

Nine-year old Japanese Schoolgirl and FAO Sow Seed of Lifelong Healthy Eating Habits

Through the concern and effort of a young Japanese schoolgirl, students of two public elementary schools in Rizal are now a step closer towards lifelong healthy eating habits. Yuhki Ueda is a grade 4 student at the International School Manila and her class recently finished discussing Children's Rights. They were asked to come up with an activity that can help an organization that supports Children's Rights.

Yuhki sold some of her old toys and books and was able to collect a little over 600 pesos. She then decided to donate this to FAO because the organization recognizes access to proper food and nutrition as a child's right. Happy with Yuhki's efforts, her father Mr. Takeshi Ueda and FAO, through Mr. Tsurumi, both provided additional funds. The combined funds were used to buy gardening tools and vegetables seeds, which were donated on 22 July 2011 to San Mateo Central Elementary School (SMCES) and Justice Vicente Santiago Elementary School (JVES) of the Province of Rizal.

Mr. Kazuyuki Tsurumi turned over the tools and seeds to the school officials and officers of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in simple but heart-warming ceremonies. Also present in the turnover ceremonies held at the covered courts of both schools are District Supervisor of the Department of Education (DepED) for San Mateo Ms. Felicisima Lazar and grade 4 and 5 students, who would be using the tools in their Elementary Agriculture subject. Mr. Tsurumi was accompanied by Alberto Aduna and Roberto Sandoval Jr. of FAO's Makati office.

Yuhki's desire to support children's rights in her own little way has touched hearts and rekindled in the students the desire to help others in need. This gesture also showed that even the smallest efforts could lead to bigger, better things.

Speaking during the turnover ceremony, Mr. Tsurumi shared FAO's mission of helping countries like the Philippines improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and ensure good nutrition for all. He emphasized that achieving food security for all is at the heart of FAO's efforts – to make sure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active and healthy lives. Right to Food is also a child's right. With the modest donation from Yuhki and FAO, the grade school children will now be encouraged to engage in backyard vegetable farming to improve not just their nutrition, but their family's as well.

The Yuhki-FAO donation also supports two DepED programs that are currently being implemented in the recipient schools. One is the "Oh My Gulay (OMG)" campaign, which seeks to battle the most common forms of malnutrition (vitamins and mineral deficiencies). This is being implemented by creating awareness about the benefits of eating vegetables produced in the school and in the backyard. The other one is the supplemental feeding and nutrition program to fight malnutrition and nourish back to health undernourished pupils.

The tools consisted of spades, pointed shovels, pick mattocks, rakes, hand sprinklers, hand tools, and wheel barrows. Assorted vegetable seeds of "PINAKBET" consisting of eggplant, okra, squash, pole sitao and ampalaya were also given.

For their part, DepED District Supervisor Ms. Felicisima Lazar, SMCES Principal Ms. Consolacion San Jose, and JVES Principal Ms. Cleta Saladero expressed their gratitude to Yuhki and FAO. The students thanked Yuhki and FAO through a series of performances including a dance number, a magic show and English-Japanese "Thank You" song. Yuhki will be visiting the two schools early in 2012 during the harvest of the first batch of vegetables produced using the donated seeds and gardening tools.