

# Japan Year Mid-Term Report



Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce

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A very special thank you goes to Mr. Bernd Hoch of Mitsubishi Motors Automobile Schweiz AG, a major sponsor of the scholarship fund and extraordinary supporter of my “Year in Japan”.

## BACKGROUND

My background and my connection to Japan seems to be comparably less strong, as many other reports that I have read so far, stated a longstanding connection such as previous language exchange studies in Japan, family or hobbies. In fact, this made me doubt whether to apply for the scholarship in the first place. The only time I have been in Japan before, was on an amazing 4-week holiday trip after my military service in 2014. However, it was enough for me to watch out for any opportunities to find a professional connection to Japan. And this is already a key message of this first part of my report: if you want to do something like a year in Japan, it is worth to work persistently towards this goal.

In my case, I wrote an e-mail to the former chairman of the scholarship fund after consulting the webpage of the SJCC in order to confirm the requirements for an application. Then I started to take Japanese classes at Migros Klubschule the next month and finally applied 1.5 years later.

My academic background is a BSc in Business Administration with focus on international Management. A challenging international student project called exploreASEAN gave me a stronger focus on Southeast Asia, nonetheless my personal interest stayed with Japan and the Japanese culture. Before and after, I was mostly gaining professional experience in the financial Industry before benefitting of a 2-month internship at Mitsubishi Automobile Schweiz AG, just before my departure to Japan on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



## PREPARATION AND FIRST STEPS IN JAPAN

Just a few hints as most of it has been mentioned in previous reports: take enough time to find a school, to apply for a visa and to find an apartment. Especially the visa part can take several months.

Health insurance and municipality: the Swiss municipality recommended me not to change my status of residence as the duration remains unclear so far. On the other side, the Swiss health insurance recommended to unsubscribe. As I receive a huge discount in the health insurance fee, I decided to take the recommendation of the municipality and stay resident in Switzerland until I have a clearer picture of how long I will stay in Japan. I am paying now double health insurance fees, but the Swiss and the Japanese fee is very low in my case. Moreover, I can keep my supplementary insurance in Switzerland, which is not easy to regain after dropping out of the system.

In Japan you need to go first to your local municipality so that they can add your address on the residence card. Make sure you also get a document with your “My Number”, a social security number equivalent. With this number it might be easier to conclude a mobile phone contract and, only with a Japanese mobile phone number, you will be able to open a bank account.

## SCHOOL

As many did before, I chose Kai Japanese Language School to study Japanese for the first 5 months. The staff was very supportive for any inquiries and also the school’s teachers did a fantastic job in my regard.

Sometimes I felt unsatisfied with the small focus on speaking within the school as well as the time I could dedicate to travelling. The latter point however, is not so dominant anymore, as I realised that there is still plenty of time to experience Japan in its entire beauty.

As the school is full of Europeans, Americans and Australians, the primary language - except for the classes themselves - was English, which certainly limited the benefit I attained from this first part. I used language [meet-up](#) events to practice my speaking skills a little bit more, but the conversations you have tend to be very repetitive. A very useful tool to learn some new vocabulary was [NHK News Web Easy](#), which presents simplified articles on current happenings. Furthermore, I found some opportunities to use my Japanese through Christian fellowships or teaming up for some language tandems, yet not on a very frequent basis.





## INTERNSHIP

I had the amazing privilege and opportunity to connect with Bernd Hoch, Director of Mitsubishi Motors Automobile Schweiz AG, who himself supported me to receive an internship in the group treasury department at the Mitsubishi Motors headquarters in Tamachi, Tokyo.

I am still genuinely flashed and overwhelmed by the friendliness and support of many people within Mitsubishi Motors in Switzerland and Japan, the privilege to work for this amazing company and by the insights I gain in terms of working culture, professional knowledge and language.

The department head in Japan and his deputy prepared a wonderful program for me to get insights in all areas of the group treasury and welcomed me very warmly. On the other hand, on a daily routine, I experience more distance between me and the co-workers, but also between the co-workers themselves. An aspect, which can be a little upsetting as it is often very quiet and impersonal. Also, I am given less work to do than I would prefer to, unquestionably also due to my limited Japanese skills. I assume that my unusual, to 4-months limited contract also impacts the relationship with my co-workers.

Regarding language, I can see that I am improving in terms of vocabulary related to finances, ranging from balance sheet items to invoicing and some macroeconomic terms, all of it still on a hardly sufficient level (speed, variety and errors). My daily Japanese has probably only slightly improved in the last two months and I am afraid to make not much progress in the coming two months of this internship as well. With private lessons and some language exchange meet-ups I try to have some practice, in spite of being quite tired after work usually.

As it is challenging, I am also convinced of making a very rewarding experience. It is unquestionably an amazing adventure and I am currently even planning my next step in Japan.



## FOCUS: ANIMAL WELFARE IN JAPAN AND SWITZERLAND

I chose this topic as I have been sensitized by friends and family and through my community service at the “Naturama Aargau”, which is one side a natural science museum and also the knowledge pool for sustainability and environmental issues of the Kanton Aargau. I also grew up having pets and taking care of our three goats in the garden of my parents. Although the following paragraphs present some critical aspects, I do not judge consumers or producers, but rather intend to inspire people to enjoy food, and in particular meat, consciously, meaning to know the source of the “product”.

### SITUATION IN JAPAN

The above title actually needs a slight adaption to be a fair statement in itself, such as “Situation in Japan as a non-Japanese speaker”, emphasizing that a fluent Japanese speaker would find easier and faster information about food labels. For me as a consumer it seems in many cases impossible to find out where the meat or the egg is coming from and to consume sustainably produced products.

Some observations which require almost no Japanese language skills:

1. Meat and eggs are relatively cheap compared to Switzerland, even with regard to the exceptionally high price level of Swiss agricultural products.
2. Japanese meals contain a lot of eggs, in fact Japanese consume more eggs per year and capita than in any other country of the world ([Link](#)).
3. There is definitely a market for organic products as a new organic food store has opened at a high frequency location inside Harajuku Station (which is on my way to work) just this month. However, all meat offered is imported from abroad. Also near to my closest train station, there is a small store, which tries to sell only sustainably produced food, including meat and eggs.

### Laying hen and Chicken Meat:

I will begin with some astonishing numbers regarding chicken farming. According to an article of the Japan Times from June 2019, 90% of laying hens are kept within cages inside a stall ([Link](#)), without even the possibility to “move or spread their wings”. Based on the same

article, 1kg of chicken meat in Japan contains on average twice as much pharmaceuticals as 1kg in the USA.

Despite this higher share of chicken being kept in small cages, as a consumer I have definitely the choice as there are plenty of animal products that are more exemplary in terms of livestock welfare.



Source Picture 1: the Japan Times (Getty Images)

Most commonly one can find the following Kanji or labels on egg and chicken meat products:

じどり  
地鶏 (jidori)

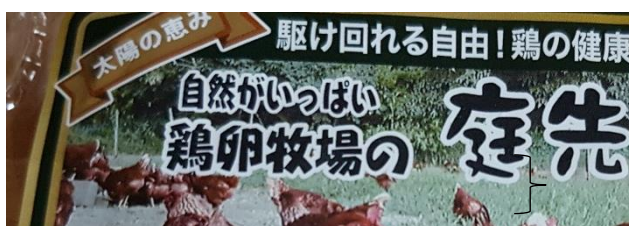
ひらか  
平飼い (hirakai)

} Both suggest something like free-range farming



Of course the term “NaturaFarm” suggests more sustainable production, however, in cases where this term might be missing, one can also try to find the Japanese expression:

やさしい<sup>けいしや</sup>鶏舎 (yasashii keisha) } “friendly inhouse-poultry farming”



かまわ  
駆け回る (kakemawaru):

the chicken get to run around freely

にわさき  
庭先 (niwasaki):

kind of garden, forecourt

## Beef Meat:

Specific legislation detailing the farming sector with regards to the welfare of livestock seems to be scarce. The ministry of environment provides recommendations on how to treat animals on farms ([Link](#)) and the World Animal Protection Organisation confirms that the focus of the Japanese Government is more on food safety than on animal welfare ([Link](#)).

The Japan Times state that “in Japan, most meat, eggs and dairy items are produced using factory farm methods” on the dispense of animal welfare. The average size of dairy farms is indicated by 80 cows “which are mostly chained up indoors at all times”. These indications leave some room for improvements.

However, a generalisation seems also here not appropriate as there are also better examples of how cow farming can be done. A good friend of mine, who is Radio Speaker of FM Aichi, could visit a Farm in Shizuoka as part of her job.

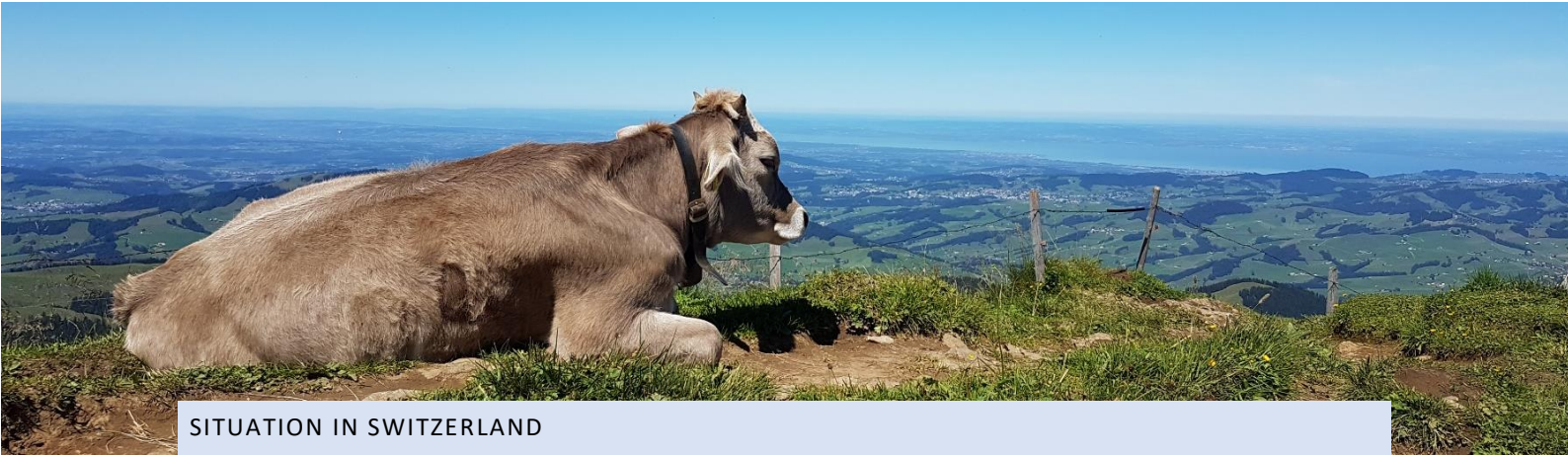
As also shown on the picture, the cows had plenty of space on this farm. More surprisingly, the livestock on that farm is used for meat production and not for milk. Generally, one would be more likely to find free range cows for milk, as producers try to limit muscle development in meat production ([Link](#)).



Source Picture 2: Moe Kumaki on a farm in Shizuoka Prefecture

While I was not able to find labelled meat from Japan neither in the 3 supermarkets in my neighbourhood (“Life”, “Odakyu OX” and “Peacock”) nor in the new organic food store in Harajuku, the above mentioned farm would offer free-range meat in their farm-own store. Talking with my friend Moe Kumaki, she describes a similar impression as stated in the articles of the Japan Times, namely that public awareness of farming standards is rather low.

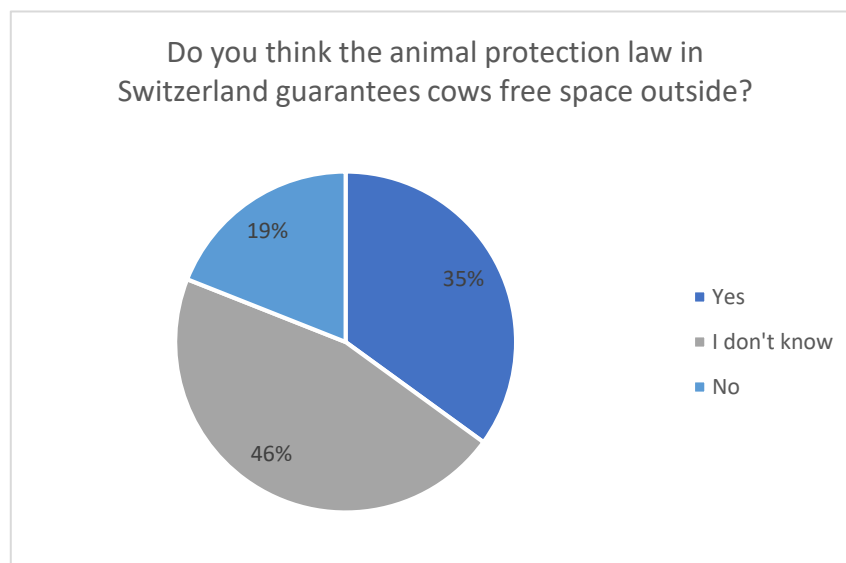




#### SITUATION IN SWITZERLAND

In Switzerland I hear many times a high level of satisfaction regarding the welfare of pets and livestock. We have been trimmed by advertisements of happy cows waking up as the farmer is playing on the harp ([Link](#)), well-trained chickens running to the Migros store to deliver an egg ([Link](#)) and a happy, speaking dog advertising Swiss fruits ([Link](#)).

However, the given requirements of the Swiss regulator requests slightly different standards than suggested by advertisements. Swiss beef cattle does not be given any fresh air at all, there needs to be no straw on the floor and the space available – despite largely depending on the size of the cow – measures between 1.8m<sup>2</sup> and a maximum of 5m<sup>2</sup> for big and pregnant animals. All details about requirements for livestock can be found on the webpage of the Swiss Government ([Link](#)).



A survey published by the Swiss consumer magazine “[Kassensturz](#)” in 2013 revealed that the average Swiss consumer is not aware how the animals live in a farm. The questions “Do you think the animal protection law in Switzerland guarantees free space outside for cows?” was answered “I don’t know” by 46% of survey participants and “Yes” by 35% of participants, leaving a remaining of only 19% with the correct answer “No”.

**Other regulations related to available space for the animals are:**

Mast- Poultry	up to 30kg of Chicken per m <sup>2</sup> , which is equivalent to up to 5.5 chicken per m <sup>2</sup> , new stalls should have daylight.
Sows	depending on the size of the pig, 0.9m <sup>2</sup> in most cases (animals up to 110kg), new stalls should have daylight or opportunities to switch between daylight and rest (dark) room areas.

So, does the happy Swiss cow in the mountains not exist? And the free-running chicken is only a marketing gag? No, it is not. Whoever consumes consciously has a large influence on the animals' **lives**. Labelled meat, in particular organic, guarantees that chicken can be outside as well as inside a stall, so do cows and pigs. The tendency is towards organic, although the total share of organic meat and fish was only around 5.3% in 2016 ([Link](#)). The differences in Switzerland could not be better illustrated than by the two pictures below:



Happy chicken with a lot of space on the organic producing farm in the village I grew up ([Biohof Schär](#)).



Header of the animal welfare protection pamphlet of the Swiss government ([Link](#))

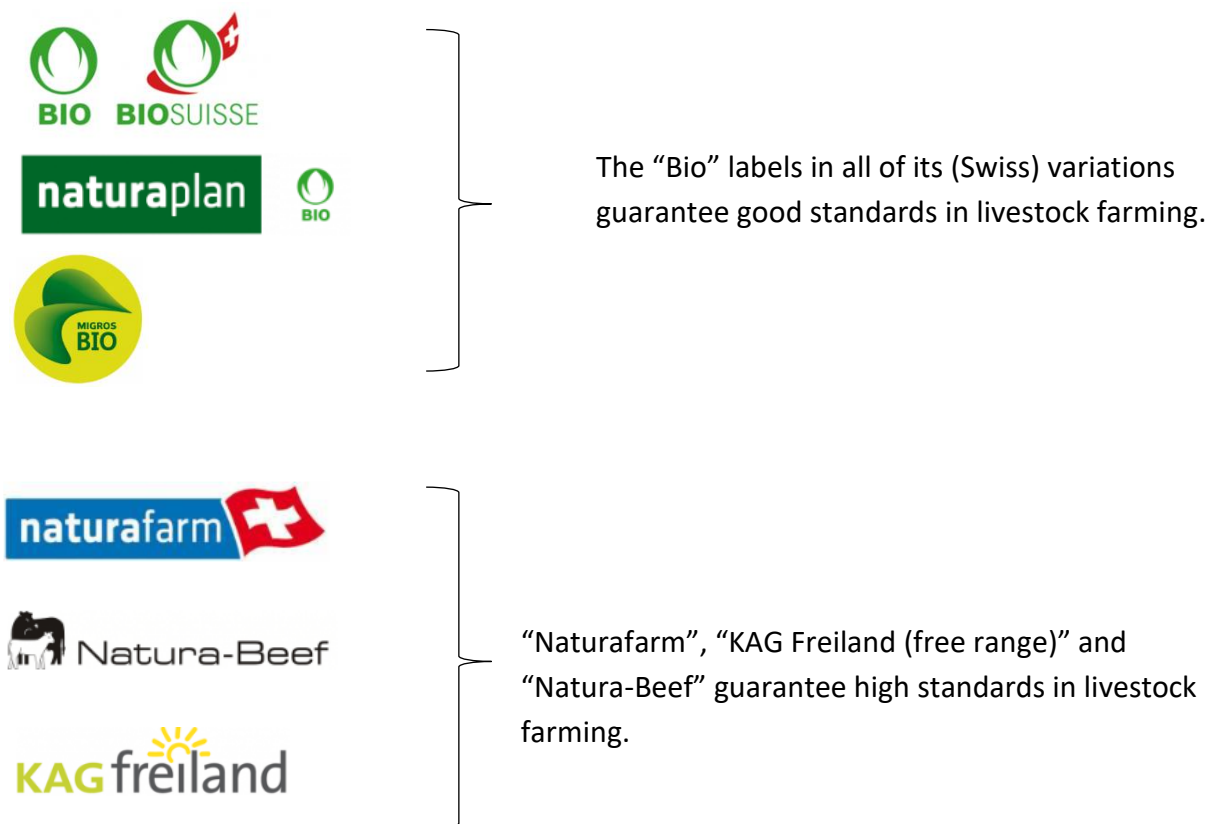


## Labels in Switzerland:

There are numerous labels and while a few of them are widely known in Switzerland, others are less common. I can imagine that from an expat perspective, the identification of all the labels and what standards they represent might be even more difficult.

According to the “Stiftung für Konsumentenschutz Schweiz”, the institution for consumer protection in Switzerland, there are more than 65 major food labels in Switzerland ([Link](#)). Many of the super market chains in Switzerland want to create their own labels, as they would need to pay license fees in case they use an existing label of any other organisation ([Link](#)). Leaving aside some by Swiss law governed expressions like “Bio” (organic) or “Öko” (eco), when using other wordings, the standards can be different from each other leading to some confusion of the consumer.



Several non-profit organisations in Switzerland have created an overview of which labels they can recommend regarding key aspects of environmentally friendly produced food. Unfortunately, this overview is only available in German, French and Italian, which limits the range of expats being able to read the analysis. The overview is available in the three languages on the [WWF webpage](#). Below, I selected a few, which I think are widely known:







## SUMMARY

1. My experience is that many Swiss people are not aware of the minimum standards for animal welfare on farms. This is supported by the before mentioned consumer magazine survey as well as by an indicator from the “World Animal Protection Organisation” below ([Link](#)). According to a by animal protection NGO’s created report, which classified 50 countries regarding numerous aspects of animal protection, Switzerland received the grade “C” in regard to humane education on a scale from G (worst) to A (best). Japan received only an “E” on the same scale.

<u>Switzerland</u>	<u>Japan</u>
Providing humane education	
<u>Education on animal care and protection</u>	
	

2. In spite of having detailed regulation on livestock welfare in Switzerland, many animals still live in rough conditions. However, Switzerland receives better scores on animal welfare and belongs to the leading countries in this regard.

<u>Switzerland</u>	<u>Japan</u>
<u>Protecting animals used in farming</u>	
	

3. In both countries we can find a variety of labels, which offer a choice on what to consume. However, without proper education and internationally standardised labels, it is nearly impossible to compare products in different countries. There is surely in both countries potential to improve consumer education and consumer awareness as well as the current regulation to protect livestock.