

JAPANESE CUISINE AND THE EVOLUTION OF CULTURE

JAPAN'S RICH CULINARY HERITAGE DRAWS HEAVILY FROM PLACE AND TRADITION BUT HAS ALWAYS BEEN INNOVATIVE, RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF EACH GENERATION. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

Food connects us to culture, history and place, carrying emotions across time. Japan's renowned culinary heritage—celebrated for umami-rich dishes, artistic presentation, and deep-rooted tradition—has gained global recognition, especially since *washoku* was named an intangible cultural heritage. Today, dishes like ramen and sushi are as familiar to households as Italian pasta or Indian curry. Blending tradition with modern tastes, Japanese companies draw on decades—even centuries—of expertise, turning to global markets to sustain and share Japan's culinary legacy rooted in nature and place.

A STORIED HISTORY BORN FROM CENTURIES OF EXPERIENCE

Sugimoto Meat Industry, a Japanese leader in premium Wagyu beef, is looking outward to global consumers. Chairman and Representative Director Tatsuya Sugimoto emphasizes the growing need for international expansion. "We are always looking for overseas partners with whom we can build a strong partnership and grow together," he says.

Toyoma-based beverage manufacturer Tombow Beverages draws on over a century of expertise and advanced technology to meet evolving customer demands. President Akio Mitsuta explains, "International companies entering the Japanese market and Japanese companies looking to enter the international market can benefit greatly from our strengths."

Chairman Jiro Nagumo of the 100-year-old sake brewer Hakkaisan Brewery stresses the importance of place to his company's craft. His father, the second-generation leader, championed regional revitalization, a legacy he aims to continue: "My purpose is to continue evolving the Tanrei balanced style and expanding Hakkaisan Brewery's reach into global markets, transforming sake into a truly international beverage."

Likewise, Tatsuuma-Honke Brewing's 360 years of shaping sake continue to influence the modern era. President Kiyoshi Tatsuuma notes the rise of Japanese cuisine has boosted interest in sake, which evolved in harmony with *washoku*. "It can be enjoyed in various ways—chilled, at room temperature or heated—allowing it to pair well with different dishes," he explains.

LOCAL SPECIALTIES, GLOBAL ACCESSIBILITY

Every locale in Japan has its specialty—and for Hakata, *mentaiko* manufacturer Fukuya champions the local cuisine. President Takehiro Kawahara says *mentaiko*, known in English as pollock roe, isn't just for Japanese dishes but modern

global plates. He explains: "Since *mentaiko* pairs well with oil and carbohydrates—staples in cuisines worldwide—we see significant opportunities for our products globally."

Japanese dishes don't just pair with international tastes, they evolve with them—perhaps best exemplified with the California roll, according to trading company TOP Trading President Toshiro Nakazawa. "We want to ensure Japanese ingredients remain valued and essential, not only for preparing traditional dishes but also for creating unique local dishes incorporating these elements," he says.

Staple condiments are also finding new purpose—such as in wasabi manufacturer Banjo Foods Wasabi Dressing. Executive Managing Director Yasuo Mishiro says when developing dressings, the company aims to keep customers coming back. "We believe our dressing achieves this ideal harmony, making it not just distinctive but also highly versatile and enjoyable for a wide range of consumers," he says.

CULTURE MEETS HEALTH

It isn't just traditional ingredients, but in health Japanese food manufacturers are transforming. Ina Food Industry's R&D in agar is providing new opportunities for everything from sweets to fertilizer and medicine. "We see opportunities to supply high-quality agar for use in health and wellness formulations," President and CEO Hidehiro Tsukakoshi says. Likewise, Meiji Food Materia's President Yuta Kawano says his company also focuses on health R&D, particularly on gut health. He explains, "Beyond our own research, we actively collaborate with national and international academic and research institutions and work with leading experts to develop cutting-edge technologies and functional ingredients."

None of this would be possible without innovation in food factories. As a specialist in the field, Food Techno Engineering (FTE) embodies this spirit by pioneering and tailoring technologies for the global food ecosystem. Company President Kenji Noda affirms, "The basis of our technology is to contribute to society—we strive to develop equipment and technologies useful to people."

Japanese producers are meeting modern challenges and global markets by doing what they do best—promoting local specialties and culture. By adapting centuries-old ingredients and recipes to contemporary tastes, they're sparking international interest in *washoku* as something truly unique.



1. Banjo Wasabi Dressing
2. Hakkaisan Tokubetsu Junmai
3. Fukuya Men Cheese
4. Sugimoto Curry Matsusaka

HAKKAISAN BREWING COMBINES TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN SAKE

NIIGATA'S HAKKAISAN BREWING BRINGS THE AGE-OLD ART OF SAKE BREWING TO THE MODERN WORLD. *By Daniel de Bomford, Cian O'Neill and Sasha Lauture*

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Sake is art. Artisans have brewed sake for hundreds of years with a technique called *kanzukuri*, using the frigid touch of winter to create optimal conditions for their creations. Hakkaisan Brewery continues this tradition in Niigata under the gaze of Mount Hakkai, sourcing all ingredients—from the spring water to the *koji*—locally.

Hakkaisan Brewery Chairman Jiro Nagumo says the brewery focuses on the Tanrei balanced style, which centers on achieving a balanced taste for broad appeal. With the profile of sake experiencing global gains, the company looks to capitalize by producing sake that will please both experienced and novice sake drinkers. Nagumo explains the

Nagumo describes the process as more akin to manufacturing than food production. He likens sake brewing to building a Formula 1 car, maximizing technology, materials and talent to develop elite, private-use Daiginjo—the best bottle. Knowledge gained, he says, is applied to everyday sake, making it delicious, affordable and ever improving through new technology. Hakkaisan produces high-quality products at affordable prices.

The company analyzes the market to find new opportunities and develop new products with global audiences in mind. Hakkaisan has entered into a multi-year partnership agreement with the Los Angeles Dodgers. “It is a great honor to collaborate with such a historic team, and we try to make special collaboration products with Los Angeles Dodgers and expand the potential of sake worldwide,” he

rationale behind the broadly appealing taste came from his grandfather Koichi Nagumo, who founded the company. “His goal was to create a sake that was easy to drink and enjoyable in social settings,” he says. His father, Kazuo, further refined the style and committed to regional revitalization, establishing the brewery as a place where local people could find meaningful work. Believing the growth of the business and the revitalization were intertwined, the company grew dramatically. Now, with the company’s reins, Nagumo says his purpose is to continue evolving the Tanrei balanced style and expand Hakkaisan Brewery’s reach into global markets.

Hakkaisan Brewery’s goal is to offer the best quality sake, achieved through decades of technological development, which it leverages across all its production processes.

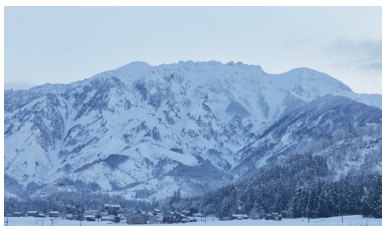
“We craft sake with the goal of facilitating communication and creating meaningful connections, which is why we emphasize enjoying Japanese sake.”

Jiro Nagumo

Chairman, Hakkaisan Brewery

says. In 2021, it partnered with Brooklyn Kura, a sake brewery and taproom in Brooklyn, New York, and is working with them to release sake products made in the United States. “Our collaboration was driven by the allure that sake holds for American consumers,” he explains. Brooklyn Kura wanted to produce Japanese Sake in the United States, which appealed to Hakkaisan Brewery. He adds: “This partnership represents more than just exporting techniques; it’s about creating something unique.” Utilizing in unison with Hakkaisan’s tutelage and Brooklyn Kura’s identity, the collaboration has resulted in some truly unique sake. Nagumo believes the blend of tradition and innovation makes the product interesting and has the potential to become a global sake brand.

Hakkaisan Brewery’s blending of tradition with innovation uplifts the art of sake production. By honoring age-old methods and embracing modern techniques, they craft sake to satisfy seasoned and new enjoyers alike so that everyone might experience the wonders of sake.





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BANJO FOODS: VERSATILE WASABI FOR THE GLOBE

WASABI IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF JAPANESE CUISINE, AND BANJO FOODS IS TAKING ITS DOMESTIC EXPERTISE ABROAD WITH ITS VERSATILE CONDIMENTS.

By Daniel De Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Sasha Lauture

"We are working to make Japanese ingredients more accessible and easier to use."

Yasuo Mishiro

Executive Managing Director,
Banjo Foods

Condiments and seasonings are the quiet punctuation marks of daily life—subtle yet indispensable elements that enhance meals much like rituals that shape our routines. They rarely take center stage, yet their presence adds depth, flavor, and rhythm to dining, often leaving a lasting impression without drawing attention to themselves.

One company that understands this quiet power is wasabi manufacturer Banjo Foods. With over 70 years of experience supplying wasabi to the Japanese market, Banjo has become a trusted partner to major distribution companies and restaurant chains, exemplifying how the right seasoning can elevate every meal. Japanese cuisine has seen an explosive rise in popularity, and Executive Managing Director Yasuo Mishiro believes that the next wave will be non-Japanese families embracing it in their daily lives. "To support this shift, we are working to make Japanese ingredients more accessible and easier to use," he says.

Mishiro describes a domestic increase in demand for tubed wasabi, particularly premium products, after the pandemic. However, data shows young people's preference for the condiment is decreasing. Conversely, wasabi exports have increased, especially with the yen's depreciation. Mishiro explains, "In the competition between domestic and international, overseas demand is now dominating, with international buyers securing the larger share."

Processed wasabi offers several advantages over fresh wasabi; first and foremost, fresh wasabi begins to lose its heat immediately after grating. Mishiro says Banjo Food's products provide more versatility. "We can adjust its spiciness, fragrance and even color to better suit different applications and target specific consumer preferences," he says. Certain dishes like fatty tuna pair better with more potent wasabi, for example. "By tailoring processed wasabi to complement specific dishes, we can enhance the overall balance and enjoyment of the cuisine," he says. Mishiro cites this versatility as crucial in its role in overseas markets. He cites French chefs' preference for processed wasabi, which has been used in dishes at receptions hosted by the French president.

Banjo Foods has outlined its international growth strategy, targeting an increase in overseas revenue from an initial goal of 5 percent to potentially over 10 percent. Key growth areas include fresh food, private brand and original equipment manufacturing (PB/OEM) and expanding food chains internationally. Central to this strategy is leveraging partnerships with domestic clients that have established global operations. "A great example of this is our collaboration with a Norwegian company specializing in salmon-based sushi," Mishiro explained. "We supply them with our wasabi, and their products are already being exported to Spain and France through established distribution channels."

The rise in demand for premium wasabi products and the export growth, driven by international demand, provide global opportunities for Banjo Foods. Mishiro emphasizes the adaptability of processed wasabi in global markets, highlighting its crucial role in their international strategy. He states confidently, "We believe that our dressing achieves this ideal harmony, making it not just distinctive but also highly versatile and enjoyable for a wide range of consumers."





Sugimoto Brings Wagyu Beef to Global Markets



"Our goal is to expand globally and share the traditions and expertise behind Wagyu production with the world."

Tatsuya Sugimoto,
Chairman and Representative
Director of Sugimoto Meat
Industry Co., Ltd.

One bite of authentic Wagyu beef is an earth-shattering revelation, a single taste capable of redefining the meaning of flavor. Wagyu beef, renowned worldwide for its luxurious texture, marbling and unparalleled taste, originates from a unique breed of cattle in Japan.

Since 1900, Sugimoto Meat Industry has been a Japanese leader in premium wagyu beef. With the domestic market and labor force shrinking in Japan, Chairman and Representative Director Tatsuya Sugimoto says that, while inbound tourism and the weaker yen provide opportunities for the company, it is also looking to broaden its horizons. "It is becoming increasingly important to look beyond Japan and further expand into international markets," he says.

Regional markets in Southeast Asia are already in the company's sights. Sugimoto explains, "We have already opened stores in Thailand and China, I believe rapidly grow-

Sugimoto Meat Industry stands out with its authentic quality-first approach to Wagyu beef. *By Daniel De Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Sasha Lauture*

ing markets such as Indonesia and Vietnam hold great potential." The company has already received offers from companies looking to collaborate in these markets and open restaurants. "Forming strategic partnerships with local companies is the key to successfully executing



High-quality Japanese Black Beef

our expansion strategy," Sugimoto says. He adds, "We are always looking for overseas partners with whom we can build a strong partnership and grow together through joint ventures, strategic alliances and collaborations with suppliers."

Key to its strategy is maintaining the highest quality and service levels for its customers and partners. Sugimoto initiated the "Meat Academy," where all company employees are educated and upskilled. "It was our goal for everyone working at Sugimoto—not just those who interact directly with customers, but all employees—to become true meat professionals," he says. Every employee understands the technique and core principles behind Sugimoto's craft. "The academy is not just about meat-related training," he adds, "It also covers nutritional information, customer

service techniques, and sales strategies." Instructors are graduates from previous years, which creates a self-sustaining system. Sugimoto explains, "We continuously refine and improve the curriculum to maintain its relevance and effectiveness."

The focus on quality and freshness is a core component of the company's success. Sugimoto says meat should be sold on the day it is cut for optimal taste, texture and appearance. "Speed is extremely important in our operations," he explains. The company leverages advanced ice temperature aging techniques to elevate the meat quality. "We have honed our techniques using special bacteria that enhance the aging process, ensuring consistent quality, texture, and flavor," he says. Its aging process takes novel approaches to ensure maximum caliber; as Sugimoto explains, "One example is applying 5,000 volts of pressure during the aging process." He adds, "This allows us to extend the shelf life of the meat while maintaining excellent quality." Aging the meat increases the amino acids, bringing out the umami flavor and making the meat more delicious.



Traditional Japanese cuisine with Wagyu

Sugimoto says transitioning to a holding company structure has provided opportunities for new

ventures, such as wholesale, retail and restaurants. Looking ahead, he says that the company is interested in expanding into new ventures that may not be directly related to meat but align with the food service and meal preparation industries. "Recently, we opened a hamburger shop that sells both soy-based meat and traditional burgers," Sugimoto states. Sustainable food sources are becoming increasingly important as global meat production declines and global populations increase. "As a company with the mission of supplying protein in the form of meat, we recognize the importance of exploring alternative proteins," he affirms.



Sugimoto Meat Academy

Not only is Sugimoto Meat Industry bringing Wagyu to the global market, but it also offers the world a cut of exceptional, authentic cuisine. Sugimoto wants to share this tradition as it is meant to be experienced, "We want to be a long-established company that continues to evolve, ensuring that the techniques and expertise we have refined since our founding are maintained."



The Best of Hakata's Mentaiko From Fukuya

Fukuya is elevating mentaiko—seasoned cod roe—by promoting the cuisine and looking to find new markets abroad. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*



Aji no Mentaiko

Japan is renowned for regional cuisine; every region has a specialty. One can almost always find local specialties to gift to loved ones and friends—*omiyage*—in every town to bring home the joys of travel. *Mentaiko*, seasoned cod roe, is a specialty of Hakata in Fukuoka. The versatile umami flavor complements a wide variety of dishes, from Japanese favorites like *onigiri*—rice balls—to international dishes like pasta or pizza.



tubu tube Mentaiko Butter

Fukuya is renowned for its mentaiko, and Company President Takehiro Kawahara says that Fukuya's high quality separates it from its competitors. "At Fukuya, we set strict quality standards for Alaskan pollock roe, selecting only the top 20 percent to 30 percent from each catch," he explains. Kawahara describes the selection process for raw materials as crucial because high-quality

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roe has a naturally mild aroma. Manufacturers who use lower-quality roe often treat their mentaiko with alcohol to mask the fishy smell. He notes, "We focus on sourcing superior-quality roe that requires no such treatment."

Fukuya is looking abroad and expanding its e-commerce business to sustain its current scale of operations. The company already exports internationally through local partners and e-commerce in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea. Because Alaskan pollock and cod are subject to fishing restrictions, mentaiko is inherently finite; thus, being selective is crucial when expanding. Kawahara explains that the first step is to find a market that has an affinity for Japanese cuisine because once mentaiko is exported, its value dramatically increases. "Naturally, this leads us to focus on capital areas in more developed countries, where demand and affordability align with our product," he says.

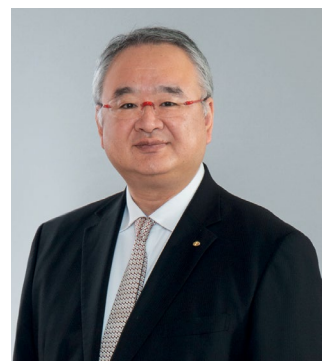
Mentaiko pairs well with oil and carbohydrates—worldwide staples, so Kawahara sees global opportunities for the company, especially in Europe. However, the European market is difficult to enter due to stringent regulations preventing the company from exporting its goods. To overcome this Kawahara says that Fukuya would need to establish a production facility in Europe to manufacture goods that meet local regulations. Fukuya plans to strategically establish a small, highly auto-

mated plant in Fukuoka before it expands internationally. "This facility will focus only on processing the kernels rather than the whole fish roe," he says. The facility will allow Fukuya to explore new labor-efficient methods of production that it can replicate worldwide.



Canned Mentaiko

To promote and educate people about Hakata's rich culinary heritage and cuisine like mentaiko, Fukuya established the Hakata Food and Culture Museum. In its effort to celebrate Hakata's specialties and culture, it fosters the apprecia-



"At Fukuya, we set strict quality standards, selecting only the top 20% to 30% from each catch."

Takehiro Kawahara,
President, Fukuya Co., Ltd.

tion of the next generation, providing resources for local school children. Kawahara wants to facilitate a conversation that focuses on appreciating mentaiko and how it can be enjoyed in different ways. "The best mentaiko isn't just about form—it's about the experience," he says, adding, "If I can successfully change the way people think about mentaiko, that will be my greatest achievement."



Mentaiko on rice



Mentaiko Potato Chips

Meiji Food Materia Revolutionizes Functional Foods

Functional foods provide health benefits and facilitate sustainability goals, and Meiji Food Materia is at the forefront. *By Daniel de Bomford, Cian O'Neill and Paul Mannion*

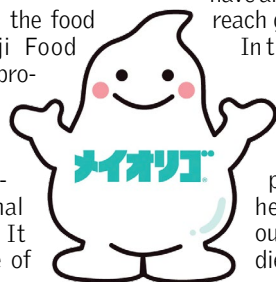


"As a research-driven company, we have positioned functional materials as an essential pillar of our business."

Yuta Kawano, President,
Meiji Food Materia Co., Ltd.

Sweet treats and functional foods come together to offer indulgent flavors with added health benefits, making it easier to enjoy wellness. In a world of unhealthy confectionery, science and manufacturers are working together to produce new flavors to delight and inspire. However, it takes expertise, R&D and a high degree of competency to successfully create the foods of tomorrow.

As a key player in the food supply chain, Meiji Food Materia focuses on providing high-quality sugar products, corn sweeteners, processed food materials and functional health ingredients. It serves a wide range of

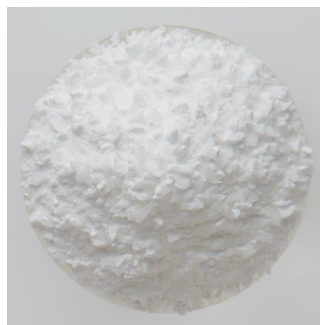


industries, including confectionery, beverages and pharmaceuticals. Yuta Kawano, president of Meiji Food Materia, says the company's strength is its ability to source high-quality raw materials and products from external suppliers and supply them to Japanese companies. "As a trading company, we act as a B2B bridge between global suppliers and domestic companies," he explains. However, its expertise goes beyond simply trading, with a strong focus on R&D.

"As a research-driven company, we have positioned functional materials as an important pillar of our business and my goal is to further strengthen and expand this area," Kawano says. For example, Mayoligo® is a fructooligosaccharide that acts as an alternative to sugar and is a healthy functional material, and the company already supplies over 20,000 tons per year. Mayoligo® doesn't affect blood sugar levels and is low in calories, making it perfect for health-conscious consumers. "We see tremendous growth potential in this sugar substitute and have already expanded its reach globally," he says.

In that way, Meiji Food Materia's research is focused on improving consumer health, particularly gut health. "What sets our functional ingredients apart is their

ability to strengthen the intestinal microflora," he says, and adds, "This improves mineral absorption, reduces the risk of lifestyle-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes and strengthens the immune system." The company's unique probiotics and other gut-active ingredients address health issues caused by the overconsumption of sugar and are currently undertaking clinical trials to validate its research. "Beyond our own research, we actively collaborate with national and international academic and research institutions and work



Mayoligo P granule

with leading experts to develop cutting-edge technologies and functional ingredients," he states.

In addition to food and health, the company is active in the development of bio-cleaning products that both clean and deodorize. In 1946, when the pharmaceutical research department was founded to develop antibiotics and antibacterial agents, it discovered BN Bacteria, which has the ability to break down organic matter, particularly oil. This led to the development of BNCLEAN®, a cleaning agent made from naturally occurring bacteria. "The uniqueness of BNCLEAN® is that, unlike conventional chemical cleaners, it harnesses the power of microorganisms to clean surfaces," he says. Bio-cleaners are a safer and more sustainable option and are favored by consumers and businesses looking for environmentally friendly solutions. The company into the agricultural sector, to apply its expertise in line with global sustainability initiatives beyond cleaning. "Research has shown that BN bacteria can stimulate



Meioligo G syrup

plant growth and reduce the risk of root diseases," Kawano says.

With partnerships established across the globe, products like Mayoligo®—which is marketed for both human and animal consumption—are already in the hands of consumers. Meiji Food Materia has three key criteria. The first is strong R&D expertise as the development of fructooligosaccharides requires a high degree of competency, and Meiji Food Materia favors companies that can conduct evidence-based research and provide robust data. Secondly, strong sales and marketing infrastructure to effectively target markets to ensure broad adoption. Thirdly, a stable sugar supply and high-quality assurance production facilities to provide the highest production standards. Kawano explains, "Adherence to these standards will enable the partnership to drive sustainable growth and innovation and expand the global reach of Mayoligo® while maintaining the highest standards in scientific development, production and market impact."

In merging functional foods with advanced technology, Meiji Food Materia exemplifies the food innovators of the future. Its research-driven approach enhances consumer health and offers sustainable solutions. As sweet treats evolve with functional benefits, Meiji's fusion of taste and science sets a promising standard for the future of confectionery.

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BNCLEAN

Advanced Agar from Ina Food Industry Raises the Bar Across Sectors

Ina Food Industry leverages cutting-edge R&D to deliver innovative agar solutions for applications in food, medicine and industrial sectors. *By Daniel de Bomford*

Innovation is the cornerstone of progress and development, even in the food sector. Developments in food ingredients and techniques have led to the discovery of entirely new cuisines; for companies like Ina Food Industry, innovation and R&D set them apart from their competition.

Founded in 1958, Ina Food Industry is the youngest agar manufacturer in Japan. Company President and CEO Hidehiro Tsukakoshi says establishing themselves was challenging, particularly since major confectionery manufacturers were unfamiliar with the company. "This is what led us to explore applications beyond traditional confectionery, ultimately expanding our presence into a wide range of industries," he says. Today, Ina Food Industry products are widely recognized across multiple sectors, from cosmetics to pet food.



Kanten Papa product (Agar pasta)

Tsukakoshi acknowledges that things are different now, but their key strength remains in their ability to produce agar in stable quantities. Since it is a natural ingredient, maintaining consistency in its properties

can be challenging; however, its products are renowned for their reliability and high quality. It is the preferred supplier for non-confectionery manufacturers like those in the dairy industry, which requires stable ingredi-



Agarooligosaccharides

ents for large-scale production.

In the past, agar was primarily categorized by two factors: the base ingredients and its firmness. Tsukakoshi says the company has expanded the parameters and developed agar of varying viscosities and textures to meet a broad range of industrial and culinary applications. "Another major competitive advantage is our strong focus on research and development, which has allowed us to diversify our product offerings," he explains.

Its Ina Kanten is widely used in manufacturing and renowned for its quality. Tsukakoshi says one of its key advantages is its ease of dissolution. Traditional natural agar requires water to be heated to at least 100 degrees Celsius to dissolve, whereas Ina Kanten can dissolve at temperatures as low as 80 degrees Celsius. This can lead to significant cost savings in energy usage on an industrial scale.

The company also has a consumer brand, Kanten Papa, which it launched around 45 years ago. Tsukakoshi says that at the time, home-cooked sweets were affordable but often lacked great taste. "We wanted to change that by introducing a product that was not only instant and easy to use but also delivered exceptional flavor and quality," he explains. Kanten Papa has made the same high-quality agar used in professional

food manufacturing accessible to everyday consumers.

Ina Food Industry takes its R&D beyond food applications. Tsukakoshi explains: "Through joint research with academic institutions, we have analyzed the oligosaccharides in agar and identified its antioxidant properties." He notes one particularly promising discovery is agar's potential to help soothe knee pain, which could open up new possibilities in the health and wellness sector. He sees



Red algae (raw material of agar)

opportunities to supply high-quality agar for use in health and wellness formulations, such as ingredients for capsules. However, he says the company's focus will remain on developing



Dairy products with smooth agar



Vegan gummy candy with elastic agar



"I can confidently say that we have been pioneers in exploring non-confectionery uses for agar."

Hidehiro Tsukakoshi,
President and CEO,
Ina Food Industry

the ingredient itself rather than producing final consumer products, allowing other companies to incorporate the benefits of Ina Food Industry agar into their products.

With customer needs constantly evolving, Tsukakoshi recognizes that what people value most is strong production capabilities, high-quality output and robust R&D. With a mission that has remained unchanged for over 50 years, that consistency of vision and values will continue to guide Ina Food Industry to continue developing new and innovative agar products.



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TOMBOW BEVERAGE INNOVATES SOFT DRINKS AND NUTRIENT DRINKS

FROM BEAUTIFUL TOYAMA, TOMBOW BEVERAGE LEVERAGES ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY TO INNOVATE AND CREATE NEW FLAVORS FOR SOFT DRINKS AND NUTRIENT DRINKS. *By Daniel de Bomford*

Founded 127 years ago to produce the popular Japanese soda ramune, Tombow Beverage has since grown into one of Japan's top beverage OEMs, crafting soft drinks and nutrient drinks for both its own brand and many household names.

President Akio Misuta says Tombow Beverage is happy to fill the orders of beverage manufacturers but also has its own concept of a total package from development to manufacturing. He says the company's strength is its ability to create great flavor and fulfill special customer requests with its technology. Pharmaceutical companies, in particular, often lack the ability to develop flavors, which provides an opportunity for Tombow Beverage.

With the domestic market shrinking and habits changing, Tombow Beverage is looking to develop new products. One of Tombow Beverage's standout drinks is its alcohol-free sparkling wine. "In the past, non-alcoholic beverages focused on non-alcoholic beer, but sparkling wine is now becoming popular."

In the pharmaceuticals and health sector, the insight it has gained creating products for the elderly, such as nutritional jelly pouches, is an opportunity to find solutions for the looming global challenge of an aging population. "This is an area we can help, changing effective medicine and helping it taste better," he says. For Tombow Beverage, this marks another chapter in its storied history as it continues to innovate and meet new challenges.



"Our mission is to overcome challenging tasks as they help us grow as humans."

Akio Misuta

President, Tombow Beverage



TATSUUMA-HONKE BREWING: CENTURIES OF SAKE EXPERTISE

FROM THE EDO PERIOD TO TODAY, TATSUUMA-HONKE BREWING BRINGS SAKE TO A NEW GENERATION. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

For over 360 years, Tatsuuma-Honke Brewing has been expertly crafting sake in Nada, Japan. Sake from Nada was a favorite of Tokyo—then known as Edo—and Company President Kiyoshi Tatsuuma says its sake and Tokyo's cuisine naturally evolved to complement one another. Its award-winning Hakushika sake is renowned for its exceptional quality, smooth and well-balanced flavor, and deep connection to the Nada sake tradition.

Tatsuuma-Honke Brewing is looking to capitalize on the influx of tourists to increase its overseas revenue. "After tourists come to Japan and taste authentic Japanese sake, I would love for them to go back to their country and spread the word about how good it is," Tatsuuma says. Tatsuuma-Honke Brewing looks to collaborate with local distributors who understand its products and company and prioritize long-term partnerships. Seeking a new generation of sake drinkers, Tatsuuma describes Southeast Asia as a key focus with its relatively young and growing population. It already has a strong presence in the U.S. market and Brazil, which is backed by a strong Japanese expat community and hopes to move further into Latin America.

Backed by centuries of expertise, Tatsuuma-Honke Brewing will continue to pioneer sake as it did in Edo and bring this time-honored craft to people around the globe.



"I want more people around the world to experience our Hakushika sake."

Kiyoshi Tatsuuma

President,
Tatsuuma-Honke Brewing Co. Ltd.



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RINGER HUT'S RECIPE FOR GLOBAL RESTAURANT CHAIN SUCCESS

RINGER HUT BRINGS HIGH-QUALITY LOCAL FAVORITES TO GLOBAL CUSTOMERS THROUGH ITS POPULAR CHAIN RESTAURANTS. *By Daniel de Bomford and Paul Mannion*

The increased profile of Japanese food worldwide has been a boon for companies specializing in regional cuisines, like Ringer Hut. Founded in Nagasaki in 1962, Ringer Hut built its name on dishes like Nagasaki Champon and has grown to nearly 650 restaurants both at home in Japan and abroad in the United States and Thailand. Representative Director, President and CEO Sakae Sasano says the company's drive to achieve its ambitious goals has fueled its growth



"Innovation has been a key element of our success."

Sakae Sasano

Representative Director,
President & CEO



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and development. "The founder's vision was to make Nagasaki Champon a global comfort food and incorporate it into people's daily diet and lifestyle," he explains.

To effectively manage so many locations, Ringer Hut has redesigned kitchens to be more efficient while maintaining the food's authentic taste and high quality. Sasano attributes this innovation to the company's success and global expansion. Its Hamakatsu chain of Tonkatsu restaurants continues to deliver premium service and cuisine alongside the Ringer Hut chain, both of which are seeing success in

Thailand. Beyond restaurants, Ringer Hut offers frozen foods, including its signature Nagasaki Champon, using the same ingredients and processes to guarantee the same quality and taste. With an ambitious goal of opening 100 restaurants in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, Ringer Hut's goals will continue to push it to greater heights.

Japanese Cuisine Supplied by TOP Trading

TOP Trading is growing its exports of Japanese cuisines, supporting Japanese SMEs and inspiring new global tastes. *By Daniel de Bomford*



Toshiro Nakazawa, President, TOP Trading



トプトレードイング株式会社
TOP TRADING CO. (FAIR EAST) LTD.

<https://toptrading.co.jp>



Founded in 1970 to import lamb and mutton to Japan, TOP Trading has become a leading trading firm for both imports and exports of food products. President Toshiro Nakazawa says the company has built confidence with its customers and prides itself on catering to individual preferences. "We position ourselves as a trading company that provides access to a wide range of high-quality options," he says.

Nakazawa says TOP Trading's export business focuses on Japanese ingredients, such as miso, soy sauce, sansho and yuzu, rather than finished

retail products. He recognizes that Japanese dishes evolve in foreign countries, citing the California roll, but is cognizant of diminishing the need for authentic ingredients. "Instead, we want to ensure that Japanese ingredients remain valued and essential, not only for preparing traditional dishes but also for creating unique local dishes that incorporate these elements," he explains. TOP Trading tailors its products to international markets to make them accessible and appealing while maintaining their Japanese essence. Its strategy targets restaurant chefs less familiar with Japanese cuisine and inspires them to combine the ingredients with local traditions to create something unique. "This approach not only expands awareness of Japanese ingredients but also leads to a more sustainable and positive long-term outcome for our business," he says.

Trading companies like TOP Trading play a vital role in supporting the development of SMEs in Japan. Nakazawa says maintaining consistent yearly purchases is a key aspect of supporting these companies, and TOP Trading strives to increase the volumes of its purchases yearly. He describes fostering communication with suppliers to ensure they understand how the products are used and the demographics that



Sansho
(Japanese pepper)



Award winning yuzu



Incorporating miso,
shoyu and vinegar
into local dishes

enjoy them as equally important. "This feedback helps SMEs feel proud of their products and the role they play in the market," he says. TOP Trading's expertise, which has been cultivated over decades, ensures that suppliers and producers can overcome challenges, such as the various regulatory differences between regions.

Nakazawa sees the path to growth in deepening the company's relationship with its partners rather than seeking new ones. His goal of expanding the export business is key to his ambition to achieve parity between the company's import and export business divisions. "The export business, however, is something I personally initiated, and it holds a special place in our company's history as my contribution," he says.

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