

Chapter 2

Hog Lift and Corn from America

How the U.S.-Japan relationship grew out of Iowa's support for Yamanashi

Hog Lift

“Once there were two beautiful lands and two proud peoples separated by a great distance and many differences. This is the story of how a wonderful friendship has blossomed between them.”

These are the opening lines to a beautiful picture book with a unique title: “Sweet Corn and Sushi – The Story of Iowa and Yamanashi” (see picture below). This book, written by Lori Erickson, is less than 30 pages long and can be viewed online, so I would recommend all of my readers to have a look. (<http://www.myfood.jp/ebook/top.html>)

A picture book depicting the friendship between Iowa and Yamanashi



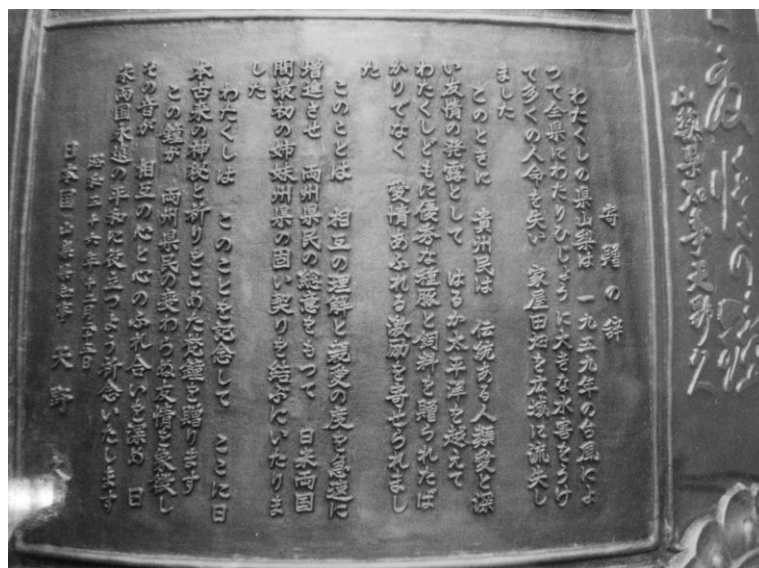
To be honest, before reading this book, I myself had completely forgotten that the first prefecture to form a sister-state bond with the U.S. was Yamanashi. When I visited Iowa, I saw the famous “Bell of Friendship” (which is also featured in Erickson’s picture book) and I fully understood the special connection that exists between Yamanashi and Iowa. However, consumed by the hustle and bustle of everyday life, I must have tucked away this important piece of memory somewhere in the back of my mind. The fault is my own.

And now, faced with the task of giving those food issues we take for granted a more concrete form, the history of U.S.-Japan feed grain trade cooperation is a crucial topic of discussion. The story of the “Iowa Hog Lift” in particular is one we must not omit. Why? Because when people talk about U.S.-Japan relations today, the history of such down-to-earth grassroots cooperation tends to be overlooked, resulting in discussions that focus only on observable, short-term phenomena and jumping to black-and-white conclusions.

You may think it strange for me to bring up China in a discussion about the

U.S. and Japan, but I would like to take this opportunity to introduce an old Chinese saying that goes, “When drinking water, do not forget the one who dug the well.” This saying is not talking about obligations, but rather about voluntary, mutual help when one’s counterpart is faced with a difficult situation – such pure goodwill and action, I believe, are the keys to a long-lasting positive relationship. Now, let us take a look at this history in conjunction with Erickson’s story.

Yamanashi Prefecture gave this Bell of Friendship to Iowa as a token of gratitude in return for the support provided through the Hog Lift



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What Kind of Relief Aid Can We Provide? – Yamanashi’s Typhoon Damage and the Hog Lift

The western part of Japan suffered extensive damage from typhoons during the summer and fall of 2011. About half a century earlier in 1959, great storms such as Typhoon Vera (The Ise Bay Typhoon in Japanese) ravaged many regions of Japan. The war between the U.S. and Japan had just ended in 1945, and for almost 15 years since then, both countries had worked hard to rebuild the people’s livelihoods, but the typhoons of 1959 caused considerable damage to many parts of Japan.

At the time, a man by the name of Master Sergeant Richard Thomas was working for the U.S. Air Force in Japan. When Master Sergeant Thomas heard that Yamanashi had suffered immense damage, he thought about what he could do to assist in the relief effort. Thomas was from Iowa, which was famous for its large hog industry. He thus came up with the idea to send hogs from Iowa to help the typhoon-stricken livestock farmers of Yamanashi.

There are many words in English that describe pigs; grown-up pigs are referred to as hogs, while “pig” is used specifically for the younglings. Swine is a more general term that describes all aspects of pigs.

To be precise, the animals that were sent were breeding hogs, and there are specific names that describe male and female breeding hogs, but we will not go into further detail here, since it is too technical. Some readers may think of the word pork when talking about pigs, but pork only refers to pig meat.

Now, back to sending Iowan hogs by airplane to Japan – today, we may dismiss this with a shrug and say, “What’s the big deal?” However, 50 years ago this was a major project. Even today, this project of airlifting hogs is something of a legend, remembered as the famous Hog Lift – the Flying Pigs Project, as one could say.

The 36 Pigs Arrive in Japan on a U.S. Air Force Plane

Because Master Sergeant Thomas was working for the U.S. Air Force, he

could contact the agricultural attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Japan and get approval from him, which then led to the U.S. Air Force agreeing to provide military aircraft for the hogs – an unbelievable turn of events considering today’s way of doing things. This certainly was a major decision.

The U.S. Military Aircraft that made the Hog Lift possible



On a side note, there is currently an organization called the U.S. Grains Council, which has a branch office in Japan. This organization works with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foreign Agriculture Service to promote the overseas export of grains produced in the U.S. There is no doubt that the Hog Lift served as an important foundational experience for this organization. I will talk about this in greater detail later.

Now, back to the pigs – back then, commercial cargo jets did not yet exist, so the pigs had to be transported using a cargo aircraft owned by the U.S. Air Force, and the aircraft had to make many painstaking stops along the way. Those 36 hogs sent by Iowa as a token of goodwill were placed in specially designed wooden boxes, and they were also treated like VIPs, with a

specialist escorting them and giving them frequent sprays of water so that they did not die of heat. These hogs were sent from Iowa's capital, Des Moines, to Japan on a three-day journey.

The 500,000 Descendants of the Original "Flying Pigs"

Erickson's picture book talks about how the American farmers were very considerate, sending along 1,500 tons of corn so that the hogs, who used to freely eat corn and soybeans in a spacious field back in the U.S. would not be disturbed by any sudden change in their diet. The book also talks about how, in a period of history when ordinary civilians had little freedom of overseas travel, these pigs came all the way to Japan, and how the hogs, upon first arriving in Japan, had a taste of Japanese radishes and carrots. Erickson's book depicts all of these things with a gentle and warm touch.

Unfortunately, one of the original 36 hogs died on its way to Japan, but the remaining 35 lived out their full life spans. The last one died nine years after arriving in Japan, in the midst of the post-war economic boom in Japan. By that time, it is said, the 35 hogs had contributed to the livestock and hog industry of Yamanashi Prefecture and already had about 500,000 descendants.

This was an incredible example of concrete and effective relief measures following a natural disaster. Today, many of the hogs that are bred in Japan are said to share some genes with the hogs of Iowa.

In this way, one can see that the Hog Lift was an embodiment of everyone's good will –not only that of Master Sergeant Thomas, the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Air Force, which immediately understood Thomas' intention and sprang into action, but also that of the farmers who actually donated the hogs that were sent, as well as all the people who took part in transporting the hogs.

A descendant of the original 36 hogs who came to Japan on the Hog Lift, in good care at the Yamanashi Prefectural Livestock Experiment Station



© U.S. Grains Council

From “Hog Exchange” to “People Exchange”

A year after the Hog Lift, in 1960, Iowa and Yamanashi became sister-states. As I mentioned earlier, this was the first sister-state bond between the United States and a Japanese prefecture. The Bell of Friendship that Yamanashi sent Iowa in 1962 is a testament to this bond.

Incidentally, I myself was born in 1960. Thinking of the people’s effort that has existed since the time I was born and how, in the half-century since, Iowa and Yamanashi have been enriching and deepening their interaction in various fields, I am reminded of the importance in life of taking immediate action with whatever we are capable of doing.

One of my favorite expressions is “now or never.” Master Sergeant Thomas is a great example of someone who jumped at a one-in-a-million opportunity and has since gone down in history for this reason. I know nothing of his military career, but it is truly admirable that he accomplished such a great feat during his lifetime.

In addition, one must not overlook the fact that Master Sergeant Thomas’ initiative was not only innovative and new at the time, but it also contributed to the long-term development of U.S.-Japan trade and cooperation across various fields as well as overall expandability.

In the case of the Hog Lift, Master Sergeant Thomas, who originally came up with the idea, was probably just trying his best to do something to help. In that respect, those people and organizations that supported Thomas’ cause and provided assistance, despite miscellaneous difficulties, were also acting out of pure goodwill to do what they could to help.

Oftentimes, once things start moving forward, they progress in all sorts of unexpected directions. In the case of Iowa and Yamanashi, the 35 hogs led to full-fledged interaction between our two countries.

Since then, every governor of Yamanashi Prefecture has visited Iowa. School teachers, artists, entrepreneurs and children have also taken part in this

exchange, contributing to an on-going interaction at the civilian level as well as governmental level. It is widely known that many natives of Yamanashi participate in the annual week-long bicycle race across Iowa called RAGBRAI, while many Iowans have climbed Mount Fuji. As the title of Erickson's picture book "Sweet Corn and Sushi" suggests, vastly different elements from each culture are now freely interacting at all levels.

Young readers may be familiar with a Japanese Manga series by the name of "One Piece." The creator of this series, Eiichiro Oda, once said, "The characters in the Manga leave the artist's hands and start moving about independently." Similarly, one could say that the Hog Lift left the hands of its "creator," Master Sergeant Thomas, and the friendship between Iowa and Yamanashi has since blossomed "independently."

I will return to the topic of hogs once again. Yamanashi's hog industry recovered and prospered by building upon the foundation provided by the hogs sent from Iowa, and subsequently, an increase in the number of hogs led to a greater need for feed grains. This was the next step, whether or not designed by a strategy, but it naturally led to the exporting of U.S. grains. This is an example of one form of development with expandability, as mentioned earlier.

Japan in need of feed grain, the U.S. with surplus grain to export

We have looked at how, thanks to the hard work of Master Sergeant Thomas and others, hogs were delivered to Yamanashi. In the meanwhile, how was the Japanese livestock industry as a whole doing? We will discuss the specific circumstances on the Japanese side in a later chapter, but for now, suffice it to say that, aside from the natural disasters, the Japanese livestock industry during this time was also suffering from a serious shortage of feed grain. This was not a short-term problem, since it was becoming more and more apparent that economic growth and subsequent improvement in people's standards of living would result in a long-term increase in the demand for meat, and that in order to meet such demand, large quantities of feed grain would be necessary for the breeding livestock.

The U.S. at the time was experiencing a boom in the supply of feed grains, and there was a surplus. This meant that the U.S. had the resources and the ability to fulfill Japan's demand quite easily. Even so, one must not forget the wide range of long-term cooperation that had been taking place at the top levels as well as grassroots levels in bridging the psychological and geographical distance between Japan and the U.S. In 1993 when the state of Iowa was devastated by floods, the people of Yamanashi sent \$300,000 to help the Iowans, demonstrating the strong unity between these two lands. The people of Yamanashi no doubt remembered who had helped them out when they were suffering the most.

The previously mentioned U.S. Grains Council was established under these circumstances, in 1960, and its first overseas office was set up in Japan the following year. These are the concluding words in Erickson's picture book:

"Whether you live in Iowa or Yamanashi, know that there are many friends waiting for you half a world away."

This picture book has very strong emotional appeal, but it also conveys a strong message about how something we take for granted first began, as well as how we should think about the future.

Next, we will take a look at how the U.S. reacted to the previously mentioned increase in demand for meat in Japan. As this is one of the major developments that have supported the increase in feed grain imports, as well as Japan's livestock and formula grains industry, it is an important topic to discuss. There are many topics to talk about concerning various products, but here we will focus on eggs and chicken.

Surging Demand for Protein in Postwar Japan

In any given country, the first thing on the minds of agricultural producers is, "How can I sell my produce at the highest price possible?" This is basically what it boils down to, and it is no surprise since people involved in agriculture must make a living somehow. Academics and various organizations may think up additional reasons, but at the end of the day,

regardless of whether we are talking about developed or developing countries, I think this is the agricultural producer's primary concern. If the livelihood of the farmers and their families is at stake, lofty talk is not going to push people into action. The larger the scale of management becomes and the more industrialized farming becomes, the more seriously this problem presents itself.

I mentioned earlier that back in the 1960s the U.S. grain supply exceeded demand. This situation is trouble for the producers – the price goes down, and the farmers need to look for new buyers, but this difficult situation continued in the U.S. for a while. Thus, it was welcome news when standards of living rose in the populous Asian countries and Asian people's eating habits diversified, because that meant a whole new market was opening up.

Japan at the time was finally finished with its physical recovery after World War II and had begun the process of rapid economic growth. Japan was also expecting a rise in meat demand. For all these reasons, Japan was an attractive potential market for the U.S. grain industry. With a more prosperous Japan, the demand for eggs, pork, beef, poultry and milk was also rising rapidly.

The U.S. wanted to export its agricultural produce, especially livestock products and grains, while Japan, due to changes in dietary habits, needed increasing amounts of livestock products. During this period, fueled by large-scale economic growth, many aspects of Japanese life saw dynamic changes. I would like to talk about eggs here as an example of the clear, dramatic effects of advertising, even though eggs were perhaps not as large-scale as pork or beef.

It had always been known through experience that eggs are a good source of nutrients. Many Japanese homes in the 1960s still did not have refrigerators, but eggs can be kept for several days without the use of refrigeration, so if accurate knowledge about how to handle eggs could be spread, one could expect to see a rise in egg demand in Japan. Thus, the American authorities at the time went ahead and conducted campaigns, hosted seminars and made advertisements together with Japanese officials interested in

promoting eggs.

Eggs were Sold Singly in the 1960s

“The History of U.S. Exports of Feed Grains to Japan” in the GAIN Report (JA8521, USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 11/5/2008) cites the following quote by Hubert Dyke, who was directly involved in sales campaigns for eggs in Japan. This illustrates differences in the standard of living and lifestyle between the U.S. and Japan at the time:

In 1964, egg cartons were unknown in Japan. Eggs were sold in bulk, by the egg or by the kilo, and the Japanese housewife had to carry the eggs purchased in her hand. Occasionally, she might put them into her silk scarf folded at the four corners used to carry groceries, books, or any other articles requiring a bag. But the chances of breakage were great, so she often carried them in her hand, which meant that she could only buy two eggs at one time.

The Council contracted with a plastic toy manufacturer to make a plastic egg carton which held six eggs and could be brought back to the store on future shopping trips. In cooperation with 16 associations in Japan, we held an Egg Festival Day. The local associations paid for the TV and billboard advertising and the retail merchants sold eggs at a discount on that day.

Any housewife who purchased six whole eggs at one time received, absolutely free, a plastic egg carton. We distributed 1.5 million of the cartons in Tokyo alone that day, and they were gone by 10 a.m. The theory of this promotional test was that if the housewife had the eggs in the kitchen, she would use them more freely. Eight years later (1972), egg cartons are common in the supermarkets.

Reading these comments brings back some of my own memories. While writing this book, I contacted my parents, who were born in 1926 and 1929, to ask them about how they used to buy eggs in the early 1960s, especially around the time when I was 4 or 5 years old, because my memory from that

time is not clear.

After talking with my mother, I was reminded that there was an egg shop near my house just outside of Tokyo. There, the eggs would be laid out on a mat of chaff, and the customers would say how many they wanted to buy. When I was young, I used to go buy eggs with my mother, and as I waited for her, I would draw letters or pictures in the chaff mat, or I would pick out and ask for those few brown eggs that were mixed in with the white ones. These are some of the memories that came back to me as I was talking to my mother.

American Feed Grains Supported the High-Flying Japanese Poultry Industry

My mother remembered that after specifying how many eggs she wanted to buy, the shop person would wrap the eggs in newspaper. Now I also remember how I used to carry home the eggs wrapped in newspaper and how I had to be careful not to break them. Eggs were also placed in paper bags at one point, and my mother recalled that later on, eggs were placed in plastic cases, which could be kept and brought back to the store for reuse on future shopping trips.

From both my parents I was able to verify that this definitely was the case around 1964 and 1965. Back then, I was living in a commercial district outside of Tokyo. Just looking at the example of eggs, the rapid transition from the time of eggs laid out on a chaff mat and wrapped in newspaper to the time of reusable plastic cartons, and finally to all eggs being sold in plastic cartons symbolizes the rapid transformations in distribution, sale and purchase behavior that were taking place at the time.

The plastic egg case has become a most commonly accepted convenience now, but my perspective on eggs has surely changed after learning about the background of its debut. This is an effect of knowing what we take for granted and how it has been brought about through many people's involvement and efforts.

In the early 1960s, the per capita annual consumption of eggs in the U.S. was estimated at 290, while in Japan it was only about 80. By the early 1980s, Japan had reached the same level as the U.S., so one can appreciate the extent of the rapid transition that took place between these years.

Even when I had grown a little older and all the eggs at the store were already placed in plastic cases, I remember childishly wanting to get the carton that contained a brown egg.

Looking back, it is evident that this was a period of rapid growth in the Japanese poultry industry, accompanied by an explosive rise in the demand for feed grains. This meant that the feed industry, which provided formula grains by processing imported grains, was also expanding rapidly. As you can see, the relationship between Japan and the U.S. has had a pervasive impact in all areas of our lives.

Next, I would like to talk about a case in which something we now take for granted originally came into being through a sort of innovation: The ways in which poultry is marketed in Japan.

Bone-in Chicken – A Novelty for Japanese People

Some of the work that the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) does relate directly to technology, trade and national trade policies. Most of the FAS's budget is used for supporting developing countries, but there is also a program for promoting export. It was this conventional overseas market development program, rather than the more recent market-access programs that were established in the mid-1980s, that fostered the plastic egg case initiative mentioned in the previous section, as well as the poultry example that we will now discuss.

These programs are a means of developing, sustaining and expanding export markets for U.S. agricultural produce in the long term, as well as a means of providing private trade organizations with funding to support their activities. It is said that “necessity is the mother of invention.” Just as plastic cases were introduced in order to expand the demand for eggs, there is an

interesting episode concerning chickens. The following quote is taken from the U.S. Agricultural Export Development Council's "Partners in Developing Farm Markets Overseas" by James Howard and others, describing how poultry was handled in Japan during the 1960s:

Historically, it had retailed mostly as boneless meat, in narrow strips, sold by the gram to be used by housewives in combination with other foods, especially in soups. Whole or cut up birds with bones were a rarity to Japanese consumers until Daimaru and later, the FAS market development program promoted bone-in poultry.

This information is very interesting for us. At the time, the Institute of American Poultry Industries was doing various activities to promote the sale of the U.S.-produced poultry, and after researching the state of the Japanese poultry industry and how chicken was being consumed, as well as seeking a potential buyer, they chose the Daimaru Department Store in Osaka as their vehicle.

After negotiating with Daimaru's food section manager, they were able to get Daimaru to agree to promote the sale of American chicken in all of their stores and to continue purchasing chicken produced in the U.S.

By today's standards, this may seem like an ordinary business agreement. However, as previously mentioned, the vast majority of general Japanese consumers at the time were unfamiliar with bone-in poultry products. In the same document, Howard also writes:

"This small beginning was the start of fundamental change in the way poultry was merchandised in Japan."

Broiler Production by Mass Breeding has started in Japan

This project of introducing bone-in poultry to Japan was started in 1960. Since then, Japan has gone through major transformations, not only in the way people eat chicken, but also in terms of how poultry is produced. In particular, this period marked the transition from traditional backyard

chicken breeding to broiler production based on mass breeding. In recent years, broiler production has become the object of much criticism because of its ever-expanding scale and increasingly mechanical method of breeding, but representatives from the Japanese poultry industry who visited the U.S. at the time noted “the efficiency of integrated broiler production and processing; wholesale marketing costs at very low levels, and mass presentation of a large variety of fresh and frozen poultry products in retail stores.” They learned much from their visit, and when they returned to Japan, they made use of their newly gained knowledge and integrated those ideas into the rapidly growing Japanese poultry industry.

Bone-in chicken legs were also a personal favorite of mine during my early elementary school years (late 1960s). Perhaps that was because as a child, I was deeply impressed by that round, fleshy meat with the bone sticking out from both sides that cartoon characters ate so vigorously. Bone-in meat made me feel like I was enjoying a luxury. I am sure many children like me were dreaming that one day they would be able to eat meat like that to their heart’s delight.

Ironically, even though it was the U.S. that first introduced Japan to bone-in chicken, nowadays, due to international competition, not much American chicken is imported into Japan. Chicken produced in Thailand gained attention for a while, but Thai chicken, too is now only imported in very small quantities. Looking at the 2010 figures for import quantities, poultry from Brazil made up 92% of all the poultry that Japan imported, while only 6% (34,000 tons) were imported from the U.S. Poultry imported from Brazil added up to a staggering 380,000 tons.

It comes as a surprise that, in spite of the costly shipping that is required to bring the poultry all the way over to Japan from Brazil, Brazilian chicken still has a competitive edge over the American poultry. The figures fluctuate from year to year, but in recent years, the poultry that Japan imports has been overwhelmingly produced in Brazil.

For reference, in terms of import value, among the top 20 agricultural and marine products that Japan imported in 2010, the U.S. was ranked as the

top exporter of corn, soybean, wheat and pork. As for beef, the U.S. was second to Australia, and as previously mentioned, the U.S. ranked as the number two exporter of chicken after Brazil.

The Half-Century U.S.-Japan Partnership through Real Businesses

Japan and the U.S. have built a very strong relationship over the past half century. It is true that our diets have been immensely influenced by the U.S. in both positive and negative ways. Japan has been the biggest importer of the U.S. agricultural produce for a long time, and our life has greatly benefited by that as well.

It is a matter of life or death for us to secure a stable source of grain, since Japan doesn't produce much grain, let alone enough to fulfill the domestic demand, except for rice. Based on my own experiences of importing grain from producers other than those in the U.S., it is undeniable that the U.S. has responded to Japan's demand at least for the past half century. I will talk about that more in the next chapter, but the simple fact is that there are no other countries that can supply the huge quantity of feed grains stably in the mid-term to long term, not just for short-term measurements.

Please remember the comment of that U.S. firm's top executive; "The biggest and the last competitive edge that the U.S. has today is its logistical capability to transport huge amounts of grain consistently and reliably."

This comment seems to represent today's international trading situation. In addition to that, the unrivaled abilities of the U.S. in state-of-the-art science and technologies, as well as their applications, are simply too apparent. What we need to do now is to create a new partnership in food that can endure in the years to come, on the basis of the trust that we have nurtured over the past half century.

In the next chapter, I would like to talk about the situation surrounding today's grain production in the U.S. and how Japan, on the customer side, has dealt with the rapidly increasing meat demand and the related grain demand.