

## OISCA in AZERBAIJAN

**Hearty congratulations to the friendly people of Azerbaijan on the auspicious occasion of 30th Independence anniversary today of their motherland.**  
**OISCA-International, October 18th 2021.**

While undergoing a training in Israel hosted by MASHAV, Israeli Agency for International Development Cooperation, Mr. Elchin Nasirli, who came from Azerbaijan, heard about OISCA from a fellow trainee from south India. He immediately made up his mind to set up a branch of this NGO in his motherland. It was sometime in the early 2000. OISCA-International head office in Tokyo gave a green signal to him based on the recommendation by OISCA South India.



Beautifully ripen apples on May 2, 2021

Geographically, Azerbaijan is in the south Caucasus region. OISCA Azerbaijan became the first national chapter in this region. Azerbaijan is facing Caspian Sea to the east. 10,200,000 people (2021, UN Population Fund) are living on the land of 86,600km<sup>2</sup>. When the birth of this chapter was reported in Japan, like-minded OISCA members who were curious of Caucasus region, formed a group to visit Azerbaijan. The group visited Azerbaijan sometime in 2006.

### A Japanese Apple Grower's Inspiration

One of the OISCA group members found out that climate and soil condition of Azerbaijan might be



Map of Azerbaijan

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Ambassador of Japan with the “Sakurai” apple grower in Guba, September 30<sup>th</sup> 2021

## Information through UN network

In an effort to support NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, sent out information to world over in 2010 NGO activities. OISCA was encouraged to take advantage of such an opportunity. Accordingly, OISCA Note series travelled from Tokyo to New York and New York to the world OISCA Note No.1, February 15 2010, was about Children's Forest Program that has become OISCA's Premier program in 2020 (ref: Bulletin Board No.134). OISCA Note No.20, August 25, 2010, was on AZERBAIJAN. Its full text is reproduced here.

OISCA Note No.20  
August 25, 2010

### AZERBAIJAN

Japan-origin apple gains popularity in a central Asian country, named "SAKURAI" apple.

A born-in-Japan apple is gaining a growing popularity in Azerbaijan. It was in 2005 when a small number of saplings of a quality apple were brought to Azerbaijan by a Japanese apple grower in Yamanashi-Pref. in the suburbs of metropolitan Tokyo. This arrangement was coordinated jointly by OISCA Yamanashi and OISCA Azerbaijan as a bilateral friendship. These saplings were taken to Nugedi Village, Quba District in the northeastern region of Azerbaijan. Apples have traditionally been grown in Quba area. A couple of ambitious apple growers decided to accept the risky challenge that they had never encountered, namely, they made up their minds to plant Japanese apple saplings in their apple gardens.

Three years had passed. In November 2008, first fruits of a small number emerged. So juicy and delicious that the Quba apple growers had never tasted. With this, the apple growers were able to overcome the risky challenge, and named the born-in-Japan apple as "SAKURAI", the name of a Japanese who brought with him the saplings to Azerbaijan. More and more apple growing farmers in Nugedi Village have been joining in "SAKURAI" apple cultivation.

Mr. Yasuma Takao, a student of Asia Leaders Program, Dept. of Peace and Conflict Studies, at the UN-mandated University of Peace, who is undergoing, through OISCA Azerbaijan, an internship at Nugedi Village from June to October 2010 reports from the Village (August 4, 2010).

(quote) On July 9th, Ambassador of Japan Mr. Masamitsu Ohki set out on tour to the OISCA apple project site in Nugedi village of Quba District. The Ambassador has long been interested in the field of agricultural development in this country, thus this visit to the project site initiated by the only Japanese NGO in Azerbaijan was set. In Nugedi, the project of growing Japanese apple variety has been implemented since 2005 in cooperation with Mr. Mitsuharu Sakamoto, board member of OISCA Yamanashi Branch and Mr. Shohachi Sakurai, expert of apple produce. Since Mr. Ramiz Karimov and his colleagues recognized the excellent taste of the apple which is called "Sakurai" there, they are now planting "Sakurai" apple and rapidly increasing the growing area. They estimate that apple harvest in 2011 will be around one ton.

With Mr. Ambassador, the President of OISCA Azerbaijan, Mr. Elchin Nasirli, who has worked main role in coordinating this project, and Mr. Lutful Kabir, the international advisor of OISCA Azerbaijan and the Director of Human Resources and Organizational Development of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, accompanied. In their visit to Nugedi village, Mr. Ramiz Karimov explained with showing his apple trees, and then he and his colleagues entertained their guests with aromatic tea and homemade delicious cakes.

On the table, Mr. Karimov told that he was feeling his most honorable moment in his long life. Ambassador Ohki said, "It is very delightful to know that the Japanese apple variety can be useful in developing agriculture in Azerbaijan. I will be glad if your project can succeed after selling the apples with setting good marketing strategy". Then, Mr. Elchin Nasirli said, "We will cooperate to produce and organize the marketing of high quality agricultural products for the better life together". In the clear blue sky, the Ambassador's visit to project site was done in great success.

My two and half months stay in Nugedi village starts this week until the middle of October, and I am engaged in the apple here. The life here is not very easy, because water access for daily life and agricultural production is not enough inside and outside of the village. I will try my best for the progress of this project while learning many things from the village people through working on production and selling Japanese apple variety. (unquote)



Ambassador of Japan chats with apple growers at an apple garden in Nugedi Village, Quba District, Azerbaijan, on his visit to the site on 9th July 2010.

suited for apples to grow. Having heard of it, Mr. SAKURAI Shohachi, a member of OISCA Yamanashi Branch and an experienced apple grower, thought that the apple species that he himself had newly developed might be worth experimenting in Azerbaijan. Yamanashi is in an inland hilly province not far from Tokyo. With the invitation of newly born OISCA national chapter, he visited Azerbaijan in November 2006 carrying with him the scions of newly developed apple species.

In Azerbaijan, he was escorted to Guba, a northern hilly region, by Mr. Elchin Nasirli. Mr. Sakamoto was so impressed that the climate, soil and topographic condition of Guba were so similar with those in his home community in Yamanashi. He immediately got an inspiration that the apple that he has developed could grow well in Guba.

In fact, apples have been grown in Guba by the local people for years. But it seemed that the taste and quality were not so attractive to local consumers. With the consent of local growers, Mr. Sakurai planted the scions he has brought from Japan. All the scions were donated to Guba apple growers through OISCA Azerbaijan. As a matter of course, the apple growers at Guba were suspicious of Sakura's goodwill in the beginning. They had the pride with their apples.

### **APPLE can serve as a delicious tool of friendship**

However, it did not take much time for the apple species that Sakurai brought was recognized by the growers in Guba. In order to show an appreciation to Mr. Sakurai, Guba apple growers named it "Sakurai" indicating the birth of "Sakurai brand" apple. As years passed by, "Sakurai" apples began to gain a popularity in Azerbaijan. Having heard of it, the Ambassador of Japan visited Guba himself in July 2010 (Ref: OISCA Net No.10 on page 3) and found out it was true. He

purchased "Sakurai" apples (fruits) and served them to the invited guests to the birthday party of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan that was taken place at the Ambassador's residence in Baku, the national capital. No doubt, the apple gained a high praise. Unexpectedly "Sakurai" brand apple has contributed to advancing Azerbaijan-Japan friendship.

### **Localizing Sakurai to Azerbaijan**

OISCA Azerbaijan President Mr. Elchin Nasirli has reported from Guba to Tokyo on May 26<sup>th</sup> 2021 that popularity of "SAKURAI" apple is further growing and the number of growers on an increase. Average production of Sakurai apple reaches 25-30 tons a hectare. The fruits are getting a higher price in the markets.

In recent years, Sakurai apples have been serving to the participants of meetings, conferences and various other events. Sakurai apples have begun to be introduced by TVs. Sakurai apple is strengthening its presence in this Caucasus country. Proportionally OISCA Azerbaijan is gaining a confidence and popularity by people. It has passed 15 years since this apple species was introduced in 2006, Sakurai apple has become just like a born-in-Azerbaijan fruit.

"Apple" is linking Azerbaijan and Japan through OISCA network. "Where there is a will, there is a way" has worked. At the same time, the Sakurai experience teaches us that "OISCA's volunteer spirit" can travel the world even in the absence of a passport. On September 30<sup>th</sup> 2021, newly assigned Ambassador of Japan visited Guba as the photo on page 2 shows.

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