

UPDATE 2013: CONTINUING TO HARVEST "KIBOU" FOR JAPAN

Back in 2011, Orange Coast Optimist Club and Tanaka Farms wanted to do their part in helping the people of Japan after the devastating events that took part in March of that year. Recognizing that food is one of the critical resources that would allow Japan to overcome and move forward, the Walk the Farm event was the vehicle used to help raise these funds. We are proud to say that 100% of the funds raised at the past two "Walk the Farm" events were donated to various farmers in Japan to assist them in rebuilding their nation.

It has been two years since the magnitude 9.0 earthquake hit Japan, which unleashed a tsunami that hit the northeastern coast and later triggered a nuclear crisis. Many are still grappling with how to move forward, including the twenty-four farmers that we have been supporting by way of the Walk the Farm funds. Fifteen of these original twenty-four farmers are still in communication with us. Because of their plight, proceeds from Walk the Farm 2013 will go to these fifteen farmers.

Continued on page two

The majority of farms in Japan are small in size and depend largely upon family members to work the land. Because of the small size of these farms, the vast majority of them belong to Cooperatives (Co-ops), which allows them to get better prices on their inputs that they require and to market their produce. Through this arrangement, a strong bond is created among the members and in many instances the farmers help one another to tend their farms.

In most cases, the farmers must wait for the Japan government to redistribute the land. This "plan" could take up to five years, as the debris must be moved and disposed of, the salt must be removed from the soil, irrigation systems need to be rebuilt, farmers need to decide if they plan to farm again or not, and electricity, communication, and water need to be restored to these areas.

Once the land is redistributed, farmers will need to not only rebuild their home, but purchase farm equipment and build farming structures, as well as till the land.

**Continue the HOPE...
Join Us For
WALK THE FARM 2013
Saturday, JUNE 15, 2013
9 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Tanaka Farms
5380 University Drive, Irvine, CA**



Inspired by the resilience of the people of Japan after the devastating events that took place in March 2011, the Orange Coast Optimist Club and Tanaka Farms wanted to do their part to help. Recognizing that food is one of the critical resources that will allow Japan to overcome and move forward, 100% of the funds raised at our last "Walk the Farm" event were donated to some farmers in Japan to assist them in rebuilding their nation.

Incorporated into the "Walk the Farm" logo is the kanji for "kibou," which means HOPE. We wanted to Harvest HOPE for Japan!

Visit
www.walkthefarm.com
for more information.

Letters From Some of Our Farmers

Here are several letters that we have received from the farmers we are helping: (translated and re-phrased):

Tsuneo and Kiyohiko lived in the Idohama community in Sendai, less than a mile from the coast of the Pacific Ocean. They were home when the earthquake hit and, when they received the tsunami warning, assisted in transporting elderly neighbors to the evacuation center.

When they returned to their home, they found the front side of the bottom floor of their home completely gone. Now in their 60s, they are not sure what they plan to do next -

try to rebuild their farm and home, or lease their land and plant their "roots" elsewhere.

Fall has arrived and the Japanese zelkova, ginko, and maple have changed their colors and I feel the reality of the second Fall after the disaster.

It has been one year since the Association of Group Relocation and the Sendai city government began the discussion of our 103 displaced households. The "walls" of laws and regulations are so high that we haven't seen much movement. Because of this, one-by-one we are seeing our neighbors make the decision to leave the area. Currently there have been 20 households that have left and we have also made the decision to move and to acquire a place for farming 5km from our original house. We have not started construction on our house, since financing this is still an issue.

We are told that construction of homes in the Idohama area where we once lived

and farmed could begin in April 2013. But with all of us losing our homes and farming equipment, we feel it will take a while to rebuild the community. The individual farmers will now have to create co-ops in order to continue farming. But the hope of restarting our farms is something to look forward to.

Our four families are all healthy and we have been able to grow vegetables for ourselves with the support that you have sent us.

Again, we appreciate your kindness deeply,

Tsuneo O.

Thank you very much for your generous support. We lost the storage shed where our rice was stocked, as well as the materials, fertilizers, and machines when the tsunami hit. We are currently trying to rebuild our inventory in order to start farming again.

We are moving forward. We will do our best.

Kiyohiko O.



Yukikazu and her husband decided not to rebuild their home. Their home was 11 years old when it was hit by the tsunami; they still have to pay off the mortgage, even though their home was demolished. She and her husband are haunted with the memory of a neighbor who was found dead two months after the tsunami in their kotatsu (warming unit that sits below the floor).

My mother has been living in my son's house with her grandchildren since the disaster. We were hopeful to move with her under the Government's Group Relocation plan. Unfortunately, at the end of August 2012, the Sendai government informed us that this was not a possibility. Therefore, we have been looking for a house that we all can live in together.

Please pray that we will be able to find a house by spring and then start to farm vegetables for ourselves.

Yukikazu O.

The tsunami completely destroyed the home of the Kazuo and Noriko. Also, living in the Idohama community, they



were able to escape the disaster; however, they have nothing but memories of their home and past lives. Noriko-san commented, "The day the tsunami hit was the blackest day of my life. I lost all hope and will to live. But when the volunteers that came out to help clean up the debris in the days that followed, this gave me hope." She is now glad to be alive.

We are so thankful for your financial support. We truly appreciated your visit (Glenn and Shirley Tanaka, Dwayne and Stacey Yoshinaga, and Jolene Backman traveled to Japan to meet some of the farmers that have received funds from Walk the Farm) last year, especially with America having its own troubles. Even

Continued on page three

though it was a short visit, it was great to meet you and to be able to share our story.

We were surprised to receive your financial support once again this year. Thank you very much.

The farm in Idohama is just like you saw it last year; there has been no progress. We are borrowing farm land from my family and making vegetables for us to eat.

*We pray for your health.
Kazuo and Noriko M.*

Note from Takeshi and Dorrie Takazawa:

Dorrie and I visited Takao S., the strawberry farmer in Watari in December 2012. He has rebuilt his house in the midst of flattened fields damaged by the tsunami. Takao-san started from a couple hundred seeding plants growing it to 15,000 strawberry stocks over the summer. The day before we visited him, he had his first harvest of eight cases. He is calling it "mohitotsu," or one more. He gave us a dozen strawberries to taste. We then understood why he calls his strawberries this. They were firm and very sweet...and we wanted "one more." Because of a back injury Takao had over 10 years ago, he has been using the bench method (raised planter boxes) to grow his strawberries. Watari was known for having excellent soil, but since the soil has been damaged by salt since the tsunami, no one has been able to begin farming. The underground water is also damaged by the salt.

Takao-san kept saying that you can't dwell on what has already happened. He said that he could not afford to not grow strawberries for two years. All of his notes and records of his farming

over the years had washed away with his house, including his machinery and equipment. But instead of waiting for the Government Relocation Plan that was to include full benefits, he decided to rebuild his greenhouse on his own. Many volunteered to help him. When we visited him, he was installing a heating system inside the greenhouse in preparation for the cold winter. He was going to use the underground water to heat the house, since it doesn't matter if the water contains salt or not. The soil would not be affected by this method. He plans to harvest six times between now and June 2013. Takao-san is producing these strawberries as a thank you to all the people who helped his community through this disaster. ■



Visit www.ocoyouth.org

Jabber from the Editor

Photos by: **Dorrie and Takeshi Takazawa**

For most of the farmers in Japan, even though their land is clear of debris, they still cannot farm because the government is still working on a re-zoning plan. Some farmers have committed suicide due to depression. Others have relocated to start over again. Some have found other work and have made the decision not to return to farming. And then there are others who are still waiting in limbo, hoping to return to their home and farm again. The farmers in the Fukushima area, are still dealing with the stigma of the radiation. They are still not able to sell their crops as easily as they did before.

The farmers that we are helping, as noted in their letters, remain hopeful.

People helping people: This is the spirit---and at the heart---of the Walk the Farm events...harvesting hope for a brighter future.

Stacey Yoshinaga (Editor)



Walk the Farm 2013

Saturday, June 15, 2013

Check-in Anytime Between 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Tanaka Farms

5380 University Drive
Irvine, CA 92612

Take a leisurely 1.5 mile walk around Tanaka Farms and sample some of the farm's fresh fruits and vegetables along the way. This fundraiser will help rebuild farms in Japan that were devastated by the earthquake / tsunami on March 11, 2011. Even though it has been over two years since the disaster, many farmers still have no idea when they will be able to return to feeding their nation. Let us not forget these farmers and their struggles. 100% of the net proceeds from this fundraiser will be distributed to a number of farmers in Japan.

Dog Owners!

Check-in between noon and 2 p.m...you and your dog are invited to come out and enjoy the Walk. Sorry absolutely no early check-in for dog walkers. Dogs MUST be on a leash at all times during the Walk.

OCO Helping Farms Feed Families

A registered 501c(3) non-profit organization - Tax ID 33-0395041

Walker - \$20

Dog - \$5

T-Shirt \$10

Sponsorship Opportunities
Also Available

- On-line Registration Only -

REGISTER BY JUNE 1

WalkTheFarm.com

(due to limited space,
walkers MUST pre-register)

For more information:

Walk@WalkTheFarm.com

949-653-2100 x202

Orange Coast Optimist is affiliated with Optimist International, a world-renowned organization. Optimist clubs throughout the world are dedicated to the scholastic, physical, moral, and civic development of the youths in every community