas about the environment and the stimulation of local communities, as well as care and welfare. At this convention, Ms. Kikuchi, a first grade student of Iwate Prefectural Tonoryokuho High School who is studying agriculture while receiving the Kirin SCJ “kizuna” scholarship, gave a presentation about her feelings of gratitude and her thoughts about agriculture based on her experience of the tsunami during the Great East Japan Earthquake.



Ms. Kikuchi, Iwate Prefectural Tonoryokuho High School

“Thank you for the love of all”

There are some people I would like to say “thank you” to.

One of them is my grandfather who enjoys his home garden. I have helped him with this home garden since I was little. We grew a variety of vegetables. In spring, we plant potatoes. In summer, we harvest mini tomatoes and green peppers.

It was very difficult for me when I first helped out. We planted various vegetable seeds and seedlings, and went to the mountain to pick up fallen leaves to turn into compost. Carrying heavy loads and digging up the soil; the work that involved us always moving our bodies was very hard. To be honest, I did not like helping out.

However, my grandfather was completely engrossed in the agriculture work with a happy smile.

I asked him, “Why do you seem so happy when the work is so hard?”

He replied, “Because it is enjoyable to grow something large.”

I could not understand what was so enjoyable. Nevertheless, when I saw the vegetables that had become big, I began to have a wish of “please grow fast.” I came to understand little by little what was enjoyable. I also came to think that I would like to grow various vegetables with my own hands in the future.

I would also like to say “thank you” to the great many people who supported us after the earthquake.

At the moment of the earthquake, I was in the gymnasium in the middle of club activities. At first, I did not know what had happened. When I went outside immediately after being surprised by the really great shaking, I ran to the primary shelter about 800 meters away with the children of the neighboring elementary school. I was almost in tears from the feelings of dread of not knowing what was happening, but when I saw the elementary school children that I was escaping with, I became fully concentrated on the idea that “I must be strong. We have to get away to the shelter.”

I arrived at the shelter, but it became full with people really quickly so I started to move on up higher to the secondary shelter.

“Has everyone been able to evacuate?”

As I became concerned and looked back, I could see a black sheet of spray rising up, so I ran up even higher to the national highway. When I looked back again after finally reaching the highway in desperation, I saw that the tsunami had swallowed up not only the elementary school and junior high school where I still have so many memories, but almost all of Unosumai-cho in Kamaishi City where I lived. At Kamaishi-Higashi Junior High School, the places where about 70% of students lived were lost, with people even now living in temporary housing.

My house was flooded up to the first floor. We had no electricity for one month after the earthquake and also no water for three months. We had to go to my grandfather's house to fetch water, which was very inconvenient.

In addition, because the school buildings had been washed away, we spent a year renting a building in a school in the city. It was not possible to have the final sports day we were all looking forward to or the festival called "Kamaishi Yoisa" that I had wanted to participate in since I was in the first grade of junior high school. Our graduation ceremony was also held in a rented school building. The tools for our club activities had also all been washed away, so I was really sad.

At that time, thanks to the support we received from people all over the country, I was able to regain my energy and to do my best. Together with the people who had come to volunteer, I also participated in efforts to plant tulip bulbs received from the Dutch Consulate on our local flower road. This spring, I went to see the tulips beautifully blossoming along the roadside. This made me really happy.

Mayor of Osaka at that time knew we were unable to go on school trips due to the earthquake, so gave us a present of a school trip. That time I spend with my friends was the best treasure.

Then, in summer last year, when everyday life had started to return to normal little by little, I took part in a full day experience of Tonoryokuho High School. I had heard from a cousin that "agricultural high school is fun," so I had decided to take part previously. I was surprised at the amount of tomatoes being cultivated in the greenhouses and it was really fun to measure their sugar content, which was something I had never done before. At this time, I could understand the fun of growing vegetables and my feelings developed even stronger about wanting to definitely study agriculture at this school. I thought that I would like to experience the pleasure of growing vegetables in my grandfather's home garden.

However, there were also fears about radioactive contamination in home gardens, so the place became much lonelier than before the earthquake. This is a very regrettable thing for me. So my goal now is to learn many things relating to agriculture in my next three years at high school, to recover the day when I can enjoy making vegetables with my grandfather and to revive home gardens.

Moreover, I would like to find work helpful in the reconstruction of Kamaishi in the future. I also want to actively participate in volunteer activities and to work hard so that I can bring smiles to the faces of many people. My philosophy is to challenge anything with a feeling that I will never give up.

In the disaster prevention education that I have received, the slogan was to "be the one who can help others rather than the one who needs help." I feel that it is my mission to deliver the "love" that I have received from many people to a lot of other people.

My grandfather taught me the toughness and joy of agriculture.

I am really grateful to my family who have support me in attending Tono, and especially my father and older brother who come to pick me up after work every day.

Then there are the volunteers who have given hope to us who have lost a great many important things.

I would like to learn agriculture over the next three years believing in myself who never gave in to that great tsunami while enjoying the “love” of many people.
