

Hello. My name is Tanaka Mai. Mai means rice in Japanese, so sometimes people confuse my name with rice produced in Japan like Niigata-mai, Akita-mai, Okayama-mai, Tanaka Mai... wait, that's me. Ever since I was little, I've never missed a single day of eating rice, but I don't only see it as delicious carbohydrates which fill my stomach. According to National Geographic, the most consumed food in the world today comes from grains including rice being 19% of all food consumption followed by wheat being 18%. If we boost the production and consumption of this dominant player in the global food supply, I believe rice will become the key ingredient for saving millions of lives around the world.

UN's Food and Agriculture Organization estimated in 2017 that about 815 million people in the world today are suffering from hunger and go to bed on an empty stomach. However, there is a Japanese man who is trying to put an end to this urgent problem. His name is Tatsushi Tsuboi, also known as Mr. NERICA. NERICA is a short name for New Rice for Africa and it is a kind of rice developed in 1994. According to Japan International Cooperation Agency, NERICA is three times more productive, and it is more suitable for Africa's dry climate than other rice. Mr. Tsuboi has been spreading NERICA throughout Africa by teaching people the way for a good harvest, and by 2008, it is grown on more than 200,000 hectares in 17 different countries.

Although this makes a dramatic difference to the world, we know his effort alone cannot eliminate the problem of world hunger. Then, is there anything that I can do to help the world see the better future without hungry people? I was inspired by Mr. NERICA's work and wanted to help the people in need. But I don't have a lot of money to donate or the courage to go to Africa to grow rice.

This summer, I found the answer: Freerice. It is a website run by UN's World Food Programme. The user can expand their English vocabulary and knowledge of other subjects while playing multiple-choice quiz games. For every question the player answers correctly, World Food Programme donates 10 grains of rice to hungry people. Then, the total amount of rice the player donates is shown on a screen just like the score. Moreover, it is ad-supported, so users don't have to pay. During the summer vacation, I was hooked on playing the game. At first, my goal was to donate 30,000 grains of rice. But by the end of August, I couldn't have been happier when I looked at my score on my computer screen: 50,000 grains of rice. This is about 13 bowls of rice. Mother Teresa said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one."

Not many people in Japan know about the Freerice project because there are few articles about it written in Japanese. But this means that if we encourage our family, friends, and teachers to participate in it, more companies will support it, and the number of undernourished people will be much less. Hopefully, this will also promote the consumption of NERICA and support Mr. Tsuboi's work. So, today I'm standing here to ask everyone for a few clicks on the web. Just starting with ten grains of rice can make a difference.

4部20番 田中まい

岡山市立石井中学校

Ten Grains of Rice