

# A Life's History

The man who developed modern Japan's seeds and plants industry

Takeo Sakata

# 坂田武雄

(1888 ~ 1984)



Manga by Mieru Fujiyama

Edited by SAKATA SEED CORPORATION

The founder of the company, Takeo Sakata, endured many hardships.

SAKATA NO TANE (SAKATA SEED CORPORATION) is a company that develops a large number of flower and vegetable varieties.

You like the same flowers I do, Takeo.

This is a great tree!

Takeo was a small, quiet boy who liked reading, flora, and fauna.

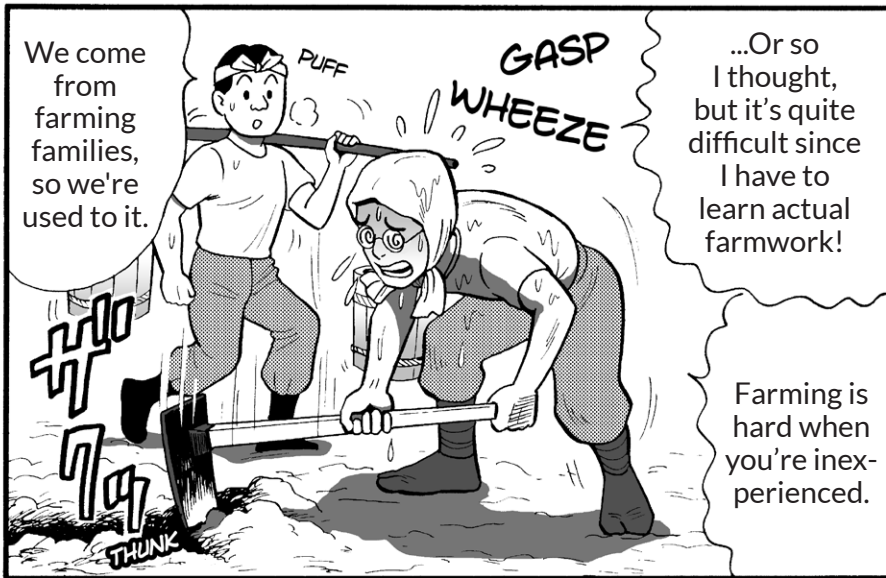
He was born on December 15, 1888, in Tokyo. He was the oldest son of Denzo Sakata's family of eight children.

I love seeing plants bud in the springtime!

EXCITED

When he lived in Yamagata Prefecture, he would get excited during springtime.

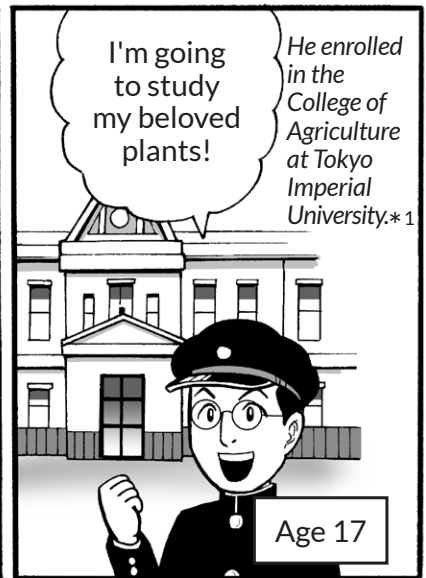
The Sakata family descended from a samurai family, but his father became a schoolteacher during the Meiji era.



We come from farming families, so we're used to it.

...Or so I thought, but it's quite difficult since I have to learn actual farmwork!

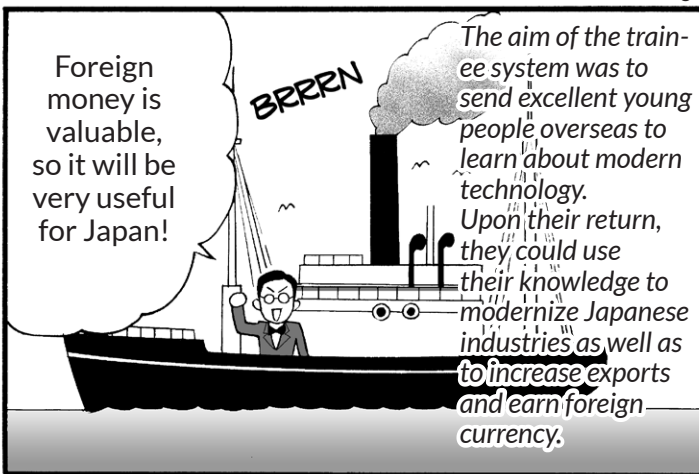
Farming is hard when you're inexperienced.



I'm going to study my beloved plants!

He enrolled in the College of Agriculture at Tokyo Imperial University.\*1

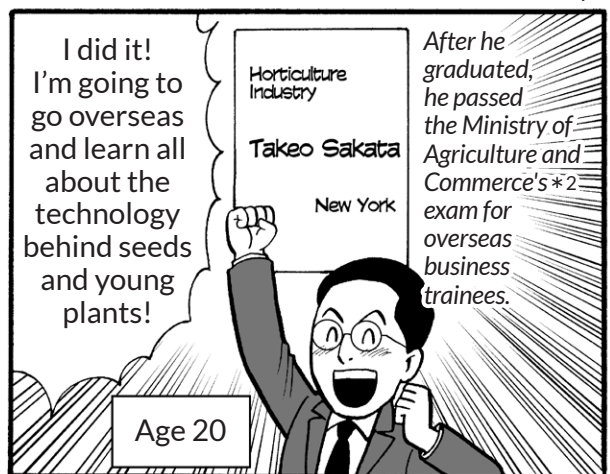
Age 17



Foreign money is valuable, so it will be very useful for Japan!

BRRRN

The aim of the trainee system was to send excellent young people overseas to learn about modern technology. Upon their return, they could use their knowledge to modernize Japanese industries as well as to increase exports and earn foreign currency.



I did it! I'm going to go overseas and learn all about the technology behind seeds and young plants!

Horticulture Industry  
Takeo Sakata  
New York

After he graduated, he passed the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce's \*2 exam for overseas business trainees.

Age 20

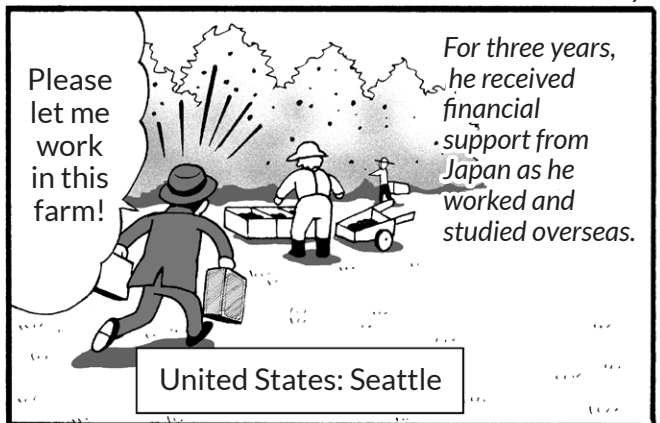


In the U.S., it's not just their society but also their way of thinking that's progressive...



What?! It's totally fine in Japan!

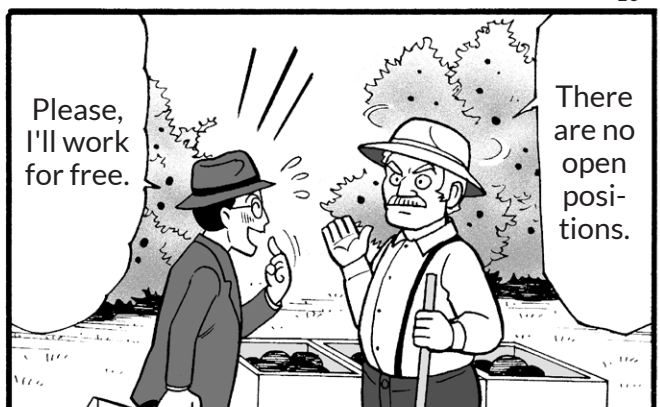
No! It's the rule that you have to be paid if you're working! You can't work for free!



Please let me work in this farm!

For three years, he received financial support from Japan as he worked and studied overseas.

United States: Seattle



Please, I'll work for free.

There are no open positions.

\*1 Now the Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, Faculty of Agriculture.

\*2 This organization is now divided into the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.



I'll read anything from technical books to novels.

Thanks to that, I was able to learn English.

He had every Sunday off and would spend the entire day reading in the library.

Physical labor is really hard, but I can do it with the Japanese spirit!

Are you okay? Hey, boy!

GRUNT

WOEELE

He moved to New Jersey and joined one of the world's top young plant companies, Henry A. Dreer.

Eisele became the patron that Takeo respected the most.

Thank you very much!

You're diligent and have a lot of potential! I will develop you into an outstanding young plant trader!

Takeo eventually caught the eye of the company president, Eisele.

Takeo is a serious boy. He keeps his word!

SMILE

Want to have lunch together?

No, I still have work to do.

But Takeo firmly kept his promise.

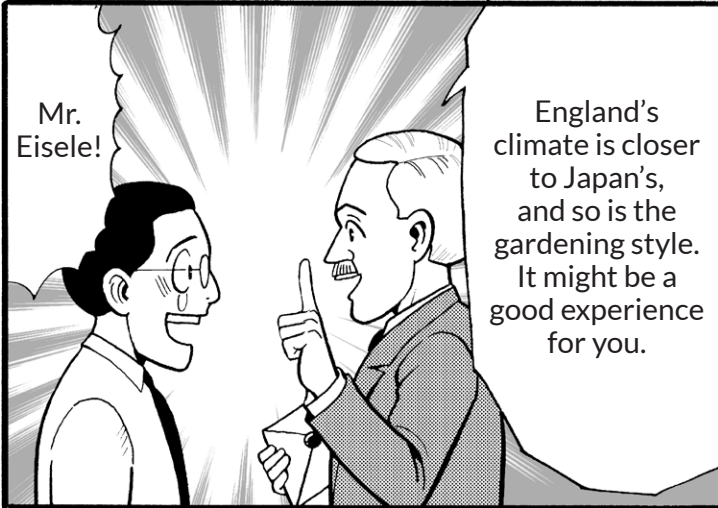
I want to go to a bookkeeping school so I can manage that... \*3

When I return to Japan, I'll set up a young plant company.

You don't have to worry about such a small amount of time.

I want to go to school, so please let me leave work thirty minutes early. I'll work the extra time during my lunch break.

\*3 Bookkeeping is a method of recording financial transactions in a notebook called an account book.



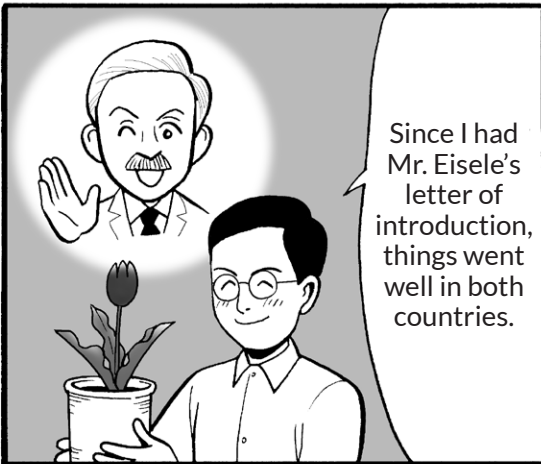
Mr. Eisele!

England's climate is closer to Japan's, and so is the gardening style. It might be a good experience for you.

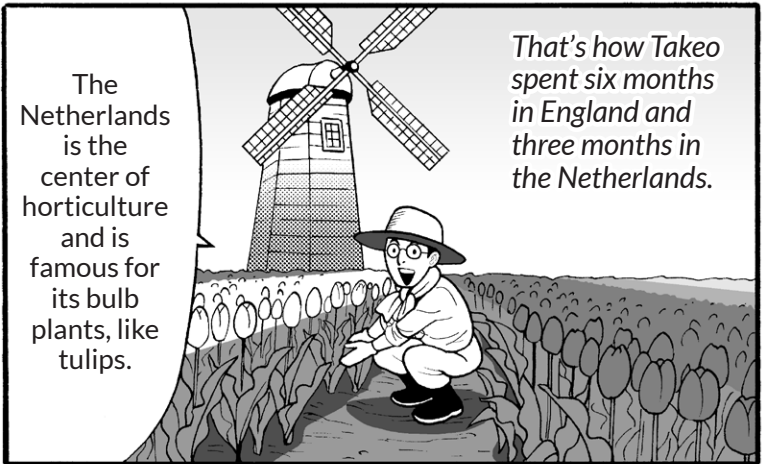


Takeo, why not go to England?

After three years, it was finally time for him to return to Japan.



Since I had Mr. Eisele's letter of introduction, things went well in both countries.



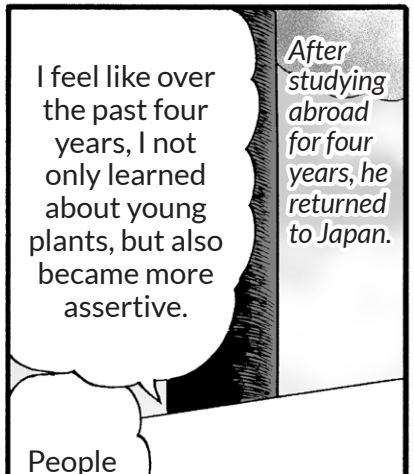
That's how Takeo spent six months in England and three months in the Netherlands.



This company will specialize in young plants!

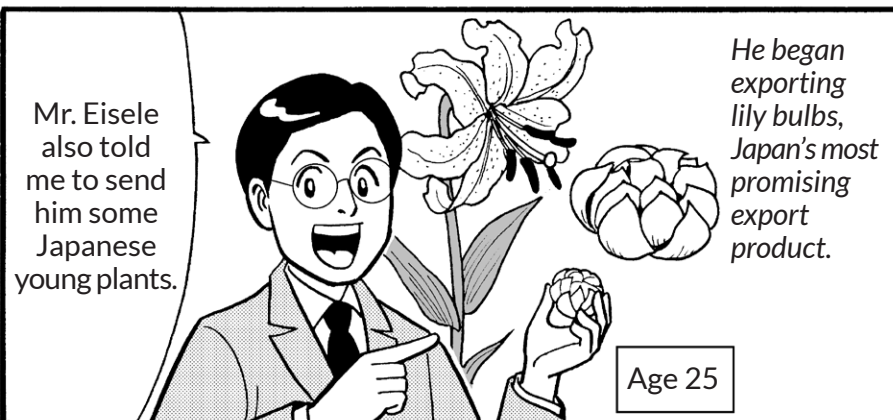
My father was against it, but I'll be a successful businessman!

He opened a business called Sakata Noen in Japan's largest trade port, Yokohama, and began importing and exporting young plants.



I feel like over the past four years, I not only learned about young plants, but also became more assertive.

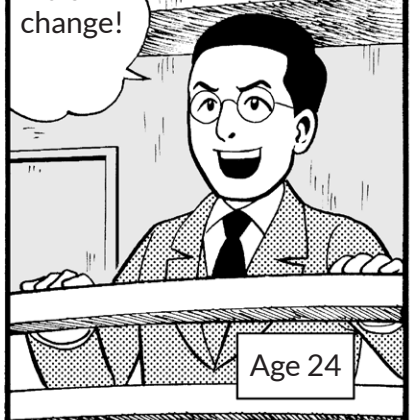
After studying abroad for four years, he returned to Japan.



Mr. Eisele also told me to send him some Japanese young plants.

He began exporting lily bulbs, Japan's most promising export product.

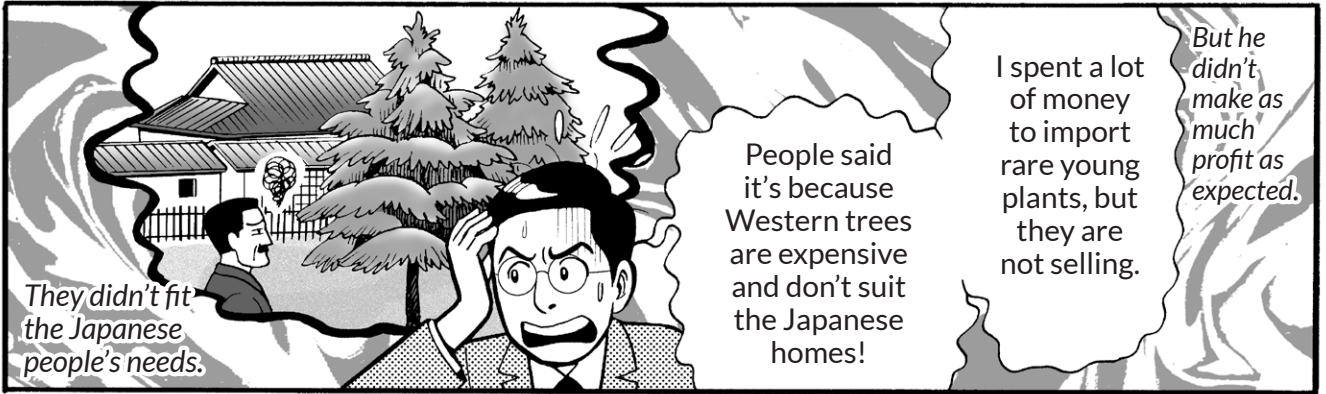
Age 25



People also change!

Age 24



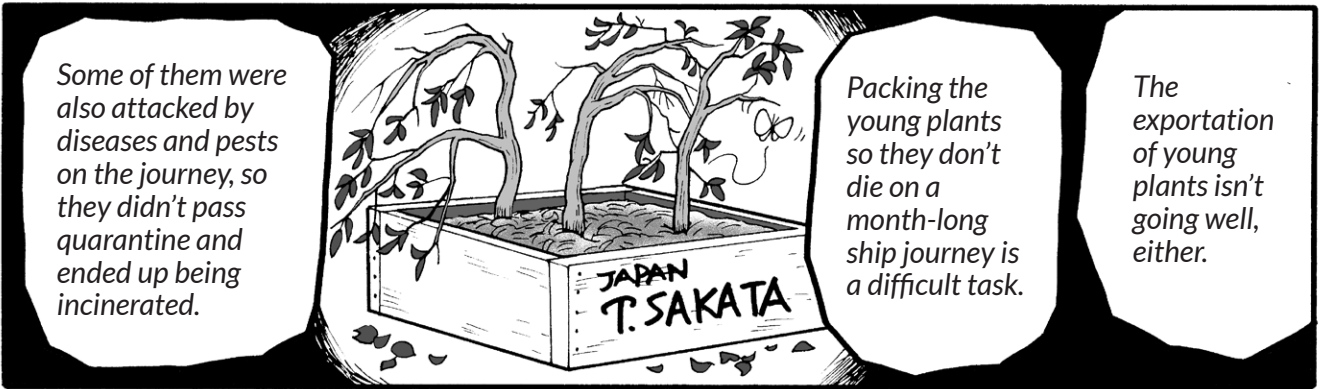


They didn't fit the Japanese people's needs.

People said it's because Western trees are expensive and don't suit the Japanese homes!

I spent a lot of money to import rare young plants, but they are not selling.

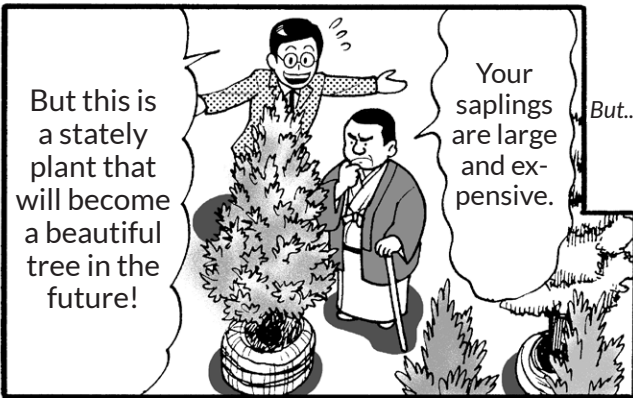
But he didn't make as much profit as expected.



Some of them were also attacked by diseases and pests on the journey, so they didn't pass quarantine and ended up being incinerated.

Packing the young plants so they don't die on a month-long ship journey is a difficult task.

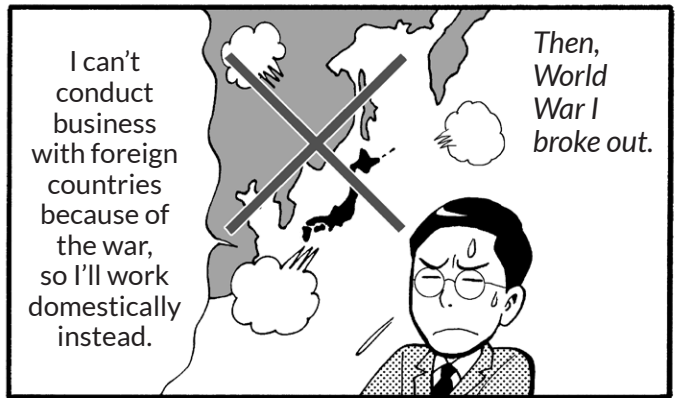
The exportation of young plants isn't going well, either.



But this is a stately plant that will become a beautiful tree in the future!

Your saplings are large and expensive.

But...

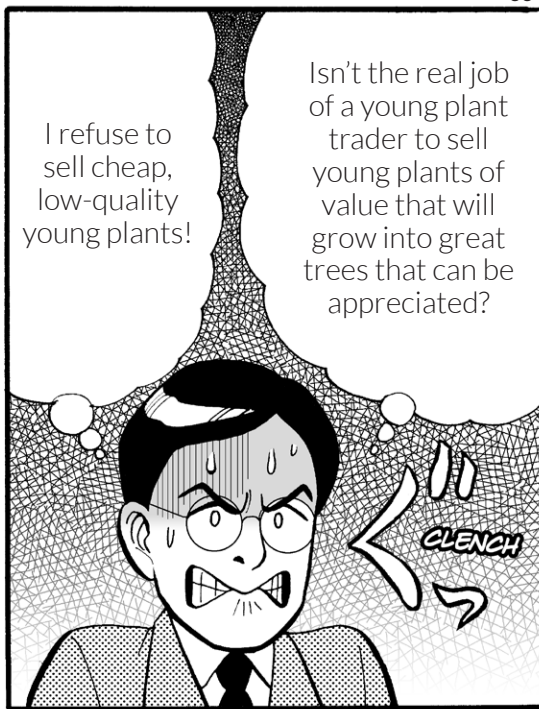


I can't conduct business with foreign countries because of the war, so I'll work domestically instead.

Then, World War I broke out.

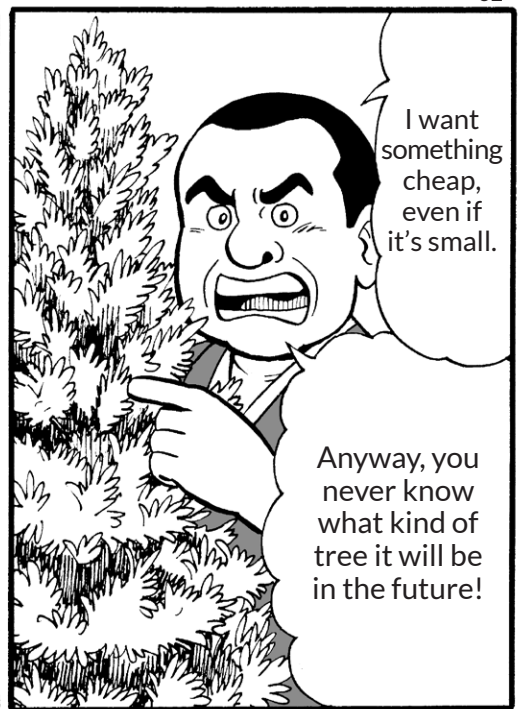


Then his patron, Mr. Eisele, passed away.



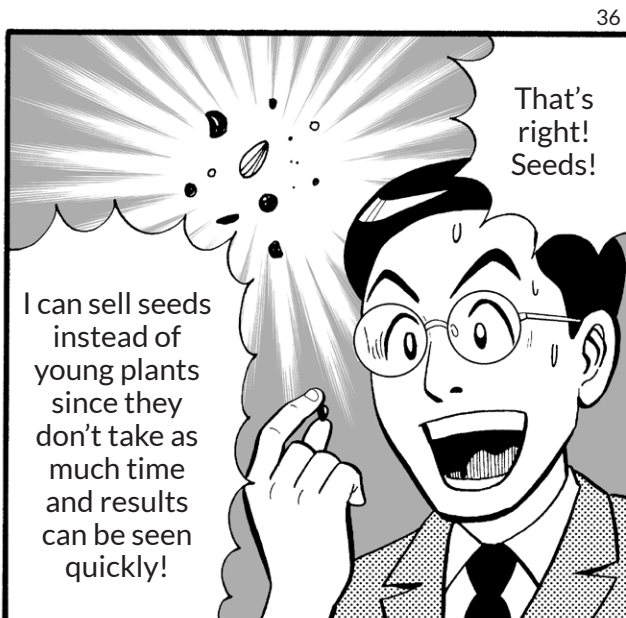
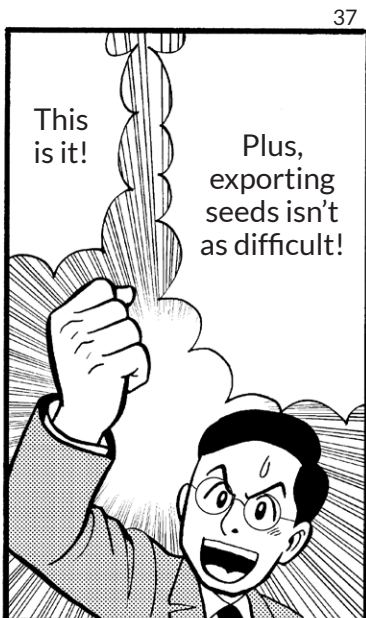
I refuse to sell cheap, low-quality young plants!

Isn't the real job of a young plant trader to sell young plants of value that will grow into great trees that can be appreciated?

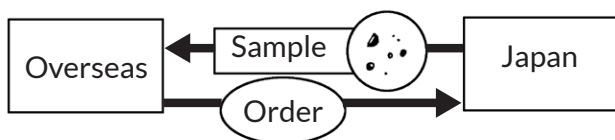


I want something cheap, even if it's small.

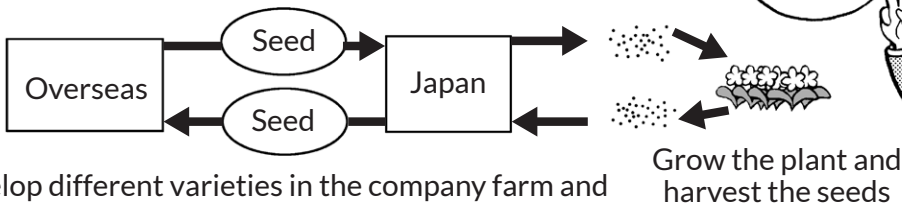
Anyway, you never know what kind of tree it will be in the future!



1. Send Japanese seed samples overseas and receive orders for more



2. Import seeds from overseas, cultivate the seeds in Japan, produce those seeds and re-export the seeds



3. Develop different varieties in the company farm and export those seeds

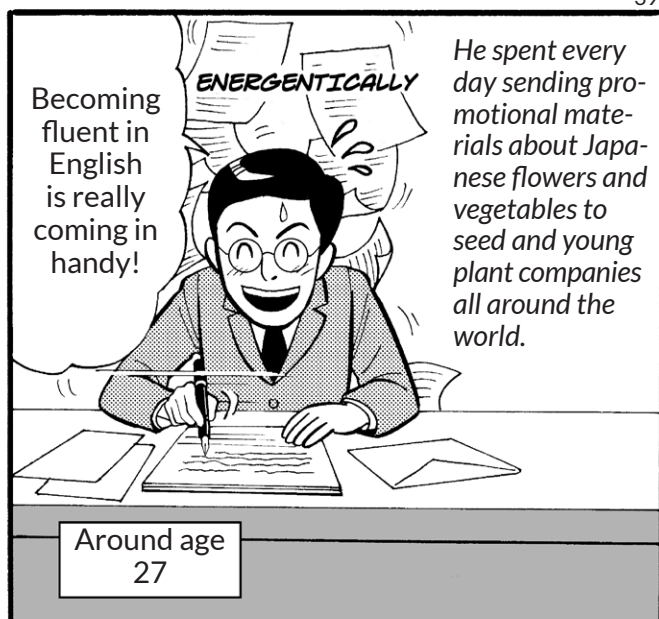


First, I thought of three different methods.

He was the first person in Japan to try exporting seeds.



38



\*4 After that, the company name was changed to Sakata Shokai.





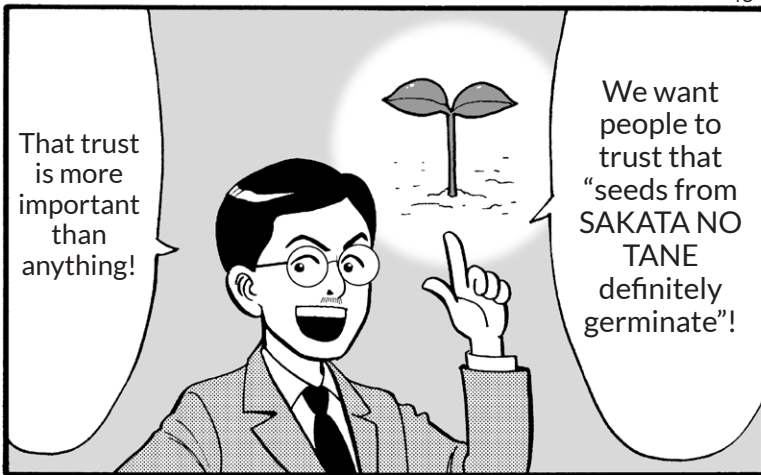
In this germination laboratory, I can determine which seeds have a high germination rate and export them.

You can't tell if a seed will germinate just by its appearance.

In order to export high-quality seeds, Takeo created the first private germination laboratory.

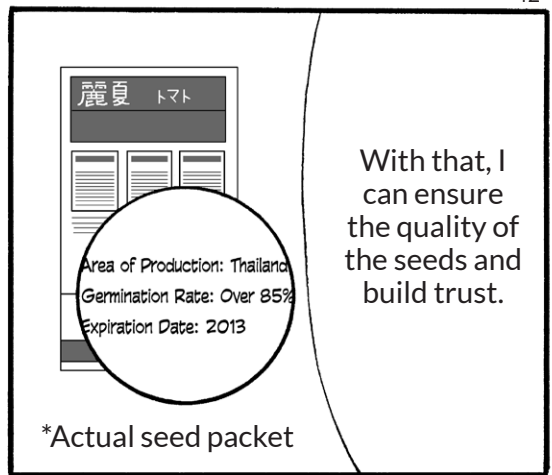
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42



That trust is more important than anything!

We want people to trust that "seeds from SAKATA NO TANE definitely germinate"!

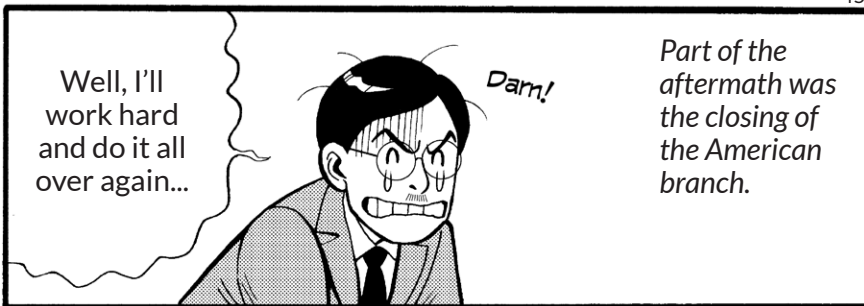


With that, I can ensure the quality of the seeds and build trust.

\*Actual seed packet

45

44



Well, I'll work hard and do it all over again...

Damn!

Part of the aftermath was the closing of the American branch.



On top of that, the warehouse and the seeds went up in flames.

At the time, the Great Kanto Earthquake happened and the office was destroyed.

I almost died...

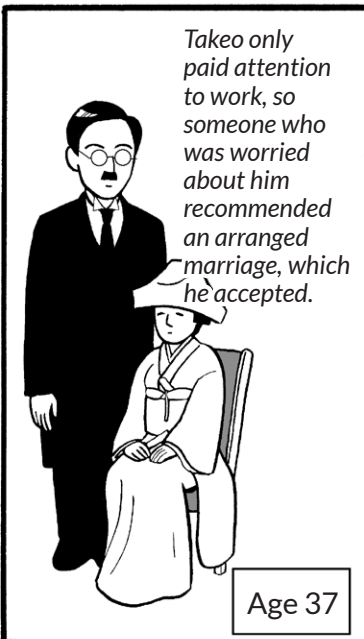
T.SAKATA

RATTLE

RATTLE

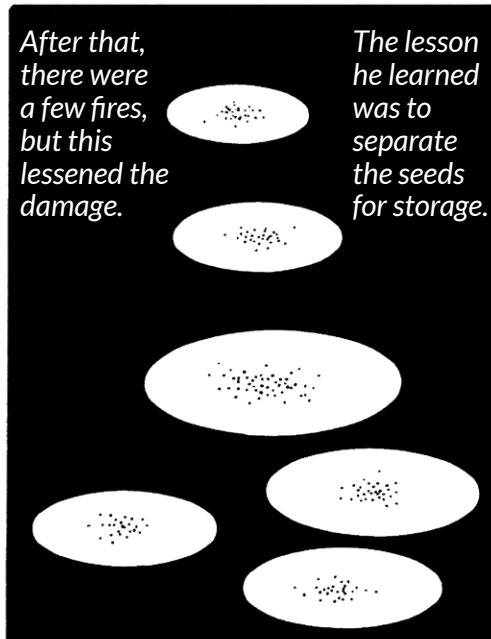
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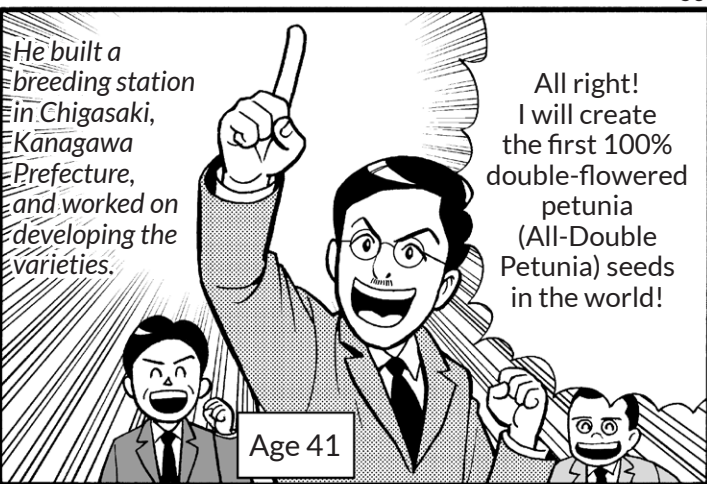
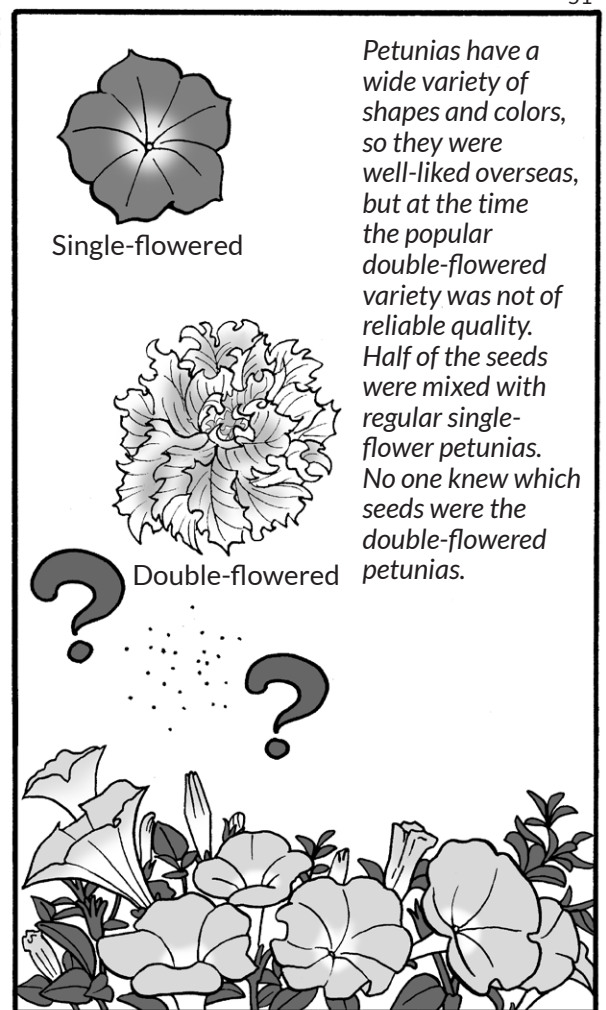
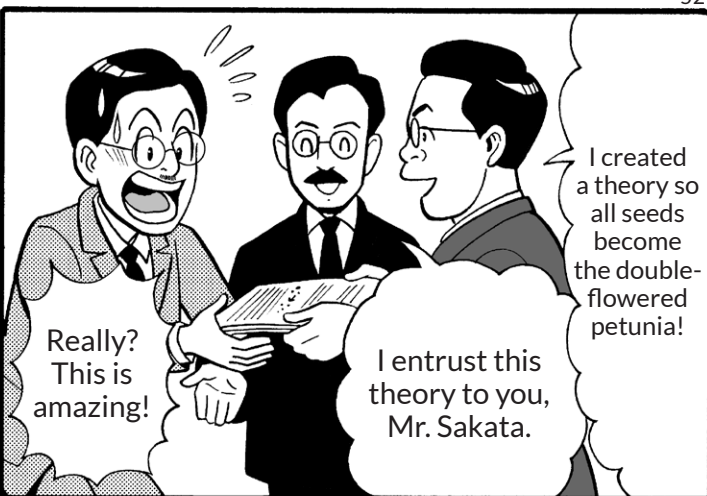
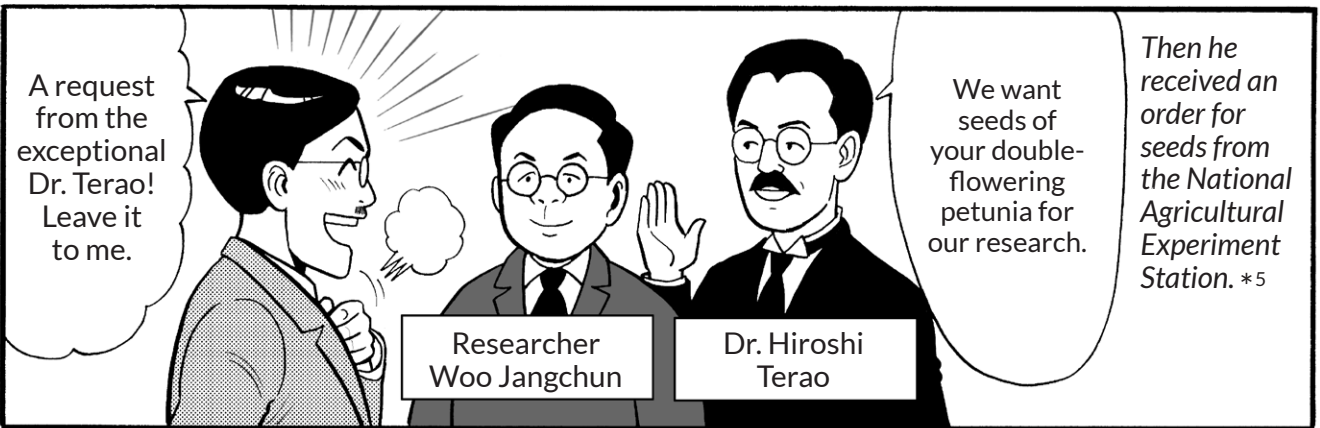
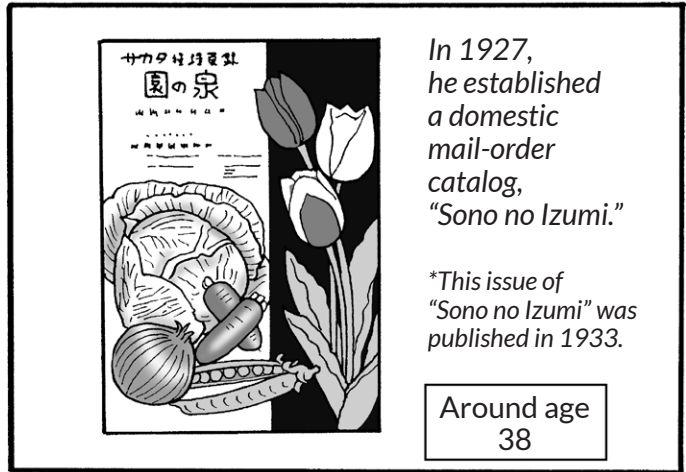
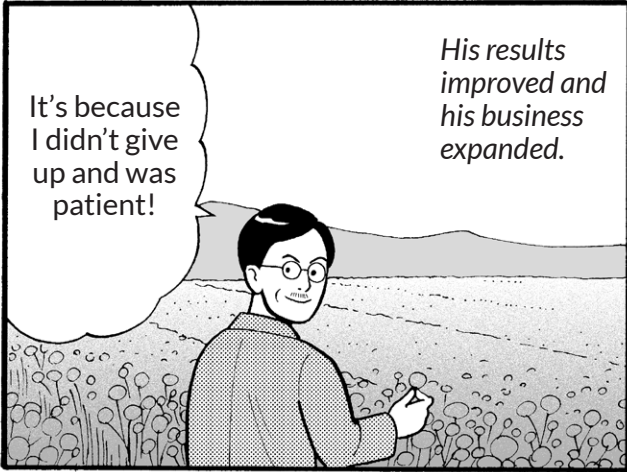
Takeo only paid attention to work, so someone who was worried about him recommended an arranged marriage, which he accepted.

Age 37



After that, there were a few fires, but this lessened the damage.

The lesson he learned was to separate the seeds for storage.

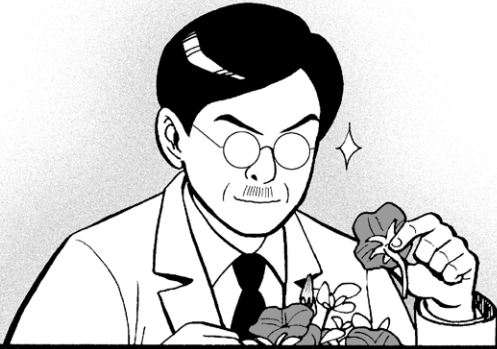


\*5 The equivalent of the modern Agricultural Experiment Station. At the time, they did advanced research in agriculture and horticulture.



You have to think of different conditions, such as the international preferences for flowers, colors, shape, cultivation environment, and pest prevention.

In order to develop new varieties, you need not just theory but also the trained sense of a grower.



He created the petunia varieties called "Victorious Mixed."

Thank goodness!

I want to sell "Victorious Mixed" seeds.

-Benary

The only company that trusted him, a German company, asked for seeds.



Sakata from Japan is selling it?

They began being sold in 1932, but they didn't sell well.

There's no way a Japanese person could develop such a difficult flower.



I'm honored to be recognized by the world!

In 1934, the only non-profit plant trialing or organization in North America AAS (All-America Selections) awarded "Victorious Mixed" the silver medallion.

Age 45



These flower seeds are more expensive than gold!

Thanks to that, news of the wonderful flower varieties spread throughout the world.

After that, the seeds began selling like hot cakes. So quickly it was like they were flying. They became very expensive, and he was able to sell them for twenty times the price of gold.

It's Sakata's magic!



But another dark cloud hung over him.

He opened a branch in Shanghai and a farm in Beijing.



After the development of the All-Double Petunia, business has been stable. Let's continue to make better varieties!

# サカタのタネ

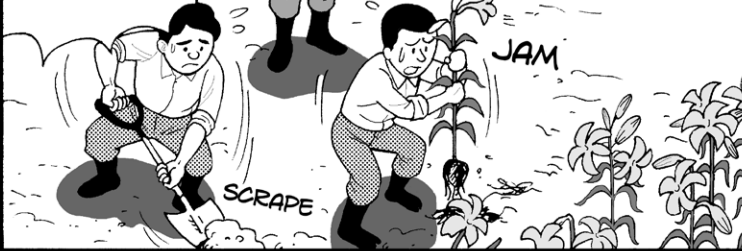
In 1938, Takeo registered the current company name, SAKATA NO TANE, as a trademark.

Sakata's Seeds

Forget about flowers! Plant sweet potatoes because they fill people's bellies!



As Takeo expected, the war situation was tough and people weren't interested in flowers.



How stupid! There's no way we'll win!

Japan entered World War II.



Age 52

Sir?!

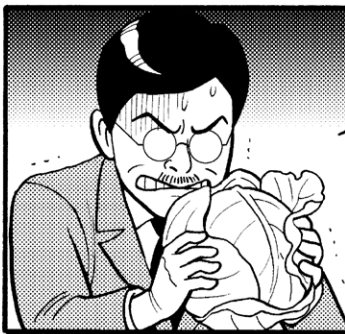
I quit! I'm going to retire!



I can't produce seeds, and even if I develop new varieties, I can't sell or export them. The work I do is nothing!

Age 56

Even though I made the world's first new cabbage, I can't sell it... \*6



We can't do the work or development that we want to!



Dai Nippon Shubyou Association was created to consolidate the seed and young plant companies. He ended up working underneath an association official.



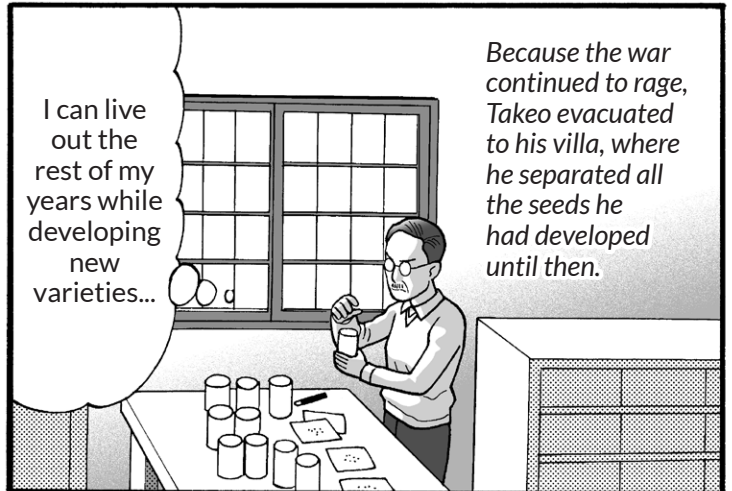
\*6 The world's first F1 cabbage, called "Suteki Kanran." It was first announced in 1939.





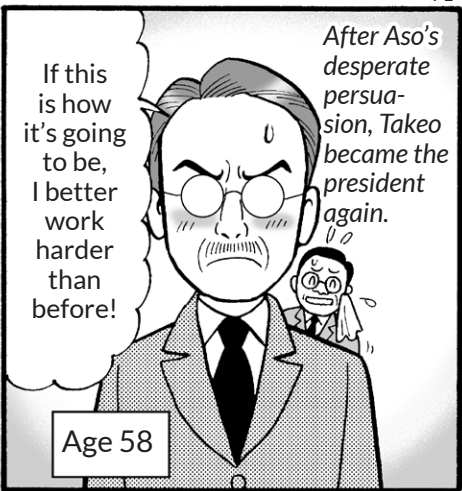
Please come back and be the president!

But soon the war ended, and he was visited by the second company president, Imasuke Aso.



I can live out the rest of my years while developing new varieties...

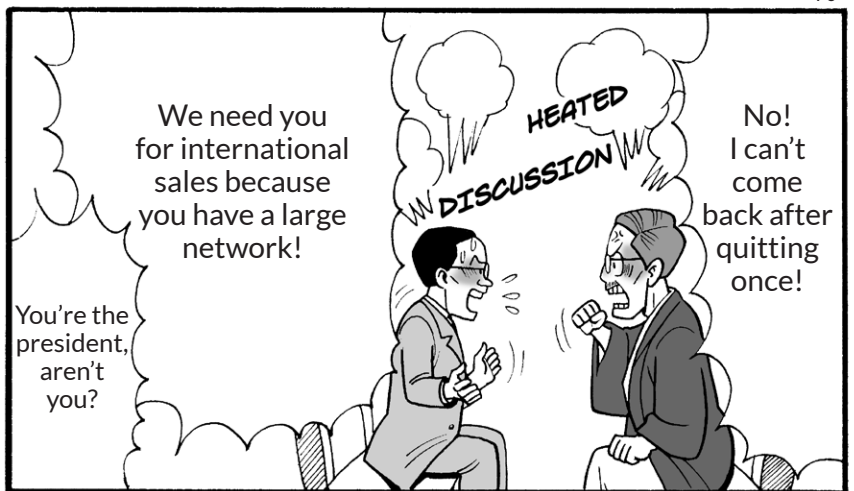
Because the war continued to rage, Takeo evacuated to his villa, where he separated all the seeds he had developed until then.



If this is how it's going to be, I better work harder than before!

After Aso's desperate persuasion, Takeo became the president again.

Age 58

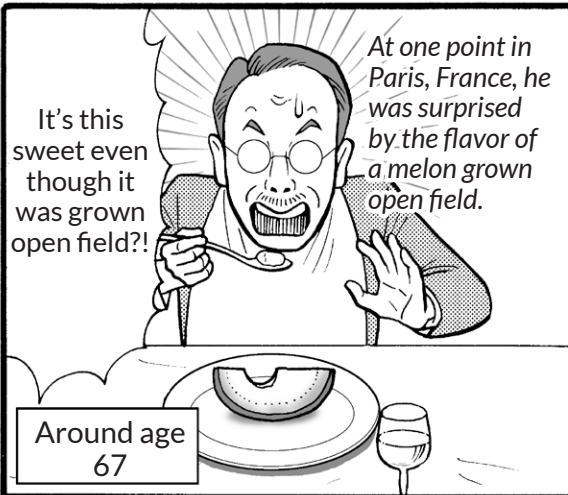


We need you for international sales because you have a large network!

You're the president, aren't you?

HEATED DISCUSSION

No! I can't come back after quitting once!



It's this sweet even though it was grown open field?!

At one point in Paris, France, he was surprised by the flavor of a melon grown open field.

Around age 67



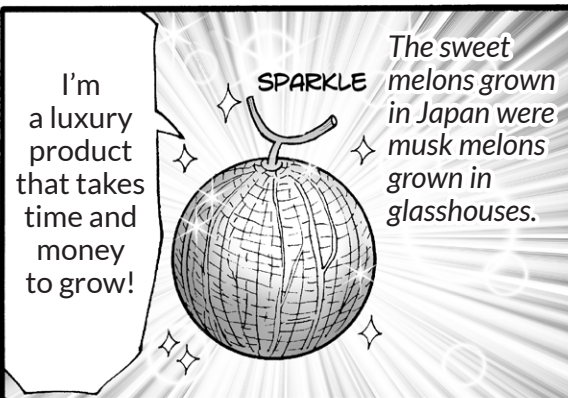
He began the scientific development of new varieties.



Now there are foreign countries also making 100% double-flowered petunias.

Because of the war, Japan's plant breeding has fallen behind that of the rest of the world.

I'll bring this country back up to speed!



I'm a luxury product that takes time and money to grow!

The sweet melons grown in Japan were musk melons grown in glasshouses.

I know! Why don't we breed it with the Oriental melon, which is native to Japan?

But even after five years of development, they weren't getting good results.

Let's develop a reasonable, sweet "commoner people's melon" that can be grown just as easily as Oriental melon!

Japanese people have loved Makuwa uri (Oriental melon) since ancient times!

Takeo sent those seeds to Japan and ordered the development of open field melons.

Yes!

Age 73

In the blink of an eye, the melon "Prince" became very popular and was loved by families nationwide.

Even we can buy this melon!

It's great!

Two years after Takeo came up with the idea, they began selling a melon variety they named "Prince."

It's sweet and delicious!

There is no end in the world of seeds.

Until he passed away at the age of 95, he lived a life full of passion for seed development.

This sentence was one of his catchphrases.

He also imported good varieties from overseas to Japan.

Sweet corn "Honey Bantam"

Snap peas "Snack"

It's an award of honor that's given to people who have contributed to the development of the horticultural industry!

After that, he kept successfully developing different vegetable varieties, and in 1965, he became the first Japanese person to be awarded the Medallion of Honor by AAS.

Age 76

The End