

DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Kim Ri Hwa

A desire for public service is a strong characteristic among citizens of many countries including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Kim Ri Hwa, this year's model farmer from the DPRK, is a shining example of that desire turned into action.

Kim is an unlikely farmer. She grew up in a small city. The daughter of factory workers, she was 17 when she heard about a call for people to work with farmers and help develop the countryside.

Kim volunteered. On earlier trips to rural areas, she had seen the disparities, which are common in many countries. Rural people were much poorer. The DPRK is a country that has, at times and like other countries, faced serious challenges in food security and those challenges were more apparent in the countryside than in the cities. This made Kim determined to make a difference and to help her country's rural men and women.

She first spent some time at the Taepung Cooperative Farm, eventually rising to Work-team leader. While there, she studied through correspondence courses and qualified as an agricultural crop engineer.

Kim performed her most impressive work, however, after being transferred to Maejon Cooperative Farm in 2003. The Maejon farm is located on coastal tideland. The soil suffers from salinity, and its 80 farming families could barely yield one ton of rice from a hectare.

Kim applied conservation agriculture methods that helped restore the soil and prevent erosion. She introduced the system of rice intensification and stack cultivation for maize.

From a farm that had been failing, Maejon became a model of productivity. Rice yields soon rose to 3 tonnes per hectare, then 7 tonnes, and after seven years they reached 10 tonnes per hectare. Maize yields rose by 80 percent. The soil had more oxygen, and root diseases declined by 70 percent.

Kim says she is proud of these achievements, but insists the credit truly belongs to her mentors. She says there is also huge enthusiasm and spirit of farmers to adopt science and technology in agricultural innovation.

With such determination, there is little doubt that Kim and her colleagues will continue to drive down hunger and improve the lives of her country's farmers.

Ms. Kim Ri Hwa, please!