

Opening Address

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Distinguished Guests, Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Symposium Organizing Committee, I have the honor and privilege to open the International Symposium on "Sustainable Agricultural Development Compatible with Environmental Conservation in Asia", which is organized by the Japan International Research Center for Agricultural Sciences, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan, in cooperation with the National Agriculture Research Center, the National Institute of Agro-Environmental Sciences and the National Research Institute of Agricultural Economics.

Above all, I would like to extend my cordial welcome to all the guests and the participants, in particular to those who came to Japan from abroad.

JIRCAS was established in October 1993 as a result of the reorganization of the former Tropical Agriculture Research Center to further promote research for the development of agricultural technology to cope with the changes in the world situation.

The research activities of JIRCAS encompass all the fields of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Needless to say, this expansion of the research fields could not have been achieved without the strong support of all the institutes affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) of Japan.

In addition, the research activities of JIRCAS are not limited to collaboration with developing countries in the tropics and subtropics but cover wider geographic regions such as cool areas and temperate zones.

One of the major activities of JIRCAS is to dispatch research scientists to overseas research institutions located in developing countries to conduct collaborative research work on various subjects relating to agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

In addition, to support these activities, JIRCAS consolidated the structure of research at the Center in Tsukuba and at the Okinawa Subtropical Station of the Center by promoting advanced studies relating to biotechnological fields, computer simulation of selected economic and environmental processes relevant to the developing countries, etc.

Another important activity of JIRCAS is to hold international symposia for exchanging information and ideas among different countries and scientists. These symposia have been held each year, covering various subjects of agricultural research.

The present symposium is the fourth symposium organized by JIRCAS and it will provide the opportunity to discuss the current situation and future prospects of sustainable agricultural development in Asia.

In no other part of the world is the need to promote sustainable development of agriculture compatible with the conservation of the environment more acute than in Asia. Indeed the remarkable increase of food production achieved for the last thirty years which enabled to meet the swelling demand of the large population of Asia has often resulted in the depletion and degradation of environmental resources. The rapid growth of the urban sector in the region has aggravated the food production basis. The Asian researchers are faced with the daunting task of developing technologies or policies that maximize the use of dwindling land, water, soil and biota resources but still enable to maintain a certain measure of self-sufficiency in major food commodities to avoid a disruption of the market in the form of large agricultural imports. To meet this challenge, a few approaches can be considered. One may be the improvement and upgrading of existing technologies, including the selection of cropping systems better harmonized with the natural ecosystems to promote the utilization of complex biological interactions, the recycling of the resource base and judicious use of agrochemicals. In an other approach, efforts should be made to develop new varieties of crops more resistant to biotic and abiotic constraints through the application of biotechnology as well as new materials. Some may suggest an economic or regulatory approach through which environmental costs would be internalized and a better balance between food production and the environment could be obtained.

This symposium attempts to highlight these issues and to discuss possible solutions, that would simultaneously enable to achieve sustainable food production and the preservation of the environment. I sincerely hope that this symposium will be significant and useful in contributing to the development of effective measures for the promotion of sustainable agriculture compatible with the conservation of the environment in Asia.

I also hope that our friendship and cooperation will be further strengthened through our joint effort in reaching this common target of immense importance.

Thank you.