

100th Anniversary Own and Pursue “My Purpose”

At the occasion of celebrating its 100th anniversary, The Norinchukin Bank set up the My Purpose Project. This project aims to have each director or employee own Our Purpose and engage in a variety of activities for the sake of, for example, food and agriculture; humankind and the environment; and local communities and society, in addition to their original business assignment.

Four employees of the Bank, who actively participate in diverse activities, including that of the “JA farming support team,” talk about their initiatives and opinions.



OTA Akihiro

Corporate Design Div.
Head of Corporate Service Group Domestic Branch Management Team

Joined the Bank in 2001. He has been in charge of planning and operating the My Purpose Project. Introduced the JA farming support team scheme and drives the initiative by participating on the team himself.

YANASE Miyuki

Food & Agri Banking Business
Corporate Business Div. V

Joined the Bank in 1998. She is the most frequent participant in JA farming support team activities and has positively engaged in several other projects. She calls for colleagues to join her on these projects.

NAKADA Keisuke

Toyama Branch

Joined the Bank in 2009. He hosts the Agrication & Fincation Project and has participated in JA farming support team activities.

OSAKI Yumi

Food & Agri Banking Business
Corporate Business Div. V

Joined the Bank in 2013. She is the most frequent participant in JA farming support team activities and has positively engaged in several other projects. She holds a leading position among young employees.

A takeoff board to jump higher—that’s the My Purpose Project!

OTA: The Bank celebrates its 100th anniversary during the current fiscal year, but does not plan to promote it sensationally to the public. The concept of the My Purpose Project, one of the commemorative events, does not focus on the anniversary itself but is rather “future-oriented” and “inner-oriented.”

As a project manager, I am interested in the perception of our colleagues—the project target—about this project. What has been the response from your colleagues?

OSAKI: Many of my colleagues read the information that Mr. OTA and other project managers send almost daily on the Bank’s intranet portal site (“Portal”). I think the support by general managers and deputy general managers within their divisions also help our colleagues

nurture positive perception to the project.

YANASE: At several departments, managers break free of their busy schedule to participate as members of the JA farming support team (refer to the upper column of page 20). I personally feel that such a positive attitude reflects their policy of “leadership by example.”

NAKADA: It is encouraging that managers are also positive to this project.

OTA: Such persons are like ambassadors, aren’t they?

NAKADA: As the lead project manager, what motivates you to run this project, Mr. Ota?

OTA: I believe we all devoted ourselves to changing the Bank in the last 10 years. It was the 10 year that we made effort to add our role to accompany our member cooperatives in tackling significant issues such as local communities and the environment, on top of our conventional role to return profits to members from their funds we manage.

I think Our Purpose and the Vision are the verbalization of the Bank's eagerness to change. They should penetrate through the organization as time progresses, and the 100th year anniversary projects intend to boost the penetration speed. Within such projects, the My Purpose Project provides a scheme to make active and autonomous participation by employees easier.

As an analogy, it's a springboard attached to a high vaulting box in a gym. I want the My Purpose Project to take the role of helping our colleague leaping over a high vaulting box after their run-ups. The role of the project managers is to cheer up our colleagues "Hey, we have a springboard for you. Let's jump one-notch higher by using it." That's why I asked you earlier how your colleagues perceive this project.

NAKADA: I see.

Recognized again the job of supporting food and agriculture by participating on the JA farming support team

OTA: I have one more question. Do you really enjoy the My Purpose Project? I said "autonomous" a while ago. To extend this kind of initiative, I believe that any project cannot last for long unless all of you find it interesting.

YANASE: Ms. OSAKI and I have participated on the JA farming support team several times. In most cases, we are dispatched to a support destination for the requested activities for four days and three nights. Every time, I come back to the workspace with a strong sense of fulfillment.

OSAKI: We would be typical examples. We sometimes meet "repeater" colleagues on site (laughter). I'm sure they share the same feeling of fulfillment.

YANASE: In three-day operations I have a sense of ending up with half-finished work because the activity ends when we are just getting accustomed to the dedicated job. As we get near the end of activity, we start to feel hesitant to return to office, feeling that "I would like to know more about this community and its producers." Likewise, the farmers also miss us and often request us to come back next year. Of course, we want to go there again.

OSAKI: I can't agree with you more. Having background of growing up in many countryside places where you are close to soil, and a mother who loves gardening and cultivation activity, I feel relieved when touching the soil. I became addicted to this project after having supported the harvesting of green onions. I really thank the farmers who warmly accepted me.

YANASE: A farming operation is really hard physically in many cases, as you can imagine. Nevertheless, I feel pleasure in being able to directly engage in such wonderful agriculture-related jobs that give birth to something in the world. I truly feel a sense of fulfillment during my participation while talking with producers and getting sweaty with them. Although our jobs share a strong tie with the agriculture, we, or at least me, usually have al-

JA farming support team



Directors and employees of the Bank engage in farm operations at agricultural corporations and/or for farmers across the country.

Farming support volunteer dispatching system organized by Nokyō Tourist Corporation of the JA Group. The participating volunteer directors and employees of the JA Group including the Bank, as well as employees of ordinary companies and university students, serve as the workforce for farm operations at agricultural corporations and/or for farmers across the country. There is an increasing number of cases in which business partners of the Bank are interested in these activities. As a result, the employees of both parties have worked jointly, in some cases.

most no opportunities to talk directly with the president and/or employees of any agricultural corporations. Almost every time I connect with producers, I learn harsh realities, of course. Indeed, their comments on why they got into agriculture and continue to do that work have been thought-provoking relative to my own work.

OSAKI: That's it! When I participate on the team, I feel like I understand a bit better the significance and value of my work, which has the principle of "contributing to agriculture, life and local communities." Ah! This is our starting point.

NAKADA: The Bank has the On-site training at JA as part of on-the-job trainings for new employees who are new graduates. The main training is hands-on learning of the JA business by visiting JAs across the nation. In my case, I joined the Bank through a job change, so I didn't have an opportunity to receive the training. For this reason, my first participation in the JA farming support team was my initial hands-on experience in the business. The main reason for my job change was that I wanted to work in the agricultural and food sectors. I therefore was strongly impressed by feeling that "Now I can have direct contact with agriculture!" thanks to the experience obtained via the JA farming support team.

OTA: I would like to call for your ideas here. The JA farming support team has set a goal of 1,000 total participants over five years. There have been 300 participants in the 1.5 years since the project started (December 2021–June 2023). About 30% of the participants are repeaters like you, and it seems difficult to broaden the base of new participants. How can we effectively broaden the base of participation?

YANASE: I know many colleagues who have not yet participated but are interested. It's not that they don't want to go. What is lacking might be someone to invite them or perhaps a supportive nudge.

In a workplace where no one has participated, it will be important for someone to set a precedent for this activity. However, it might be difficult for young employees to be the first participants. Consequently, I believe that mid-career employees or those in higher positions should invite others or provide a supportive push.

Agrication & Fincation Project

JA Bank Toyama, through the Bank's Toyama Branch, offers financial education at Katayama Gakuen Primary School in Imizu City in cooperation with various relevant organizations and companies. The project features hands-on classes and food education. Classes have included the bucket cultivation of a local rice brand, "FuFuFu"; production and sales of "trout sushi," a local specialty made from harvested rice; and using caramel as subject matter in collaboration with Morinaga & Co., Ltd.



Making "trout sushi" from the cultivation of rice seedlings to the fabrication of wrapping paper

OTA: Mr. OKU (President and Chief Executive Officer) often talks about the "first penguin" story. That's exactly it.

OSAKI: For employees who work for the Bank whose name includes agriculture, there are rather not many of us who have a concrete understanding of the reality of agricultural scenes and community sites. The experience at the JA farming support team must be offering participants a good opportunity to understand the actual business sites. I participate every time as if urged to do so by a strong impulse, and I feel a shared sense of "local patriotism" with the producers in their local communities. It would be meaningful for us to not only learn the actual state of agriculture but also develop local contacts if we want to support those local communities.

OTA: The Bank itself upholds Our Purpose, that is, striving to redefine our corporate identity, and the My Purpose Project is an ideal personal version of that.

NAKADA: What is most important for the participants in the My Purpose Project is teamwork in the workplace. It's natural that you feel you need someone to cover your work while you are engaged in the project. I can participate with the confidence of knowing that my teammates will cover my work during my absence.

OSAKI: In our case, our colleagues send us out graciously saying "Have a good time!" and awaiting the stories of our activities. I really appreciate such an atmosphere.

YANASE: We can leave our office with peace of mind, and alternatively we can provide support when others want to participate.

NAKADA: What I found exuberating after joining the Bank due to a job change was that the Bank is an organization where, if someone submits a plan, several supporters will always step forward to assist. That's how we can tackle the My Purpose Project with such commitment.

Human resources development through food and farming education and financial education, in which I could be involved because I'm employed by the Bank

OTA: It seems that the Agrication & Fincation Project at the Toyama Branch could be such an initiative (refer to the upper column). At first, there was the personal intent of Mr. NAKADA, which then spread to a circle of acquaintances and business relations within the branch, then to JA Bank and external business partners, leading to its realization.

NAKADA: Yes. Pursuing food and farming education, as well as financial education targeting children, had been my personal desire. However, after joining the Bank due to a job change, I had never considered that I could participate in such training because I was fully focused on my assigned job.

OTA: But you got that opportunity.

NAKADA: That's right. When I oversaw the asset formation business for two years for JA Bank at our head office, most my colleagues had a broad background including a person who was seconded from a securities company, a person affiliated with an asset management company and those who joined the Bank like me via mid-career recruiting. The section was full of diverse persons. While debating vigorously with each other on a variety of themes, I realized that there are different types of organizations and that employees could benefit



from freer and more flexible work styles.

When I thought about what I wanted to do, my heart prioritized the idea of helping people. I then asked how I could help people and in what ways as an employee working at the Bank. I concluded that I should provide food and farming education, as well as financial education. I am confident that the education to nurture people is an area where we can certainly help people, and the Bank has strength in both sectors.

OTA: You set up the project in a branch, requested the cooperation of JA and related local municipalities, approached schools and so on. As there was no precedent or template, you had to develop everything from scratch. Moreover, you did all that while completing your routine work. Great! Superb!

NAKADA: In my case, the teamwork at the Toyama Branch was excellent. The first response to my consulting was, "That's a good idea, so you should do it!"

Although not all was not perfect from the start, I was frankly happy because I could do what I wanted to do—My Purpose—to help people, together with trustful colleagues on my side.

OSAKI: In fact, looking at your education initiative on the Portal, I thought you seemed happy (laughter).

NAKADA: Katayama Gakuen Primary School was interested in our project, and JA, Toyama Prefecture, and several local and national companies cooperated with our team so that the Agrication & Fincation Project could take shape. Of course, we had various difficulties until the project was completed, but the process was fun. The classes we presented at the school included lessons with caramel as the subject matter and making "trout sushi," a local specialty, after growing a brand rice from Toyama Prefecture. Although I cannot disclose the details at this time, I'd like to develop pleasant classes where many participants can learn about food, agriculture and financing through discussions with related persons of JA, companies and the university. Recently, I have truly come to believe that I must be the employee who most enjoys life at the Bank (laughter).

YANASE: Even so, you have worked hard to develop this project.

NAKADA: I'm sure that all employees of the Bank have, to a certain degree, something they want to do. However, they might give up or perhaps only a few might actually raise their hand to express their opinions outside their job domain. I wish that the My Purpose Project could boost everyone to take a step forward and say "I'd like to try this myself!" The My Purpose Project is an opportunity to allow oneself to pursue an opportunity.

Diversified synergies with internal and/or external counterparties of the Bank are expected to be produced through the My Purpose Project

OTA: In addition to the JA farming support team and the Agrication & Fincation Business, the My Purpose Project includes various other initiatives such as the "Hometown Co-creation Business" (refer to page 32). Their common concept is "inner-oriented." However, they all require not only internal cooperation but also external collaboration as that is essential for the Bank due to the nature of its business. For that reason, I feel that new relationships with conventional stakeholders who have supported the Bank over its 100-year history or new synergies apart from routine operations could be developed.

What made me happy recently as a project manager is that some employees who once participated on the JA farming support team have indicated support for the onsite operations of the Hometown Co-creation Business as if dots connecting to form a line. I expect much of the Bank, which is already a unique organization, in transforming itself through the combined unique strengths of its many self-determined employees.

I would like to continue the My Purpose Project with an eye toward the next 100 years. Furthermore, similarly to the case of the JA farming support team, I want the scope of the participants to expand broadly and to encourage autonomous participation to enable every employee to create his/her own My Purpose Project story.

NAKADA: I also intend to continue participation in the project.

YANASE: I agree. Let's continue together.

OSAKI: Absolutely!

