Opening Remarks

Ogura, T. Chairman, Agriculture, Forestry
and Fisheries Research Council

Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry it is great pleasure and honor to extend to you my most cordial welcome to Japan. May I also present my deep gratitude to you for complying with my request to attend this Symposium, and to the related agencies of each country for their understanding cooperation.

This Symposium is the very first attemt sponsored by our Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. And that is why it is all the more significant on our part, and I do hope whatever you discuss and achieve at this Symposium will not only contribute to the technological improvement of agriculture in each country of Southeast Asia but to the furtherance of mutual understanding and cooperation among the countries of the region.

Needless to state, in most countries of Southeast Asia the development of agriculture is urgently needed, and it is heartening to know that each country is rendering her untiring effort toward the achievement of the objective.

To such an earnest effort of our neighboring countries, Japan presents her deep respect and it is my firm conviction that Japan will render her cooperation to that effort in every way possible within her means. Because agricultural development is not only the way to raise the living standard of farmers, who represent the greater part of the active population of the countries concerned, but also the foundation to promote economic development for which every country of Southeast Asia is now endeavouring.

Relating to the agricultural development of this region, it is proper to refer to Japanese situation. As it is well known, Japanese agricultural production has expanded, and also is expected to expand in future. However, on the other hand, the demand of food and other farm produce has increased more rapidly in recent years than the agricultural expansion. I dare to say that Japanese demand of food and feed may increase by annual rate of about 3 to 4 per cent while the production may expand only by annual rate of less than 3 per cent. Even at present, Japan is larger importer of agricultural produce than either Great Britain or West Germany. Therefore, the agricultural development of our neighbouring countries is very desirable, also from the standpoint of Japan.

In order to achieve agricultural development in Southeast Asia, there should be various problems to be solved. Of these problems some might be of strategic importance and yet not easy to solve. These problem areas for agricultural development can be divided into two major groups; one is technological improvements and the other is socio-economic improvements. Technological improvements include development of land and water resources, improvement of seed varieties, application of fertilizers, plant protection, mechanization and so on; and socio-economic improvements include farm organizations, administrative organizations, agricultural marketing, land tenure system and so on. These problems including their priorities and sequences must be defined in the context of agricultural development.

These problems of course can not be solved by clear-cut decisions. This is because all these problems, not independent but complementary to one another, are related to the different histories and natural environments of the countries of Southeast Asia. These differences inevitably have some influence upon agricultural development problems.

However, as most Southeast Asian countries are generally trying to transform their traditional agriculture into a modern and dynamic one, they have in this sense certain features in common. Therefore, as to agricultural development there should naturally be some problems common to many countries of the region.

At an advanced stage, with such infrastructures as flood control and irrigation system, the expansion of the area of arable land may be difficult in spite of increasing population, and thus land becomes a limiting factor in farming production. If technological improvements do not occur in this situation, farm production may be stagnant, and it causes such problems as permanent poverty of farmers or occasional national food shortage to arise.

If technological improvements occur even in such agriculture, growth of production can be expected. At this phase the rising yields of crops must be noticeable, as has happened in Japan and Taiwan.

Of course technological improvements depend upon technical and physical inputs such as water, improved seed varieties, fertilizers, pesticides and so on. If the supply of these inputs can be made available, technological improvements may occur in spite of certain defects in the land tenure system, marketing situation, or credit facilities. If growth of output is brought about through such improvements, it must induce old institutions and customs to change and thus to facilitate further technological improvements. Therefore the improvements of farming practices which cause further technological progress must take priority among measures for Southeast Asian agricultural development.

In this case, the fact should be taken into consideration that not only the expansion of arable land may be limited, but also the feasible supply of capital input may be limited, although a high rate of increase in the labor forces is forecast. Therefore the strategy of family farming development can best be designed in promoting "a fuller utilization of land as well as labor." However, if a trend toward fuller utilization of land and labor resulted in lowering labor productivity, farmers would have no intention to increase labor inputs. A shift of the "production function" is therefore necessary without losing their motivation toward intensive farming." Therefore, there should be technological improvements which increase productivity, and it is needless to say that in the background of this there must be organized agricultural research work.

It is risky to apply at will materials and methods developed in other countries. Adaptive research is inevitably needed for local application. On the other hand there might be no urgent need for all developing countries to perform basic research, which has been well developed in the other countries. Some cooperation relating to the necessary basic research for Southeast Asian countries might be efficient. Besides the basic research related to the principles of crop and livestock production, some research problems common to various countries of Southeast Asia could be included in the cooperation scheme.

Therefore, I believe that agricultural research calls for the cooperations of various counries of the region and that there are many research sectors which need such a cooperation.

Upon these criteria the Research Council of our Ministry has keenly felt the need of cooperation for agricultural technological improvements of the Southeast Asian region, and from 1966, the Research Council has launched upon the research activities thereon, although it was in small-scaled. And this Symposium was planned as an integral part of the same activities.

Now, Japan is at the harvest time of rice. Fortunately, she has been blessed with a favourable weather condition this year that our rice crop is expected to be 13 million and 550 thousand tons of brown rice, with per hectare yield of 4.3 tons of brown rice, perhaps the highest record in her history. At such a time, to have been able to invite you to Japan and to hold a Symposium on rice is more heartening to all of us concerned.

In conclusion, may I have the pleasure to request each and every distinguished researchers here assembled to freely and frankly discuss your problems in order to achieve our common objective to march one step forward to the region's agricultural development. And may I convey to you my best wishes for the success of this Symposium, and again my gratitude to the cooperation of related agencies of participating countries to make possible the holding of this Symposium.

And with your permission may I have the honor to declare the inauguration of this Symposium.

I thank you.