

Rak Kan ORANGE COAST OPTIMIST

Special Edition - "Kibou" - Harvesting Hope for Japan

COURAGE...STRENGTH...INSPIRATION

Heartfelt and gracious, the recipient farmers of our "Walk the Farm" donations commented that these funds have provided them the *courage* and *strength* to move forward. These farmers were extremely upbeat and anxious to share their stories, as they were grateful to be alive, and all felt they didn't want to be forgotten. They saw this as a time to *revive* and move forward. Truly, their courage and strength are an inspiration of "*hope*" for the future.

Twenty-four farmers located in Sendai and Fukushima, Japan, directly received funds from the "Walk the Farm" event sponsored by the Orange Coast Optimist Club and Tanaka Farms. These farmers were hit by the magnitude 9.0 earthquake, which unleashed a tsunami and a wall of water that hit Japan's northeastern coast, and later triggered a nuclear crisis.

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.

Meet some of our farmers...

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

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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! ■

Continue the HOPE...

Join Us For

WALK THE FARM 2012

JUNE 16

9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Tanaka Farms

5380 University Drive

Irvine, CA

949.653.2100 ext. 202

■ **March 2012
Issue 1**

completely gone. The contents of their first floor are no longer there; instead, debris from other homes and businesses in their community was deposited by the surging currents. The piano that once sat in their living room was never found. The barn and all its tools and equipment are gone as well.



The second floor of their home is still accessible, with all the contents still intact. Their house is one of three that is still standing, all uninhabitable, and it is hard to imagine that it was once sitting in a neighborhood of numerous other homes.

They own their land that they once used to farm rice and vegetables. In their 60s, they have still to make a decision as to what they plan to do next – try to rebuild their farm and home, or lease their land and plant their “roots” elsewhere.

Yukikazu and her husband have decided not to rebuild their home that was also located



in the Idohama community. Their home was 11 years old when it was hit by the tsunami; they still will have to pay off the mortgage, even



though their home will be demolished. Like the home of Tsuneo and Mariko, the structure of Yasuko’s home is still standing. However, 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). Six-foot water marks line the walls on the first floor of their home. A second and a third set of lines can be seen below the 6-foot lines, obvious that water had been at a constant level for some time.

Yasuko commented, “They must live positively for the sake of all the people who unfortunately lost their lives in the tsunami.” She plans to borrow land space from her uncle, to farm vegetables. Whether this will be enough to make a living is somewhat doubtful. Her husband has a second job, working for the government.

The tsunami completely destroyed the home of the Miura’s. Also, living in the

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A Letter From One of Our Farmers

Dear Walk the Farm Supporters,

I am writing this letter to express my deep appreciation for your kind donation we received. After the earthquake, we were lucky enough to stay at our relative’s place (they have remodded the garage into a room for us), but we never imagined to receive such incomparable support from strangers who we never met before.

[Our neighbors] told us that this is a “gift from God.” I truly believe that your fundraiser event to help everybody in needs is an “act of God.”

The moment when I saw the Tunami pressing toward the school ground where we evacuated to is still printed in my mind. When we desperately ran up the stairs of the building for our life and looked down and saw the “hell,” I thought to myself that there is “no God” in this world. However, when I met the hard working volunteers during my stay at the shelter and Baptist Church in Shiogama, and saw all the support goods and money pouring in from all over the world, I quickly changed my mind that God is always with us.

I am grateful and realized that I must live positive for the sake of the unfortunate people who lost their lives. I plan to save and use your donation money when we are able to move into a new house and start cultivating vegetables again.

Thank you again for all of your kind and warm support.

Yukikazu



Harvesting "HOPE" For These Farmers and 14 Others...

Orange Coast Optimist Club and Tanaka Farms

Walk the Farm 2012

A Fundraiser to Help Rebuild Farms in Japan

100% of the proceeds will be given to a select number of farmers in Japan

Saturday, June 16, 2012

Tanaka Farms

5380 University Drive, Irvine, CA 92612

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

Take a leisurely 1.5 - mile walk around the Tanaka Farm and sample some of the farm's fresh fruits and vegetables along the way.

<p>REGISTER: www.walkthefarm.com Walkers must pre-register due to limited space Registration begins April 1 Deadline to Register June 1</p>	<p>Walker \$20 Dog \$5 T-Shirt \$10 Dog Bandana . . . \$7</p>	<p>Dog Owners! Check-In Between 1 - 2 p.m. You and your dog are invited to enjoy the Walk Dogs MUST be on a leash throughout the Walk</p>
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- For More information: email us at walk@walkthefarm.com -

Currently Accepting Applications For Sponsors
 Please contact Glenn Tanaka at glenn@tanakafarms.com
 or (949)653-2100 ext. 202

Special Thanks to our Walk the Farm 2011 Event Sponsors: Orange County Nikkei Jr. Golf, Strawberry Growers of So. Cal., Suburban Optimist Club, 12th Grade Octagons, Union Bank Airport Branch, Orange County Produce, Toyota, Panasonic Avionics, Coast Produce, Colors Inc. ScreenPrinting, Gary Fukushima, Higashi Family Foundation, Long Beach Judo Dojo, MSL Advertising Products, Steve Latham The O Hole Golf Group, The Rafu Shimpo, So Cal Portable Restrooms, Tanaka Family, Yada Family, Ernst and Young - Michael Okabayashi, Itano Family, Ito Farms and Family, James Real Estate Management, Inc., Gregg Maedo and Associates, Magarro Farms, Ne Co - The Nakamoto Family, Orion Tanaka Family, Phoenix PDQ Inc - The Young Family, Yoshinaga Family, 10th Grade Octagons, OCO Jr. Optimists, OCO Cub Scout Pack 214, OC Baking Co., Orowheat, Wonder/Host-ess, Okuma Enterprises, World Chemical USA, Hawaiian Sweet Islands - Rick Kane, Kimura Family, Kings Hawaiian

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

Mr. Miura was working a second job, but lost it after the tsunami, as the business was also affected by the tsunami. The Miura's plans for the future are still pending.

Motivated by his pride and his determination to overcome the disaster, Takao is the only one in his Co-op, located in the Watari area of the Miyagi Prefecture, who is starting to rebuild his home. Of the 26 strawberry farmers in the Co-op, only 10 have plans to return to farming in the area. Their community was completely demolished by the tsunami.

Today the land sits barren, as the debris has all been cleared and placed in flat piles. The Japan government is build-



ing a plant in which to burn all the debris from this area only. The plant is anticipated to be completed in April, and it is expected to take three years to process all the debris.

Takao also plans to start planting

strawberries in April, with the hope of harvesting them in November... anxious to move forward before he loses his knowledge of this skill. His strawberries were known for their quality and sweetness. Takao mentioned that with this disaster, they saw the kindness of people. The first people to contact them were their strawberry customers. His hope is to start growing again as a sign of recovery, which will allow them to give back to all who helped them rebuild.

The others in the Co-op, such as Keiji and Hideo, must wait for the Japan



government to redistribute the land before they can start farming again.

These farmers grew their strawberries in



greenhouses, thus the area was a sea of greenhouses. During the clean-up efforts after the

tsunami, the plastic from the greenhouses was never found.

Posed with a different situation, the farmers in the Fukushima area did not experience damage to their home or crops; but because of the stigma of the radiation, they are not able to sell their crops as easily as they did before. These farmers are located 60 km from the nuclear power plant, 20 km outside of the government-designated evacuation area. Radiation levels are constantly monitored in this area, even though it is clear of danger. Most in this area had to make a decision whether they planned to stay or leave. In most cases, the young families decided to leave for fear that the air quality was not safe for their children. The farming families decided to stay, as this is their livelihood.

Kohno took over their farm when her husband hurt his back a year ago. They grow cherries, apples, peaches, pears, and grapes. Her husband is a well-known and honored farmer for his cutting-edge farming and fertilizing techniques. Once revered for their quality fruit, they are finding that the radiation stigma is making it difficult to sell their products.



Extra precautions must be made by the farmers in this area, which include removing the bark from fruit trees and power-washing the trees. Branches cut from the trees cannot be burned, as the ash would then float in the air, potentially spreading any radiation that might have been in the wood.

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Kohno and her husband have to make a decision whether they plan to continue farming or to look for other options. But Kohno was most thankful that people from another country cared about them and were willing to help people that they never met. They were not forgotten in this disaster.

Yukie just had a baby in January of this year and already she is back to tending their farm. Living with four generations in her home, she is running the farm growing a form of spinach, komatsuna. She also grows rice (which is mainly for those in her Co-op) as well as grapes, apples, and other vegetables.



Shoichiro snow plows the local roadways and started farming leased land a couple of years ago. Currently, he isn't quite able to see the future of his grape orchard. But because of his helpfulness to his fellow farmers, they are all willing to help him and motivate him to continue through this setback.



Although it is hard to fathom what these individuals experienced, one can only "hope" for a brighter future for all of them.



Graveyards in the tsunami stricken areas were destroyed, with headstones washed away. This graveyard in Watari is the only thing in the area that has been rebuilt since the tsunami. Family members pieced this graveyard together, re-purchasing damaged or lost grave stones.



Above - Typical damage caused by the tsunami. Note that the second floor of most homes are still intact.



Left - Temporary housing units for those who lost their homes. Those who moved into these units must now pay for food and electricity. Many have little or no income due to lost jobs.



Above - Farmers in Fukushima must power wash their trees, as a precaution and as a requirement to be allowed to sell the fruit.



Right - Vending machine in Fukushima which sells locally grown fruit.

Jabber from the Editor

Meeting these farmers and hearing what they went through, made me think about how I would have reacted to such a disaster? Hard to imagine and even phathom . . . thus it made me respect our new friends in Japan - these farmers and the many others who experienced this life-changing experience. And yes, I think all of us who traveled to Japan to meet these farmers can honestly call them our friends, as we were able to interact with them (with an interpreter of course - Mr. and Mrs. Takazawa). In our own way, we felt their anguish, fighting back tears as we heard their tales. . . but truly in the end, it was inspiring to see how they have revitalized the drive to move forward.

Makes the statement, "don't sweat the small stuff" come to life. All the "drama" that we seem to get sucked into . . . is really a waste of time. We should be appreciating each other and truly be practicing the Optimist Creed:

. . . To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

On behalf of those who traveled to Japan (Glenn and Shirley Tanaka, Jolene Backman, and Dwayne and Stacey Yoshinaga),

Stacey Yoshinaga (Editor)

Visit www.ocoyouth.org

Photos by: **Glenn Tanaka**

Orange Coast Optimist Club

Newsletter

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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