

Japan's Food Evolution: MODERN TRADITION

JAPANESE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE UNITE TRADITION, INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY, SHAPING A HARMONIOUS, GLOBALLY INSPIRING FUTURE. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

Synonymous with precision, freshness and artistry, Japanese food has become a global phenomenon, transcending nourishment to symbolize harmony in flavors, textures and aesthetics. Yet, Japan's food and agriculture sector's influence extends far beyond culinary artistry. It is a driving force in sustainability, energy and health, shaping a culinary revolution merging societal advancements with heritage-rich dishes and beverages.

At the heart of Japanese culture, restaurants serve as ambassadors of *washoku*, embodying the spirit of *omotenashi* (hospitality). Ume no Hana exemplifies this with exquisite *kaiseki* dining, highlighting delicate *yuba* and tofu dishes. "Omotenashi, health and unforgettable experiences define us," says CEO Yuji Honda. "From the first welcome to the last bite, we create moments to cherish."

Tea makers like Harada Tea and Mitsui Norin epitomize the art of blending tradition with modern innovation, crafting beverages that are deeply embedded in Japan's cultural identity. From humble households to elegant tea ceremonies, tea embodies simplicity, mindful-

ness and well-being. "Matcha powder is very easy to use—its health benefits have gained wide recognition," says Harada Tea's president, Soichiro Harada. Mitsui Norin CEO Mitsunori Saeki echoes this sentiment: "Black tea has polyphenols, and the aroma of tea has a relaxing effect." These companies are redefining Japanese tea, influencing global culinary trends.

Japan's culinary excellence thrives on quality and innovation, exemplified by its surimi-based seafood—a sustainable, nutritious alternative to traditional proteins. Industry leaders like Sugiyo highlight this ingenuity, with President Tetsuya Sugino reflecting on *Kanikama*'s journey: "I remember taking it to Tsukiji Fish Market for the first time and seeing middlemen flooding forward. After 50 years, this product is now recognized as an indispensable ingredient in Japanese cuisine." By blending authenticity with forward-thinking Japanese cuisine continues to captivate the world, timeless and ever evolving.

Beyond dining, Japan's food and agriculture are transforming sustainability, led by Farmdo's innovative vision. By fusing renewable energy with advanced farming, Farmdo

nurtures the land and redefines agriculture globally. "The sun is our treasure," says President Masayuki Iwai. "Converting solar energy into everyday usable power is socially meaningful work. Solar energy, after all, comes at no cost."

Blending heritage and modernity, Japanese food and agriculture redefine global standards, shaping how we eat and connect with culture. From sushi artistry to sustainable farming, Japan exemplifies excellence. Its dedication to quality, hospitality and sustainability inspires a harmonious future. Japan's innovations promise a lasting legacy, nourishing body and soul while leading the way to a sustainable world.



Asahi Shokuhin Shrimp Cheek Snack—*Shichimi*



Asahi Shokuhin's Tosayamamura Yuzu Ponzu Sauce, 360ml

UME NO HANA'S Global Kaiseki Vision

WITH A GROWING NETWORK OF RESTAURANTS AT HOME AND ABROAD, THE CULINARY EXPERTS AIM TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF JAPANESE FOOD'S BOOMING POPULARITY. *By Sean McBride*

Restaurant group Ume no Hana has taken the culinary artistry of *kaiseki*—a multi-course meal of Japanese cuisine—and is exporting it to the world amid the increasing international popularity of Japan's food.

Ume no Hana CEO Yuji Honda states that the firm's flagship cuisine blends historical and traditional elements of *kaiseki* with contemporary dining practices, all while focusing on *omotenashi*—traditional Japanese hospitality.

"We try to provide our guests with a welcoming experience from the opening of the doors to the very last portion," he says. "Everything they experience in one of our restaurants should become a good memory."

To achieve a balanced *kaiseki* course, Honda explains, you must judiciously select the best possible ingredients while providing the *omotenashi* experience.

Since 2013, Japanese cuisine has been recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage—a status which Honda describes as "unprecedented." And Ume no Hana has capitalized on the rising profile of Japanese food by opening new restaurants internationally and exporting its Plum Blossom products.

With plans for continued global expansion, Honda aims to educate the world on the incredible food and culinary culture Japan has to offer.



"We want to create a welcoming and inclusive, extraordinary environment for our guests."

Yuji Honda

CEO, Ume no Hana Co., Ltd.



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NO IMITATION: HOW SUGIYO *Conquered the Globe*



THROUGH DECADES OF CONTINUOUS INNOVATION AND THE EXPLOSION IN POPULARITY OF JAPANESE FOOD, SUGIYO IS FINDING GLOBAL SUCCESS WITH ITS UNIQUE, FLAVORFUL SEAFOOD. *By Daniel de Bomford*

Since Sugiyo began processing fish and producing fish products over 150 years ago, the company has seen remarkable ongoing success in both the domestic and international markets. President Tetsuya Sugino says Sugiyo's flagship product, Kanikama—an alternative to crab meat made from fish paste—has become a staple of Japanese cuisine and can be found in dishes all over the world. The story of Kanikama's development serves as a perfect example of “making lemonade out of lemons.” Originally a failed attempt to create an alternative to jellyfish, it was Mr. Sugino's predecessor who recognized its uncanny resemblance to the physical appearance and texture of crab, transforming a setback into a ground-breaking success. As the price of crab was increasing dramatically, he saw an opportunity to fill a gap in the market. While the product initially struggled, over time it was embraced by Japan and later the world. “It became massively popular in Japan, especially among those who saw crab as too high-end,” Mr. Sugino says. “Thankfully, after 50 years, we are now accepted by society, and this alternative crab is recognized as an indispensable ingredient in Japanese cuisine.”

Despite the shrinking population of Japan, Mr. Sugino says that there are still plenty of domestic growth opportunities. “We do still see huge potential in the Japanese market, ideally by entering new areas and new ways of selling products,” he says. Mr. Sugino also sees opportunity in the international market, especially with the increased global popularity of Japanese food. “The biggest driver of Japanese cuisine growth across the globe has to be the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage recognition that it received back in 2013,” he says. Combined with the depreciation of the yen empowering exports, Sugiyo is finding success internationally in the United States, East Asia and Southeast Asia.

Hunger and fascination for Japanese cuisine has driven over a decade of growth. Yet, this is nothing new for Sugiyo. A veteran of the international market, the company began exporting to the U.S. nearly 50 years ago. Sugiyo started by partnering with United Airlines, an alliance that revealed demand for its alternative crab. Leveraging that demand, it pivoted to the U.S. restaurant industry—specifically steakhouses, where crab is served on the same plate as steak.



Mr. Sugino explains Sugiyo's competitive advantage: “The price of snow crabs was increasing, and so many middle-class restaurants chose to use our alternative crab instead of actual crab.” A key part of this is the company's methodical approach to partnerships, domestic or abroad. Mr. Sugino describes Sugiyo's ideal partner of choice: “Finding the most

appropriate overseas partner is very important in our international business expansion,” he says. “The whole point of alternative crab is to enjoy the product itself. Something we have learned is to share a mindset with a partner.”

Sugiyo continues to innovate and develop products to satisfy ever-evolving global tastes, adapting to changes in consumer habits and market trends. Key to this, for example, is innovating to meet the increasing emphasis

on healthy living and sustainability—and Sugiyo's product portfolio caters to conscious consumers. “One focus we have,” Mr. Sugino notes, “is on strengthening the protein content of our products so that athletes and people who like to exercise or are looking to build muscle can intake these products.” Going hand-in-hand with health, sustainability is a major priority for Sugiyo, and Mr. Sugino says it is vital to adapt as global warming disrupts traditional supply chains.

For over a century, Sugiyo has continued to innovate and has proven that it can succeed no matter the market. With its forward-thinking approach and an eye trained on the market, Sugiyo is poised to remain a leader in Japanese seafood exports. “As a food company, it is important that we are constantly mindful of providing sustainable food to the people in the best way possible,” Mr. Sugino says.



“It is important that we are constantly mindful of providing sustainable food to the people in the best way possible.”

Tetsuya Sugino
President, Sugiyo Co., Ltd.



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"The driving force behind global tea demand is wellness."

Mitsunori Saeki

CEO, Mitsui Norin Co., Ltd.

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GREAT-TASTING TEA that Promotes Good Health

MITSUI NORIN BLENDS TRADITIONAL TEA EXPERTISE WITH INNOVATION, CREATING CUSTOMER-CENTRIC PRODUCTS AND HEALTH-FOCUSED BEVERAGES THAT CATER TO THE GLOBAL MARKET.

By Cian O'Neill

Mitsui Norin is a leading tea producer specializing in blending black tea and creating functional products with health perks. The Japanese company combines traditional expertise with innovative research and development as it explores the benefits of tea.

Responding to the health concerns of Japan's aging society, Mitsui Norin is developing new products with wellness upsides. For instance, black tea contains polyphenols, which studies suggest help suppress increases in blood triglycerides and sugar levels. Leveraging these properties, the company has created a polyphenol-enhanced drink that has been submitted to the Japanese Consumer Affairs Agency as a Food with Function Claims.

Mitsui Norin CEO Mitsunori Saeki reveals the company "increases our product lineup by working with our tea enthusiasts" to co-create unique offerings. One example is the firm's "Milk Dissolving" tea bags, which contain a blend of milk and tea leaves. Just add boiling water and within 90 seconds you have a cup of milk tea. Easy!

The company is extending its reach beyond Japan, with a presence in Shanghai and plans to focus its overseas ambitions on China, Taiwan and other parts of Asia. By blending tradition, science and creativity, Mitsui Norin continues to set the standard for innovative tea production while developing functional products that increase the health of society.



Leading Innovation in Agrivoltaics

Farmdo Holdings' pioneering agrivoltaics model is advancing agriculture, promoting renewable energy globally, and revitalizing Japan's workforce and farming communities. By Paul Mannion and Bernard Thompson



Founded in 1994, Farmdo Holdings Co., Ltd. has become a leader in merging renewable energy with innovative farming techniques.



Mongolia business

Recognized for its patented agrivoltaics systems, the company operates 255 renewable energy facilities and plans to expand to 1,000 more locations domestically.

Farmdo's agrivoltaics technology integrates translucent solar panels with hydroponic systems, allowing vegetables to thrive under panels at the same time as electricity is generated. This system also provides stable

income for landowners by turning underutilized fields into productive and profitable assets. "Many people believed vegetables couldn't grow under solar panels, but our trials proved lettuce, tomatoes and strawberries all flourished," explains Masayuki Iwai, Farmdo's president. This dual-purpose approach is profitable, as selling electricity to the grid generates more than five times the revenue of vegetable farming.

The company also emphasizes technological innovation. Plans are underway to establish smart greenhouses in the town of Maebashi by 2027, featuring artificial intelligence-driven irrigation systems, drones and self-guided vehicles. Farmdo's smart greenhouses will also include climate-control systems powered by solar energy, ensuring year-round cultivation of high-demand



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crops such as leafy greens, tomatoes and strawberries. "We aim to attract young people and provide training and job experiences," notes Iwai, showcasing Farmdo's commitment to revitalizing Japan's aging agricultural workforce.

In addition to its domestic success, Farmdo is expanding internationally. The company holds patents for its agrivoltaics systems in seven countries and collaborates with the Japanese government through the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) to promote eco-

friendly projects worldwide. Current projects include solar plants in Mongolia and Kenya, as well as collaborations in Chile. Future initiatives will focus on expanding into Africa and Southeast Asia, key regions for renewable energy projects.

Looking ahead, Farmdo aims to increase sales by 70 percent within five years and expand globally. "The sun is our treasure," says Iwai. "Converting solar energy into everyday usable power is socially meaningful work. Solar energy, after all, comes at no cost." Farmdo envisions a future where solar-powered agriculture contributes to global food and energy security.

Masayuki Iwai, President,
Farmdo Holdings Co., Ltd.

Farmdo
group

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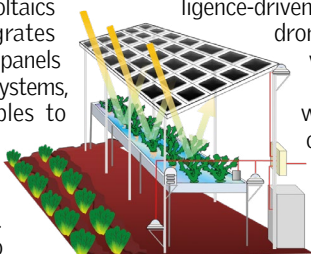


Illustration of Solar Farm® system



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GOING GLOBAL WITH BELOVED JAPANESE STAPLES

HARADA TEA HAS BEEN A LEADER IN THE PRODUCTION OF JAPANESE TEA FOR OVER A CENTURY AND IS GOING GLOBAL WITH INNOVATIVE TAKES ON THE COUNTRY'S CUISINE. *By Cian O'Neill and Daniel de Bomford*

The vibrant green hue and earthy smooth taste of matcha has transcended Japanese borders to captivate global palates as a beloved and revered cultural export. With over a century of experience as a Japanese green tea producer, Harada Tea looks to the future of Japan-grown matcha, both to meet the domestic supply and export internationally. President Soichiro Harada says that while black tea has been considered the “standard” tea, green tea has begun to become popular. “Matcha powder is very easy to use without generating waste, and it is easily mixed with milk, confections or combination drinks,” Harada says. As green tea continues to be recognized for its health benefits and consumers become more health conscious, Harada sees that popularity increasing even further and Harada Tea is ready to capitalize on this growing demand.

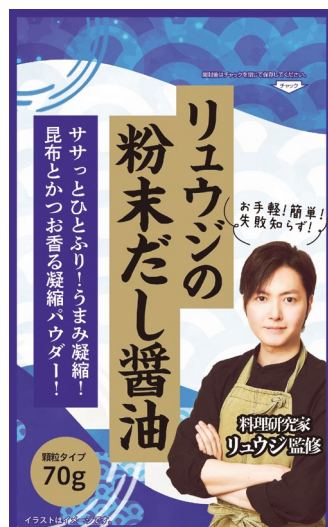
Sourcing its tea from Japan, Harada Tea has been made more competitive with the weaker yen. Harada outlines the company's policy: “Given the cost situation, we are not interested in going overseas for production since it is more cost-effective to rely on our tea cultivation in Japan.” Through its ability to source locally and its over 100 years of industry experience, Harada Tea maintains a strong relationship with growers in Japan and often advises them on best practices in a trend-driven market. “We get many consultation requests from small-scale tea leaf farmers. They want to

know whether they should move toward the trend or keep their traditional way of producing,” Harada says. He explains that Harada Tea is cognizant of chasing trends as it often dilutes the uniqueness of local varieties.

While Harada Tea has its own branded products, the bulk of its business is as an original equipment manufacturer (OEM). Harada says that the company's strength is its flexibility to support its clients and meet their unique specifications. “They may have specific requests about the taste, be it deeper, thinner or simpler,” he says. Harada explains that Harada Tea's role in the market is to be a support for its customers: “We see ourselves as a behind-the-scenes company, not one that performs on stage. We provide the ingredients for the green tea that many people drink every day, but we are in the background, and we consider that an important role to play.” Furthermore, Harada Tea attained FSSC 22000 certification, an internationally recognized food safety certification—which Harada says is a rarity for tea manufacturers: “There are only a few companies that export tea which have this certification, so this gets us a lot of interest from overseas buyers.”

Harada Tea's presence abroad presents a significant opportunity for expansion through e-commerce. Increasing its branded sales domestically would cause the company to compete directly with its OEM clients; however, the international market offers no such constraints. “We already have an OEM business overseas in a Singaporean supermarket. We provide OEM products, and we are providing ingredients for consumer drinks overseas as well,” Harada says.

In the United States, Harada Tea has partnered with Fujimart Corp., which operates the Maruichi supermarket chain. This partnership has created opportunities to develop products beyond tea—such as instant miso soup. “American people may not know, for example, how to make miso soup with dashi, so why not make it instant and just





“We are very flexible in catering to the needs of the customers.”

Soichiro Harada

President, Harada Tea Processing Co., Ltd.

add hot water?” Harada says. Japanese products could have wide appeal in foreign markets and the company president notes that its new instant miso is vegan and halal. “In that vein, our idea is to provide traditional Japanese vegan or vegetarian food,” he adds. Harada Tea’s powdered miso is currently preparing for launch in the U.S., and what could follow are other products that capitalize on the popularity of Japanese cuisine. Harada outlines their future path: “There’s a traditional Japanese Buddhist vegetarian cuisine called *shojin ryori*, that we want to export.” He goes on to explain that products like soy sauce, which are not used as often, are another key target. “In order to ensure freshness, we want to make an instant soy sauce powder that can be prepared and used whenever needed,” he says.

A key reason to diversify the company’s offerings is the challenges that Japan’s aging population will bring to the country’s agricultural sector. Harada explains that the agriculture industry struggles with a particularly aged workforce and wages that lag behind other sectors. “One reason for that is that the mass media talks a lot about there being many people struggling with low wages and that an increase in the price of agricultural products that are staples is an economic burden,” he says. Harada believes that increased prices for staples would be unpopular in the Japanese market.

Domestic consumers are also becoming concerned about food packaging and its effect on the environment. Harada Tea has an environmentally friendly bag that uses less plastic and energy but has found it challenging to



get consumers to adopt it in the domestic market. “It’s a circular bag, but Japanese people prefer a more structured package, usually with a Ziploc-like closure, which places a bigger burden on the environment,” Harada says. He goes on to explain that packaging that meets global standards doesn’t sell well in Japan, so Harada Tea has created a custom solution to meet the unique sensibilities of the Japanese market: “We have to make our own customized machine to make packaging with more of a neat, clean design that is accepted by the Japanese market.” However, Harada says that consumers in Japan will often return cardboard packaging with minor scratches or dents and believes that the solution ultimately lies with reshaping Japanese expectations. “I think the key issue is not about potential environmentally friendly options but more about the Japanese mindset, which needs to be normalized to a global standard,” he says.

Food waste is another challenge that comes with the particularity of the Japanese mindset. Harada says that there are “unwritten rules” about shelf life: For example, he explains, a product with a one-year shelf life should not be sent from the factory with less than 70 percent of that period remaining. Likewise, if the product is already in the store, it shouldn’t be displayed on shelves without a discount. He points out that the government is currently having a discussion to change this unwritten rule; to increase the acceptable time window in which a product can leave the factory or remain on a shelf.

While the future is sure to be full of challenges, Harada Tea has seen dramatic shifts in the economic, political and social environment in its 107 years of business. Its strong connections to local suppliers and international partners ensure it will have the opportunity to continue to bring Japanese products into overseas markets. Harada explains the company’s future goals: “We want to be a window to introduce various new types of Japanese foods and condiments to the global market.”



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