

Welcome Remarks

Masamichi Saigo

Director General, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Research Council Secretariat

.....

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your introduction. I'm Masamichi Saigo, Director General of the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Research Council Secretariat. Upon the opening of this international symposium, I would like to say a few words of greetings. As President Iwanaga mentioned, today we are delighted to have a lot of speakers, especially Ms. Tutwiler, the Director General of Bioversity International.

And touching upon the current situation surrounding the agricultural industry, as you know, on October 5th, the TPP negotiation has reached its conclusion. In this respect, here in Japan and not only here in Japan, I'm certain across the world, globalization of food is something that will be promoted even further. This is something we can't avoid for better or for worse. So, we should take this opportunity as a big chance and communicate attractive features of Japanese food and its food culture. And for that, our Ministry is promoting the export of Japanese agricultural products and helping companies to go overseas with those products.

The impact of TPP upon the Japanese agricultural industry cannot be avoided. But, in order to alleviate negative impact, the government is working in earnest to come up with a variety of measures. And the government is hoping to show such package of measurements as soon as possible. But, even if TPP partners have reached an agreement, it doesn't mean that from tomorrow we will be seeing cheap imports already. We need to see those participating countries to ratify TPP and, for that, it would take additional one to two years, and then tariffs will be removed over time. It's not overnight. So, it won't start from tomorrow. However, we have to already start thinking about how to enhance our measures. And that's what we are doing right now.

So, looking at the world, there are a variety of predictions, but it is for certain that the population is going to grow. In 2050, the global population is projected to reach 9.6 billion, which is 1.3 times the current global population. Emerging countries will continue to grow their economic growth and their income levels are going to continue to improve, which means that the global food demand will continue to improve.

And on the other hand, as you know, we are feeling the impacts of climate change and that's affecting our harvest. There are some people who deny global warming and climate change, but we shouldn't be bothered with such an argument. Here in Japan, there are some impacts already being seen coming from climate change, which means that the rice quality in the western part of Japan is coming down. And also, the fish yield is coming down as well, and the types of fish we are catching are changing as well. And I'm sure that those changes are being seen across the world.

Back in May, in Turkey, the G20 ministerial meeting for agriculture was held and they shared the importance of global food security and issues of nutrition. So towards the G20 Summit, the agricultural ministers agreed to put together an action plan on food security and a sustainable food system. As President Iwanaga said, today's theme is why quality matters, because "quality" is the keyword. And of course, there may be different definitions of quality, but from my perspective, I would say that our Ministry's budget for agricultural research has come down. Therefore, in order to compensate for that decline in the amount of money available, we need to improve the quality of agricultural research. In the globalization of food setting, we need to address the issues of agriculture.

But, agriculture is a very broad area. Land development is one thing, but we also need to look at other important themes related to agricultural growth and development. We also need to improve the value chain so that developing countries can earn more from agricultural activities.

So, in that sense, this symposium is being held in a very timely manner. Although our Ministry does not have much money for international cooperation through CGIAR, we are promoting bilateral research cooperation, and with the JIRCAS at the center, I hope that more international cooperation will be provided to supply solutions to global challenges.

As you may know, with the context of the independent administrative body reforms, there are four such administrative related bodies in Tsukuba. Except for JIRCAS, all others are going to be merged. There was a discussion that JIRCAS be merged as well, but then the final decision is to keep JIRCAS an independent organization without merging with other organizations. And JIRCAS needs to continue to make international contributions in the future and although JIRCAS is not a large organization, JIRCAS is a very agile organization which can respond to the requirements of the world. So, I am just encouraging JIRCAS to do even better in the future. So, today, I would like to thank everybody from the organizing committee to put together this symposium. And today's discussion is not going to end today. I do hope that the research outcome that will be presented today will benefit our future development in the area of agriculture.

So, once again, when it comes to agriculture—agriculture is such a broad area. Site specificity is a term often used. However, at the end of the day, what agriculture is doing is to produce something that we all eat, and we need to look at the value produced by agriculture. For that purpose, we need to improve the quality of agricultural research. And I hope that today there will be an active exchange of information and discussion and that this symposium will be a very fruitful one. With that, I'd like to conclude my remarks. Thank you very much.