

**100 year celebration Agricultural Attaché
network, Wednesday, 3 July 2019**

**100 years anniversary speech:, by Agricultural
Counsellor**

Dear ladies and gentlemen, former and current
colleagues of the agricultural section, dearest friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all here in
the Residence on the occasion of the 100 year
anniversary of the Agricultural Attaché network. An
important moment which justifies a celebration in this
beautiful building.

As you know, the Netherlands is worldwide the second
exporter of agricultural products. In 2018 we exported
a total amount of about 12 trillion yen. Not only food
and flowers, also agricultural technologies, such as
greenhouses, milking robots and seed materials.

For one century, agricultural attaches have been the
eyes and ears for companies. We help them to enter
new markets, solve market access problems, and
promote cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen, for more than 400 year Japan
and the Netherlands have a unique relation in

agriculture. For centuries, Dutch traders brought all kind of products to Japan via Deshima, such as potatoes, flower bulbs, beer, and more exotic products as coffee and chocolate. These products were not used for public consumption, but mostly introduced out of curiosity. Until the Meiji era the Netherlands was for Japan the window to the western Food World.

In the nineteenth century the global trade of agricultural goods changed. Mechanization caused a huge increase of production. Low shipping costs made the world smaller. So thanks to the first and second agricultural revolution agricultural goods could be shipped all over the world. And the Netherlands - with its long tradition as commodity trader, flower and dairy exporter - benefited.

The rise of protectionism after the First World War required more support on the international markets. So the Dutch agro sector requested in 1919 the government to appoint agricultural experts abroad. Because - and here I would like to quote an article from that period - "Agricultural knowledge from the embassies was not always present", *AND* "the provided

information was not always on time and accurate to be useful”.

In 1919 the first agricultural attaché was appointed in Paris, and two years later also in Rome and Berlin. The agricultural attaché network was born!

Japan had to wait 48 year. In July 1967, an agricultural office was opened in Tokyo by former agricultural attaché Mr. Martin van Wijk. And with support of Ms. Dolgoff who is present today.

The world was different at that time. Diplomats used the telex or diplomatic courier to communicate.

Telephone calls were expensive. A physical cable had to connect us.

So what was work like in those days? In 1971 Mr. Martin van Wijk wrote in the 50 years anniversary edition about Japanese trade fairs, and tastings. By the way, work we still do. The Netherlands has been a participant at the Foodex for more than 46 year. But Mr. Van Wijk described also the Japanese working scene. I would like to quote him:

“The Japanese business man only speaks his mother tongue. With the agricultural staff he can communicate in his own language”. And, “When Dutch business men

arrive on the airport, they are welcomed by the agricultural staff, introduced to counterparts and helped with Japanese translation”.

For me two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the English knowledge in Japan has been much improved. My speech can now be held in English. But I also thought “ poor, poor Ms. Dolgoff, Ms. Yamakawa or Mr. Akimoto, all those trips to Narita. So much work”. But I know, you always did it with love and dedication! How different it is today. Today thousands of Dutch business men come in and out, and use limousine busses, trains. We only pick up high level guests as we did in May when minister Schouten came to the G20 in Niigata.

Meanwhile information flows freely. Market information is freely available on the internet - a call home is for free - and a plane ticket to Amsterdam costs only 50.000 yen.

Although my wife and I study very hard to learn Japanese, I still hope that within a few year we can all communicate in our own language, using a translation app.

So over the years, the work of the attaché network has changed. Food companies can do much on their own and don't always need support provided by the government anymore.

Our work shifted to promotion of more sustainable food production based on circular agriculture. Nowadays we focus more on technology, innovation, knowledge exchange and the sustainable development goals. Less money is available for collective food promotion at exhibitions. So the days of a Dutch Food Train - like we did in the eighties - are unfortunately over!

What remains unchanged is our work in the field of market access and policy dialogue. To give you some concrete examples: for many decades, Japanese inspectors are based in the Netherlands. 27 year ago we signed the medfly protocol and started to export paprika's.

And more recently in 2016 we started the agricultural dialogue with MAFF on agricultural innovation. It's about robotics, food waste and electronic certifications. I am very pleased that Mr. Hiranaka and Dr. Kumagai, both of MAFF are here today.

What also remained is the excellent relation with our Dutch food companies. In the preparation of my speech I looked in the archive for pictures. These albums can be seen on the table. I learnt that many sponsors of today, participated in our events also 40 years ago!

These loyal companies and sponsors enables us to enjoy great food from the Netherlands. Cheese, bitter ball, Van Gogh Vodka, pork veal, flowers and French fries. Thank you for making this possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today the Agricultural Attachés and their teams are stationed in 53 Dutch embassies and consulates and their activities cover over 70 countries. We are still growing and a reliant partner for you.

On behalf of my team – who are standing here – and all the former agricultural counsellors and employees, I would sincerely like to thank you all for the fantastic cooperation the last 52 year.

Arigato gozaimashita