

# HOW WASHOKU CRAFTS MEMORIES FROM EXPERIENCES

FAMOUS THROUGHOUT THE GLOBE FOR ITS DISTINCT FLAVORS AND ARTISTRY, JAPANESE CUISINE KEEPS WITH THE TIMES TO DELIVER POWERFUL MOMENTS THAT BRING LIFELONG MEMORIES. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

**F**ood is a powerful anchor for memories. The tastes and aromas can take us back and let us experience special moments again and again. To create those anchors, quality ingredients prepared by considerate hands are paramount to the experience.

Celebrating this is FOODEX, Japan's premier food and beverage trade show, which connects suppliers and buyers from both Japan and abroad. With the Japanese government aiming to increase food exports to 5 trillion yen, Japanese cuisine manufacturers are seizing opportunities like FOODEX to bring their products to the world.

Consider Kadoya Sesame Mills, which manufactures sesame oil and carefully crafts the timeless tastes that bind our experiences. "Our sesame oil is produced in our Shodoshima factory, where we have preserved our traditional craftsmanship for the past 165 years," CEO and President Atsushi Kume says.

Traditions evolve, but the fundamentals of experiences stay the same. Kawasho Foods' Nozaki's Corned Beef has been a popular staple for over 70 years but has recently en-

joyed increased demand as lives get busier. President Yukimori Nakamura explains, "It's important that we provide solutions to these new demands, and that's also a new business opportunity for us."

Kuki Sangyo also marries tradition with progress, taking 140 years of experience with sesame oil and adapting it for a global audience. President Hiroyuki Tanaka aims to make sesame a staple in healthy cooking and craft entirely new culinary experiences. "The richness and depth of sesame oil adds depth to dishes and creates a flavor that cannot be replaced by other oils," he says.



1. Kadoya pure sesame oil. 2. Kinjirushi Grated 100% Hon Wasabi. 3. Yamafuku momiji oroshi

It's this attention to the subtleties of the component parts that enhances the overall experience. Yamafuku President Naoki Kashiwagi believes that cuisine and the artistry of its preparation, can nourish hearts and minds. He describes eating at a traditional restaurant, "They often seek to entertain their eyes and enrich their culinary knowledge rather than simply eat to fullness," he says.

A fundamental part of tying experience to cuisine is quality ingredients. Farmland tackles fresh produce challenges with robust cold chain systems in a nation with a substantial number of retail chains and small plot farms. President Tatsuo Horiuchi explains, historically, produce arrived on shelves the evening of harvest, but today that can take two days. "While two days may not seem like much, it can make a significant difference in terms of maintaining freshness," he says.

While the traditions change, people will still be creating their future experiences with the same anchors. As Horiuchi says, "People may not eat the same products 100 years from now, but I'm confident they'll still be eating bananas."

## Plant-Based for a Better Future

Marusan-AI is developing plant-based products to help people live healthier lives and reduce food production's impact on the climate. *By Daniel de Bomford, Benard Thompson and Cian O'Neill*



"Our role is to develop plant-based protein products that taste good."

Sakai Nobuyoshi, President,  
MARUSAN-AI CO., LTD.

With the global popularity of Japanese cuisine on the rise, the Japanese government is looking to increase Japan's food exports from 1.5 trillion yen to 5 trillion. Its current popularity has been driven by Japanese restaurants abroad and Marusan-AI Co. President Nobuyoshi Sakai says that won't be achieved through simply tripling the number of restaurants. "Our proposed strategy is to incorporate Japanese ingredients into home cooking overseas," he says.

Marusan-AI is not only looking to capitalize on the popularity of Japanese cuisine abroad, but because a protein crisis will become a social issue in the future, "returning to a plant-based lifestyle not only has health benefits, but also helps solve environmental problems, such as reducing CO2 emissions," he explains. Plant-based protein is also significantly less resource intensive, but Sakai believes the challenge to widespread adoption is taste.



Sakai sees a lot of potential globally for plant-based diets, especially with health-conscious consumer trends on the rise. Marusan-AI invests in soymilk production and distribution with its 90 percent owned Canadian subsidiary Alinova Canada. Furthermore, one of the barriers



to consumption was that many powdered soymilks don't dissolve smoothly in water. Marusan-AI's patented soymilk dissolves smoothly and has the potential for a longer shelf life.

Moving forward, Marusan-AI is looking to maintain its current strategy as it progresses to its 2030 goals and looks to increase its overseas sales. Regarding its strategy, Sakai says, "We aim to develop food products that are both convenient and delicious for home cooking overseas by leveraging Japanese technology."

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A variety of Osechi and Kaiseki dishes made with Yamafuku products

# Yamafuku Brings Tradition to the Modern World

Yamafuku are supplying culinary artists with the traditional components of Japanese cultural cuisines.

By Daniel De Bomford, Sean McBride, Paul Mannion and Megah Bintang



From left to right: Chili pepper paste (for Momiji oroshi); Sesame paste; Kuri-kanro (Chestnuts in syrup); Ume-kanro (Plums in syrup); Goma-tofu white/matcha

"While the decoration and presentation of *washoku* have evolved slightly over the years, the essence of its taste has remained unchanged," says Naoki Kashiwagi, president of Yamafuku Co., Ltd. Kashiwagi explains *washoku* is as much a visual art as it is culinary. He describes the almost paradoxical nature of eating at a restaurant, not to become full, but to experience the intricate traditional methods of preparing the food. "They often seek to entertain their eyes and enrich their culinary knowledge rather than simply eat to fullness," he says.

Yamafuku supplies high quality traditional *washoku* ingredients and seasonal items. Kashiwagi describes Yamafuku as more than just a wholesaler, but a trading company collaborating with partners and wholesalers serving high-end chefs. "While Yamafuku may not be a household name for the general public, almost every Japanese chef knows about us and relies on our products," he says.

Another key pillar of the business is its OEM manufacturing of *osechi* cuisine—special New Year's boxed dishes. Traditionally the items are sold separately and the buyers

arrange the food themselves. Kashiwagi explains, "We faithfully reproduce the flavors and aesthetics of *osechi* and deliver finished products for sale under our clients' brands." Yamafuku also operates logistics centers, giving it the ability to stock and deliver products in a timely manner.

Kashiwagi says the company is focused on preserving the essence of *washoku*. "While the decoration and presentation of *washoku* have evolved slightly over the years, the essence of its taste has remained unchanged," he says. The fundamentals of presentation have not changed and Yamafuku honors the core traditions of *washoku*. With advancements in processing technology and logistics, Yamafuku can export delicate products without compromising taste or presentation. Kashiwagi says, "Traditionally, *washoku* was handmade rather than mass-produced, but modern freezing technology allows us to replicate its authenticity and quality at scale."

The advances have allowed the main pillar of Yamafuku's business to be built around exports, currently worth over 400 million yen. Kashiwagi says they have set an ambitious target of increasing exports by 10

times that figure. "A critical element of this strategy is identifying the right partners to work with in each region," he says. It leverages a considered approach and tailors products to the tastes and preferences of each target region. Currently, it works

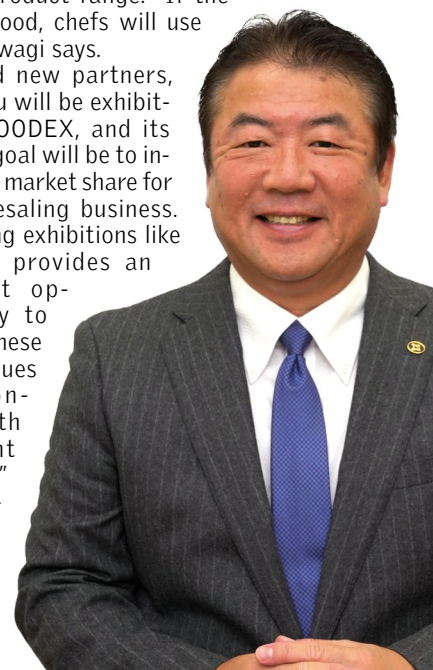
"I believe *washoku* has the power to nourish our hearts as well."

Naoki Kashiwagi,  
President,  
Yamafuku Co., LTD.  
[www.yamafuku-net.co.jp](http://www.yamafuku-net.co.jp)

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with Japanese trading companies abroad which leverages its partner's expertise in conjunction with Yamafuku's diverse, high-quality product range. "If the food is good, chefs will use it," Kashiwagi says.

To find new partners, Yamafuku will be exhibiting at FOODEX, and its primary goal will be to increase its market share for its wholesaling business. "Attending exhibitions like FOODEX provides an excellent opportunity to explore these new avenues and connect with the right partners," Kashiwagi explains.







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# OPEN SESAME: KADOYA OPENS THE GATE TO THE GLOBAL MARKET

OFFERING A HEALTHY, TASTY ALTERNATIVE TO OILS FOR RECIPES, BOTH JAPANESE AND INTERNATIONAL, KADOYA IS GROWING ITS BUSINESS INTERNATIONALLY.

By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Sasha Lauture

**S**hodoshima, nestled in the beautiful Inland Sea of Japan, has been called home by Japan's leading sesame oil manufacturer, Kadoya Sesame Mills Incorporated, for nearly 170 years. The island's warm dry climate combined with a rich history of agriculture and artisanal production has given rise to a proud culinary culture. Roasting the sesame seeds

Kume says its strength lies in its "Made in Japan" quality. "With over 165 years of accumulated history, we have crafted a distinctive Kadoya taste and aroma that sets us apart from competitors," he says.

Since COVID, Japanese food exports have soared, and Kume says sesame oil has benefited from the uplift and interest in health-conscious diets. "The rising demand for sesame oil is attributed to growing health awareness, with people opting for healthier, plant-based oils," he says. While the U.S. is still Kadoya's biggest market, particularly among Asian consumers, it exports to more than 30 countries and demand is growing worldwide. In particular, Southeast Asia is seeing an increase in Japanese restaurants opening, which Kume attributes to increased tourism from Japan's regional neighbors.

Kadoya recognizes its predominant overseas consumers are Asian and it primarily exports a rich, aromatic, well-roasted dark sesame oil which is mainly used in Asian cuisine as a key ingredient. However, Kadoya has also taken the initiative and created new product lines, leveraging its vast experience with sesame.

While sesame oil has long been a staple of Asian cuisine, its growing popularity has increased demand. Kadoya is cognizant of providing products that are curated to the preferences and palates for its varied customer base. One such

consideration is scent; Kadoya produces oils of varying strength that in Asia might trigger a familiar response and hunger but may not have the same effect in the U.S. "As we adapt to Western cuisine, sesame oil with mild aromas may have promising growth potential," he explains.

Kume says it is essential to expand beyond simply Japanese cuisine—despite the increased global profile—and adapt its products to local cuisines. "Understanding the locality, culture, and cuisine is crucial for tailoring our products to each market," he says. By creating new recipes tailored for new localities and cuisines—such as barbeque or hamburgers and French or Italian, Kume hopes that sesame oil will become a



at high temperatures slowly and evenly, Kadoya carefully cultivates that perfect, deep roasted flavor. Its sesame oil is inseparable from classic staples like stir-fries, soups, noodles, salads and more, both in Japan and across the world. Kadoya has shared its craft with the world, beginning with the United States more than 50 years ago and expanding to Europe, Asia and around the world. Its unparalleled experience in Japanese sesame production gives them unmatched insights and President and CEO Atsushi

**"Ultimately, everything comes down to product quality and taste. Providing the highest quality sesame oil remains our sole mission."**

**Atsushi Kume**

President and CEO,  
Kadoya Sesame Mills Incorporated







part of people's daily lives. For this reason, Kadoya is planning tasting in supermarkets and considering partnering with culinary schools to help consumers and chefs alike become comfortable with sesame oil.

In response to the growth, Kadoya has acquired both kosher and halal certifications. 90 percent of its exports currently go to North America, where the population continues to increase providing short- and medium-term growth opportunities. "We began exporting to the U.S. more than 50 years ago, serving households, businesses, restaurants, and as processing ingredients," Kume says. Kadoya does not face meaningful competition from U.S.-based sesame oil producers, which creates significant opportunities for it in the market.

While the majority of Kadoya's international business remains in North America, Kume sees Asia as a viable market. He explains, "Our halal products are primarily targeted at the Asian market, especially in Indonesia, where there is a large Muslim population." While kosher and halal weren't initially a major part of its strategy, Kume says that they may be effective at breaking into new markets. "Acquiring halal and kosher certification was part of our expansion to accommodate a wider range of preferences," he says. In contrast to the U.S., Asia already has a developed sesame oil sector, so Kadoya has adjusted its strategy. "We position our products as high-end sesame oil, and as the wealthy population in Asian nations grows, we see promising business opportunities in the future," he says.

Beyond producing sesame products, Kadoya has been engaging in support for small-scale sesame farmers around the world. Sesame cultivation is laborious and difficult to

mechanize, almost entirely done by hand. Japan imports almost all of its sesame from overseas from countries such as Tanzania, Nigeria and Paraguay. Many of the farmers had learned to cultivate and produce sesame without support. Kadoya, through its partners, has assisted these primary producers through guidance, agricultural technicians and support, aiming to improve the volume and quality of their yields, therefore increasing their income. Through Kadoya's guidance, farmers have seen a dramatic improvement, and the program persists, forging and strengthening long-term partnerships between Kadoya and its suppliers.

Since Kadoya's founding, it has produced sesame products on Shodoshima in the Kagawa Prefecture, prioritizing consistent taste and quality. With the desire to "create opportunities for the future smiles of the island's children through local production for local consumption activities and sesame," it has implemented Sesame Nutrition education in the local elementary school. Through this program, it aims to contribute to a healthy and prosperous Shodoshima community through sesame. All of Kadoya's products are designed and produced domestically. "Our sesame oil is produced in our Shodoshima factory, where we have preserved our traditional craftsmanship for nearly 170 years," Kume says.

Kadoya's holistic strategy of supporting growers, manufacturing locally and collaborating with global tastemakers to tailor its product to local preferences has already shown success. With demand for sesame oil increasing through a combination of health trends and the increasing popularity of Japanese food, Kadoya is set to continue its reign as the global standard of sesame oil.







GEISHA product lineup available in the Middle East and West Africa



"It's important that we provide solutions to these new demands."

Yukimori Nakamura, President,  
Kawasho Foods Corporation

# Kawasho Foods Global Mission

**With demographic challenges affecting industry and society worldwide, Kawasho Foods is providing solutions and contributing to a better tomorrow through its diverse range of products.** *By Daniel De Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

In the last century, Japanese cuisine has remained remarkably consistent in its preparation. From ramen to sushi, recipes have relied on fresh ingredients and thorough preparation techniques. Yet, in the face of a demographic shift, environmental challenges and a desire to compete on the global stage, Kawasho Foods is innovating its supply chain and developing new products to succeed in the ever-changing world.

Company President Yukimori Nakamura says that in Japan, food demand is gradually shifting. The diets of the elderly have unique challenges, and with a push for higher workforce participation, more support in easier to prepare and store food is increasingly important. "As a trading firm and food producer, it's important that we provide solutions to these new demands, and that's also a new business opportunity for us," he says. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the warning of a looming "megaquake", Na-

kamura emphasizes the importance of building a robust food distribution network to ensure emergency relief and business continuity. "We see an opportunity to provide ready-to-eat food and pre-cooked food ingredients," he reasons.

A prime example is Nozaki's Corned Beef. Popular for over 70 years, it has recently seen a resurgence in use as a home ingredient due to how it simplifies cooking. Nakamura gives examples of sandwiches, *onigiri* (Japanese rice balls) and protein to complement vegetables, like cabbage and potatoes. He stresses that Kawasho wants to provide a great tasting product that is convenient and easy to use, not as an alternative to beef, but as its own product.

Kawasho Foods' core strength is its strong brands such as GEISHA, Nozaki and KING CUP. Brands like GEISHA are already popular and have a long history in overseas markets such as the U.S. Building off that success, it looks to expand the product lineup and in both its existing markets and in emerging ones. He explains, "We believe the U.S. and the Middle East have the biggest potential, so we want to strengthen our product lineup for those markets." To



GEISHA lineup in U.S. market

grow overseas, Nakamura says that they are focused on finding new partners. With policy changes in the U.S. creating uncertainty, the company is diversifying through China and into locations such as Vietnam. "Strengthening our suppliers and then finding and opening up new sales channels are our main priorities," he says.

Through international expansion, Kawasho Foods is fulfilling its state purpose of "beyond taste, enriching the world." Nakamura explains, "We want to continuously pursue a mission of providing protein throughout the globe, regardless of the social situation, including areas that are suffering from natural disasters or conflicts." The long shelf life of canned goods makes it convenient to store and reduces food waste. GEISHA has become popular in West Africa, especially in Nigeria and Ghana. Kawasho Foods has entered its 15th year

of its elementary school supplies donation program, with Nakamura himself travelling to Ghana to participate. "We are continuously supporting the development of these regions through our GEISHA products by providing safe and sound growth for the children and society," he says.

Domestically, Kawasho Foods is also looking for ways to address the deterioration of the fishing and agricultural industries due to the demographic shifts. "These are difficult issues, but we want to pave the way through them by providing a new perspective or shedding light on new ideas for solutions," Nakamura says. As it continues to diversify its product portfolio and support society, Kawasho Foods aims to create happiness and peace through delicious food.



Nozaki's corned beef in our domestic market (Japan)



Kawasho Foods Corporation

[www.kawasho-foods.co.jp/english](http://www.kawasho-foods.co.jp/english)

# Kuki Sangyo says Open Sesame

With almost 140 years of experience producing high quality sesame oil, Kuki Sangyo continues bringing new products to market, surprising and delighting the world with the versatility of sesame.

By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson, Cian O'Neill and Sasha Lature



"As a company, we have always considered quality to be one of the most important factors."

Hiroyuki Tanaka, President,  
KUKI SANGYO Co., Ltd.

For over 3,000 years, sesame oil has been cherished as a staple in cuisines around the world. Rich in antioxidants, vitamins and healthy fats, sesame is a superfood that enriches and supports healthy living. The nutty mouthwatering aroma enhances dishes, from stir-fries to tahini-based dishes—engaging both our senses of taste and smell.

Kuki Sangyo Co., Ltd. is approaching 140 years of sesame oil production and has continuously pushed the boundaries of sesame-based foods, from pastes to lattes.

Company President Hiroyuki Tanaka believes that sesame oil's recent rise in popularity has been due to an increase in health-conscious consumers. With all its health benefits and its unique composition, it is an attractive alternative to other oils. He explains that sesame oil is resistant to heat and has oxidation stability, allowing it to be used repeatedly for frying while remaining aromatic. "Sesame oil can be used as a substitute for olive oil or vegetable oil, as dressing on salad, as a stir-frying oil," he says.

Despite a declining population, sesame seed imports have steadily increased in Japan increasing from 150,000 tons to 180,000 tons, largely due to new product developments. Tanaka says that Kuki Sangyo has been trading globally for a long time, and it has resulted in growth in its top line. "Our

sales volume in overseas markets has tripled over the past ten years and we are highly interested in exploring opportunities in overseas markets," he says. Kuki Sangyo's impressive overseas growth is fueled predominately by exports to America and Southeast Asia. The North American market is its largest market, where sales have tripled over the last 10 years. Because of its internationalization efforts, Kuki Sangyo was the first sesame oil company to achieve a halal certification. This opens entirely new markets, especially in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia.



Pure sesame seed oil  
(100% Physically pressed)

The sales increase is driven by the quality of Kuki Sangyo's products delivered over the last century. Tanaka says that its classic Kuki Yamashichi Pure Sesame Oil is its flagship product. It began in 1886 producing sesame oil, and after WWII it began roasting sesame seeds before producing sesame paste in 1970. The long history of reliability is what gives customers confidence in its sesame products. "As a company, we have always considered quality to be one of the most important factors," Tanaka says. The Kuki Sangyo brand is trusted by customers due to its association with high quality.

To maintain that quality, Kuki Sangyo utilizes a pressing method for all of its sesame oil. Tanaka explains, "For typical conventional edible oils, you often use organic solvents to squeeze out all of the oil, but we just use pressure instead," he says. This method maintains the quality without the need



for solvents. For paste, it leverages a physical method to peel the seeds to peel the skin in its domestic factory. "As for the white sesame seed paste, we carefully peeled without the use of chemicals, to bring out the rich, natural flavor of the sesame seeds," he says.

Tanaka believes that with the rise in international popularity of Japanese cuisine, consumers will begin to accept sesame oil into their kitchens. "The richness and depth of sesame oil adds depth to dishes and creates a flavor that cannot be replaced by other oils," he says. He acknowledges that it is unlikely to completely replace other oils, the versatility and aroma make it the perfect choice for a wide variety of dishes.

With its 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary around the corner, Tanaka reflects on Kuki Sangyo's history. Beginning with sesame oil, before moving into roasted sesame and sesame paste, he hopes the fourth pillar of the business will be its sesame latte, which uses sesame powder as an ingredient. Tanaka envisions a future where Kuki Sangyo's legacy of innovation continues to thrive—sharing the rich, nourishing essence of sesame with the world for generations to come.



Kuki Sangyo's flagship products



HS Plant for sesame latte powder mix



Bottling plant for sesame oil



KUKI SANGYO CO., LTD.

www.kukisesame.com  
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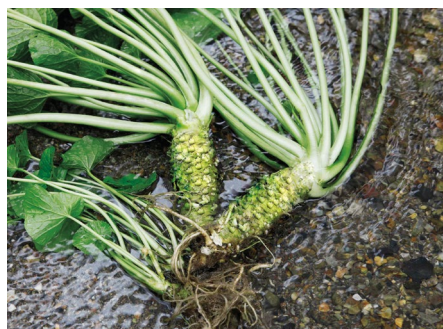
**"The uniqueness of Kinjirushi is that we handle everything, from growing wasabi plants to sales."**

**Ryoichi Ishikawa**

President,  
KINJIRUSHI Co., Ltd.  
[www.kinjirushi.co.jp](http://www.kinjirushi.co.jp)



**KINJIRUSHI WASABI**



# BRINGING WASABI BACK TO IT ROOTS

KINJIRUSHI BRINGS AUTHENTIC WASABI, STRICTLY CONTROLLED FROM HARVEST TO END-PRODUCT TO NEW MARKETS THROUGH ITS INNOVATION-LED GROWING AND PROCESSING TECHNIQUES. *By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Sasha Lauture*

**M**any might say that wasabi is spicy, but more accurately the heat is volatile and gone in a flash from the tongue, through the sinus passages. Beneath that sensation is an earthy vegetal note, tinged with a sweetness that complements the heat. Authentic wasabi is difficult to find on shelves especially outside of Japan because of its unique qualities and it is a delicate plant that is difficult to cultivate. Kinjirushi Wasabi Co., Ltd. are making authentic wasabi more accessible through a combination of technological, partnership and agricultural strategies. "Wasabi is a fresh vegetable," Company President Ryoichi Ishikawa says, "The wasabi commonly seen in tubes is made for room temperature storage, and the flavor and aroma of wasabi are reproduced with additives."

"We are particularly interested in providing genuine wasabi," he says, explaining Kinjirushi's frozen wasabi packets. "To have the same experience without our product, you would have to grate real wasabi, something difficult to find and which does not stay fresh for a long time," he says.

Kinjirushi has set its eyes to the international market, and Ishikawa says there is a huge business opportunity to be found. It has been exporting to the U.S. for over 40 years, which is still their biggest international market but also sees potential in Southeast Asia, South America and Africa. Currently, Kinjirushi's overseas expansion is supported by local distributors, but it looks to build more sales support and outsourced production. "We also support our customers across the globe through our staff and ambassadors who make great effort to explain our products," he says.

Kinjirushi approaches supplying wasabi holistically, handling everything from growth to sales. "We also developed our own breed of wasabi, providing seeds and seedlings to the farmers to grow," Ishikawa says. "Together, we are also developing hydroponic cultivation methods under an artificially controlled environment," he says.

Ishikawa explains an enzymatic reaction occurs in Wasabi giving it flavor, "This reaction happens when the wasabi root is grated, which damages the cells and releases the enzyme." Wasabi is very delicate; therefore, the grating process is paramount to maintaining the taste and aroma. "Our company has developed a flash frozen grating method with -196°C that can retain the freshness of wasabi and extract the best functionality of wasabi, including aroma, spiciness, and taste," he says.

Wasabi is a powerful health food, full of potent antioxidants and Kinjirushi is working to bring those benefits to customers worldwide. The rhizome of wasabi contains hexaraphane (6-MSITC) as an active ingredient. Research has highlighted the brain health benefits of wasabi, particularly its potent antioxidant properties which help protect cells from damage. Ishikawa explains, "With just five grams a day, people can feel the health benefits of wasabi—it can also be taken as a supplement."



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