

Study mission on agro-industry for the APE-LDC Program

Twenty-three participants from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Nepal completed their study mission on agro-industry in Japan under the Special Program for Agricultural Productivity Enhancement in Asian Least Developed Countries (APE-LDC). The study mission was conducted from 28 November to 9 December.

Among the objectives of the study mission was the refinement of the respective national action plans (NAPs) of the four target countries under the APE-LDC Program. The program, which was formally launched in early 2005, is primarily aimed at the capacity building of NPOs and other related agricultural agencies in those low-income developing countries to enable them to implement agricultural productivity enhancement projects more effectively. Due to the focus on agro-industry, the study mission included special presentations on the development and present status of agro-industries in Japan, as well as extensive visits to selected food manufacturing and distribution companies. The presentations and visits centered specifically on how the Japanese food industry applies various management tools to improve the quality and safety of its products. The experience and lessons learned by the participants from the presentations and visits served as useful inputs in the fine-tuning of their respective NAPs, which they undertook during the final two days of the mission.

Among the many lessons learned were: 1) Company operations pay special attention to maintaining food safety beginning with the procurement of raw materials up to the marketing and distribution of the products. 2) Conscious efforts are made to promote traditional indigenous foods that reflect local culture. 3) The use of locally grown/produced materials is promoted as a measure to ensure the quality and safety of food ingredients. 4) The quality management system should be customer focused. 5) Company incentives/awards are important to nurture creativity and independence among employees. 6) Easily available consumer access to information on production practices is one method to strengthen food safety and quality assurance. 7) Direct marketing channels are becoming more impor-



Examining quality grades at Pearl Rice Processing Center, Fukuroi, Japan

tant in the delivery of the freshest and safest products. 8) Contract farming is a powerful method for productivity and quality improvement.

In refining their NAPs, the country groups worked out a revised Gantt chart of projects scheduled for 2006, as well as the specific project proposals containing the details of implementation. The proposals included projects/activities in the areas of productivity promotion, productivity and quality management training, and demonstration projects. The latter mainly involve the dispatch of APO experts to the demonstration factories/companies identified by each of the four countries. These experts will essentially provide advice and training on the appropriate application of tools such as 5S, kaizen, total quality management, and total productive maintenance.

An immediate project that the target countries were asked to carry out after returning home was a follow-up seminar that will serve as a venue for reporting the findings of the just-concluded study mission to government officials, representatives from the private sector, and other concerned parties. The seminars were planned for January or early February in each of the countries. 