

# HOW JAPAN IS PRESERVING FOOD TRADITIONS

JAPANESE COMPANIES THINK GLOBALLY AND ACT LOCALLY TO PRESERVE AND NURTURE JAPANESE FOOD CULTURE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*



1. BYO Restaurant - Washoku sake EN
2. Odagaki Shoten Black Soy Beans
3. Chiba Soy Sauced based Yakitori
4. Hanamaruki Aged Koji Powder

**F**ood traditions are inherently local. They're inherited, shaped by community and passed from parent to child, master to student. They weave familiarity into daily life, bringing people together to share their joys.

For condiment producer Kubara Honke's president and CEO, Tetsuji Kawabe, the heart of *washoku* lives within the home. "Ideally, traditional cuisine and culinary traditions should be passed down within households," he explains. Authenticity begins with cultivation. Koufuku Holdings, a rice-focused innovation company, supports local farmers to preserve these traditions. President Takeshi Kitamoto emphasizes, "We are working to make farming more sustainable and appealing for current and future generations."

Local ingredients are the backbone of culture. Odagaki Shoten, Japan's premier supplier of *tambaguro* black soybeans—essential in holiday sweets—understands this deeply. "Black soybeans play a key role in *osechi ryori*, not only as a healthy ingredient but as a symbolic one," says President Noboru Odagaki. Food also brings communities together, and Kamada Soy Sauce has facilitated this for over 230 years. CEO Takeo Kamada notes, "When it comes to our *dashi* soy sauce and other products, we believe the key lies in balancing authenticity with localization."

Culture, however, does not stand still. Koji Nakano, president of restaurateurs B.Y.O., shares, "Our company philosophy is to innovate Japanese cuisine while preserving and passing on traditional Japanese culture." For nearly 110 years, *koji* and miso manufacturer Hanamaruki has adapted its processes for modern tastes. President Shuichiro Hanaoka explains, "This 'oiki-kouji miso' uses the oiki-kouji method, which is a revival of a method we used 70 years ago."

Preserving tradition also means protecting the environment. Tsuji Oil Mills champions sustainability by upcycling unused resources. President Takehiko Tsuji states, "One of our basic principles is to find new value in the effective use of unused resources."

Together, these *washoku* masters embody the harmony of tradition and modernity.

## PERFECT GIFTS FROM DECORATED CHOCOLATIERS

MARY CHOCOLATE'S FANCY CHOCOLATE CONTINUES TO DEVELOP THE PERFECT GIFT CHOCOLATES WITH JAPANESE SENSIBILITIES. *By Daniel de Bomford, Cian O'Neill and Paul Mannion*



**Yoshiteru Koyamatsu**  
president, Mary Chocolate Co., Ltd.

**C**hocolate is the perfect gift. Its rich flavors capture the joy we experience through human connection, delivering unforgettable moments of delight. Since its founding in 1950, Mary Chocolate has meticulously pursued the art of chocolate-making, drawing on Japanese aesthetics to craft delicate flavors, luxurious textures and suitable portions that reflect Japan's unique sensibilities.

President Yoshiteru Koyamatsu emphasizes that the demand for chocolate as a personal gift extends beyond seasonal events like Valentine's Day in Japan, where countless gift-giving occasions exist. "In recent years, there's been a clear shift toward people choosing products that reflect their own values and with which they feel a personal connection," he says. Mary Chocolate aims to provide chocolates that truly resonate with customer preferences.

One of the company's signature offerings, Fancy Chocolate, particularly the 24-piece Fancy Chocolate set, has been selected for the Best-Selling and Long-Selling title in the Japanese and Western Confectionery Gift Set category of the Nikkei POS Selection in the last 10 years.

Continuously refining its recipes over the years, Mary Chocolate has developed 16 flavors by pairing chocolate with fruits, nuts and even matcha, carefully selecting combinations that enhance each ingredient's flavor. The company, recognized internationally with numerous awards, looks to develop more preferred chocolates. He explains, "My mission is to create more opportunities for people to experience our chocolate both domestic and international."



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# B.Y.O. MEANS AUTHENTIC JAPANESE CUISINE

B.Y.O. OPERATES 16 BRANDS AND 116 STORES, BASED ON ITS PHILOSOPHY OF “CREATING FOOD THAT PASSES ON JAPANESE CULTURE.”

By Arthur Menkes and Paul Mannion

**F**ounded in 1991, B.Y.O. is a Japanese company that operates a variety of restaurant brands primarily focused on Japanese cuisine. President Koji Nakano says the company wants to broaden perceptions of Japanese cuisine beyond popular dishes like sushi and udon. “Our company philosophy is to innovate Japanese cuisine while preserving and passing on traditional Japanese culture,” Nakano says. The company adjusts its menus according to the season so local customers can enjoy seasonal cuisine. It makes over 800 menu changes each year across its 16 brands. These changes allow its customers to discover new favorites while preserving the traditions of Japanese cuisine, and its commitment to seasonality is a key part of the dining experience.

The company plans to open new restaurants, both overseas and in major Japanese cities. Through the development of franchises, it wants to build a brand loved by many people. It has begun accepting franchise applications for Dashi Chazuke + Niku Udon En, which currently has 27 restaurants nationwide, mainly in Tokyo. The franchise is a high-class, Japanese, healthy fast-food restaurant that serves excellent dashi chazuke, onigiri (rice balls) and udon noodles with beef cooked in dashi broth. Along with its franchisees, B.Y.O. hopes to spread the appeal of dashi throughout the world. The company also offers bottled dashi and other products on its website for domestic delivery, so customers can recreate the tastes of its restaurants at home.



**“We want to challenge perceptions and show people that Japanese cuisine is more diverse than they may realize.”**

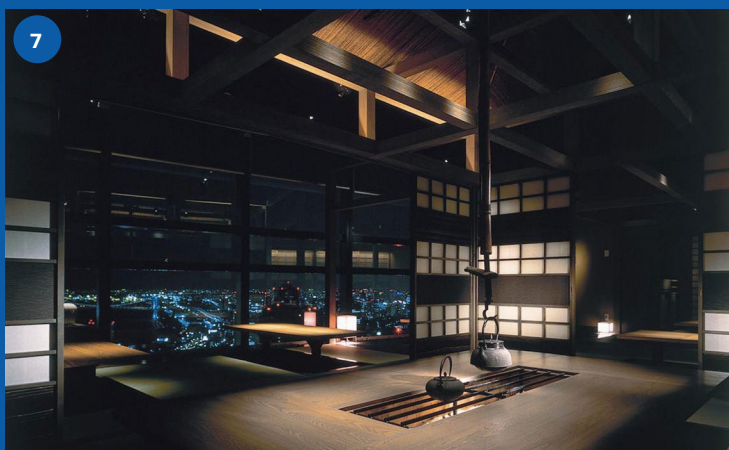
**Koji Nakano**

president, B.Y.O., Co., Ltd.



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The company is in the midst of recruiting personnel who aspire to “innovate Japanese cuisine.” B.Y.O. actively recruits people who search for new values in Japanese food and aspire to create rich dishes with a commitment to deliciousness and hospitality. Through a comprehensive training program, recruits are not only from Japan but are multinational, and the company boasts employees from Vietnam, Nepal, Myanmar, Indonesia and Taiwan. The program teaches cooking techniques, knowledge of food ingredients, hospitality and store management and helps recruits gain a wide range of experiences and grow as well-balanced chefs, staff and managers.

The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) is one of the most prestigious culinary schools in the world and invited B.Y.O. to demonstrate a recipe for “Dashi Chazuke.” “The fact that such a renowned institution recognized the potential of dashi reinforces our belief in its global appeal,” Nakano says. This recognition solidified the company’s ambition to expand Dashi Chazuke En overseas.

B.Y.O. conveys the depth of Japanese cuisine with dishes beyond the globally beloved sushi and tempura. It is seeking to go beyond simply opening restaurants abroad and is looking for international partners to satisfy the globe’s fascination with Japanese cuisine.

1. Sushi Course (Washoku EN)
2. Well-balanced Japanese cuisine (Obon de gohan)
3. Dashi-Chazuke
4. Dashi broth bottle
5. Making dashi broth
6. Cooking lecture at CIA school
7. Traditional Japanese seats



# KUBARA HONKE SHARES AUTHENTIC DASHI, EXPANDING CULINARY TRADITIONS GLOBALLY

AS JAPANESE CUISINE REACHES NEW HEIGHTS, KUBARA HONKE AIMS TO SHARE DASHI WITH A NEW GLOBAL AUDIENCE TO PRESERVE ITS CULTURAL HERITAGE.  
By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Paul Mannion

The first thing that springs to mind in conversations about culture is often the great works of art—literary, musical and architectural. It’s also the intangible, a familiar spirit shared between people or the knowledge passed on from generation to generation. A culture’s food bridges the gap between tangible and intangible; it is something to be shared and passed on. As purveyors of Japanese seasonings, ingredients and condiments, Kubara Honke is entwined with *washoku*—Japanese cuisine—which was designated as an intangible cultural heritage in 2013 by UNESCO.



Kubara Honke President and CEO Tetsuji Kawabe says that the succession of local cuisine doesn’t necessarily have to rely on restaurants. “Ideally, traditional cuisine and culinary traditions should be passed down within households,” he explains. As a company that provides ingredients for home cooking, Kubara Honke plays a key role in this process by offering products that align with traditional flavors and cooking methods. “If our products are embraced and incorporated into daily cooking, we believe we can contribute to preserving Kyushu’s rich food culture for future generations,” Kawabe says. He describes one of the company’s proudest achievements as contributing to the nationwide popularity of flying fish

*dashi*. The company made it the focus of its product development early on, and over the years, it grew in popularity beyond Japan’s southern island of Kyushu. “Our company played a key role in introducing and expanding the appreciation of flying fish *dashi* across Japan,” Kawabe proudly states.

**Delivering Washoku to a Global Audience**  
Kawabe says that the Japanese food industry needs to do more to promote authentic *washoku* home cooking around the globe. With its rise in popularity in the wake of the UNESCO designation and the influx of tourists after the pandemic, people are seeking authentic experiences in their home countries. “Compared to many other global cuisines, Japanese food tends to be lighter and lower in calories, which likely contributes to its growing appeal among health-conscious consumers,” Kawabe remarks on *washoku*’s increased profile.

With the declining population, Kawabe says the company needs to expand into global markets. It has already made a concerted effort in the United States and has a presence in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Europe. The company



**“We hope that Kaya-  
noya will become syn-  
onymous with dashi all  
over the world.”**

**Tetsuji Kawabe**

president and CEO,  
Kubara Honke Group Co, Ltd.



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already has a dedicated e-commerce site for the United States. “One of our potential strategies is leveraging our online recipe collection to attract Americans who are open to trying new seasonings and condiments in their everyday meals,” Kawabe suggests. To promote dashi in the United States, on October 15, 2024, Kubara Honke established National Dashi Day. It used the event to



share information about the origins of dashi, the different types of dashi and the importance of dashi in Japanese cuisine. It also hosts the annual Ago Matsuri (Flying Fish Festival) in Japan. The company believes that promoting dashi goes hand in hand with its business expansion and plans to continue National Dashi Day in 2025.

One of the challenges of exporting Japanese ingredients abroad is that a smaller percentage of people in these markets cook at home. Kawabe says that the company must be considerate of what products it offers and have a deep understanding of each market to find ways to incorporate its ingredients into everyday cooking. “Getting home cooks to adopt our products as part of their daily staples will be crucial, though it presents a high hurdle for us to overcome,” he says. The company is already rolling out its domestically popular “*dashi* soup” overseas, which can be prepared quickly and only requires hot water to serve. Looking ahead, Kubara Honke is considering new paths for growth. “While we are currently focused on seasonings, food ingredients and condiments, we may explore expanding our product portfolio in the future,” Kawabe explains. He suggests potential avenues for ready-to-eat meals or other innovative products that align with evolving consumer needs. “Offering ready-meal options, making it easier for consumers unfamiliar with Japanese cooking to experience authentic flavors in a convenient way,” he says.

## Innovative Strategies and Partnerships Strengthen International Position

Kawabe describes Kubara Honke’s sales approach as “unconventional,” having established e-commerce stores before physical ones. “We initially bu-



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ilt our brand through e-commerce, and once our products gained nationwide popularity, we began opening stores in key locations to further strengthen our market presence,” Kawabe says.



The company plans to enhance its brick-and-mortar stores to create a distinct atmosphere that appeals to customers as it strengthens its flagship locations. “At the same time, we will continue to expand our e-commerce presence, as we believe that physical stores and online sales should complement each other,” Kawabe explains.

Another critical facet of Kubara Honke’s strategy is its partnerships with foreign chefs in the United States. Currently, it is partnering with Chef Ivan Orkin of Ivan Ramen, who has been a believer in the Kubara Honke’s Kayanoya Dashi for a long time. In collaboration with Chef Ivan, the company created a recipe for truffle ramen with Kayanoya vegetable dashi and posted an instructional video with the chef online. “I have used Kayanoya dashi for a very long time at Ivan Ramen,” Chef Ivan says in his testimonial.

Between partnerships and International Dashi Day, Kubara Honke aims to communicate the value and uses of *dashi* with consumers. Japanese

cuisine is perceived by the market as healthy, and *dashi* is a key reason for this in many dishes. “*Dashi* is a powerful alternative to salt due to its natural umami, allowing for reduced sodium intake without compromising flavor,” Kawabe says. The company has long recognized this inherent strength in promoting healthier eating habits. “Moving forward, we aim to better communicate *dashi*’s health advantages and educate consumers on how it can be used as a flavorful, low-sodium alternative in everyday cooking,” he says.



The company’s goal is to have its products integrated with everyday cooking around the globe. “We are actively exploring pathways to achieve this and remain open to ideas that can help introduce our seasonings, condiments and *dashi* to a wider audience,” Kawabe says. He believes finding the right approach is key to expanding the company’s reach and ensuring its products become a natural choice in home kitchens. He hopes to secure this piece of culture’s future before passing it on to the next generation to nurture and grow. Sharing his dream for the future, he resolutely states, “In the future, we hope that Kayanoya will become synonymous with *dashi* all over the world.”





## SHARING HAPPINESS WITH KAMADA SOY SAUCE

THE SOY SAUCE MANUFACTURER LOOKS TO TAKE ITS LOCAL FAVORITES INTERNATIONALLY TO SHARE THE JOY OF AUTHENTIC JAPANESE CUISINE. *By Daniel de Bomford, Arthur Menkes and Bernard Thompson*

**F**ood often serves as the centerpiece of our social gatherings. A mainstay for weddings, picnics, birthdays and even simple catch-ups between friends, it gently punctuates social interactions, enriching lives. Few have a greater understanding of that role than Takeo Kamada, CEO of Kamada Soy Sauce. “There is so much joy in the dining experience—eating, cooking, sharing what you’ve made with someone else, and also, the profound gratitude of receiving life itself through food. Japanese cuisine—made with our products—can be a way of achieving that,” he says.

Kamada Soy Sauce has been operating for over 230 years, providing high-quality ingredients and innovating on old favorites. Its Dashi Soy Sauce, launched in 1965, blends two essential components of Japanese cooking—soy sauce and dashi—into one versatile seasoning. Dashi, known as the Japanese broth of life, requires considerable effort to extract. However, when preparing traditional Japanese home-cooked meals, using Dashi Soy Sauce can save both time and effort. This product opened up a new category of “dashi soy sauce” in the Japanese seasoning market. The company is looking to continue its expansion internationally and is seeking partners from key markets—Europe, the United States and Southeast Asia—who have an understanding of both upstream and downstream aspects of the business.



Kamada says the key is understanding customer preferences. “Japanese consumers enjoy subtle taste variations, but this sensitivity is not always shared by non-Japanese customers,” he says. Kamada Soy Sauce’s strategy is to bridge the gap between authentic Japanese cuisine and local tastes, with an emphasis on understanding the needs of the end user. “Unlike mass-market brands, we are a small, local company, and our strength lies in personalized engagement rather than broad,

mass communication. We leverage this strength to foster one-to-one communication with distributors and end users overseas,” Kamada states.

Kamada hopes to see the business continually expand overseas and bring joy with scenes around the dinner table created by their products.

**“I believe our purpose in life is to find happiness by making those around us happy.”**

**Takeo Kamada**  
CEO, KAMADA SOY SAUCE Inc.



# Koufuku Holdings Leads in Sustainable Innovation

Koufuku Holdings is supporting farmers, reducing waste, creating new products and expanding internationally as it addresses future economic, demographic and environmental challenges.

By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Paul Mannion



"I hope to see materials used in a way that contributes to human health."

Takeshi Kitamoto, president, Koufuku Holdings Co., Ltd.

Agriculture is considered the genesis of civilization. It allowed societies to put down roots and build over generations, culminating in the modern technological marvels that are taken for granted today. As technology has progressed, agriculture's labor has decreased dramatically. However, Japan's acute labor shortage and climate change are beginning to disrupt supply, with the country suffering rice shortages in 2023.

For Koufuku Holdings, a company specializing in health, food and biotechnology, this represents a challenge it is determined to overcome. President Takeshi Kitamoto says the company's most significant opportunities lie in supporting farmers. "Initially, we only purchased rice from farmers, but we are now actively participating in farming ourselves," he explains. Starting next year, the company will operate its own farm.



Health product Fit Life coffee

## Supporting Farmers

Kitamoto says that the company's focus is on easing the burden on farmers, as their physical demands have become a significant challenge. Only 30% of Japan's land is flat,

meaning much of the farmland is situated on hills, increasing the strain of work, especially on hot summer days. "To combat this, we are working to provide solutions that reduce the workload, making farming more sustainable and appealing for both current and future generations," he says. Kitamoto explains that another challenge is pests, particularly rice stinkbugs, which are managed through labor-intensive grass clearing. Koufuku Holdings is deploying drones to disperse pesticides and fertilizers, while also supporting grass removal by dispatching workers to assist farmers. Farmers entering the industry also face high upfront costs and ongoing maintenance for machinery. Koufuku Holdings addresses this by offering rental equipment, such as tractors, to ease the financial burden. "By leveraging technology, workforce support and equipment rental solutions, we aim to reduce the workload on farmers, making rice cultivation more viable and sustainable in the long term," Kitamoto states.



Golden sprout rice with high nutrient content

## Creating Sustainable Value With Waste

Koufuku Holdings is also working to solve sustainability challenges with both food and plastic waste. Kitamoto explains that despite the shortages of rice, Japan faces significant food waste issues, including unused rice. "Instead of discarding surplus rice, we want to repurpose as much of it as possible for alternative applications, such as bioplastics, to contribute to sustainability and waste reduction," he says. The com-



Shampoo products containing rice moisturizing ingredients, Terra Care

pany has the capacity to develop environmentally friendly plastic alternatives, such as those made from rice, but with current initiatives, they remain uncompetitive.

Other applications for rice include Koufuku Holdings' patented b50 ingredient, derived from rice the company harvests. "Its key benefit is that it enhances the moisture retention effect by a factor of seven, acting as a growth inhibitor to prevent moisture loss," he explains. The ingredient is included in skincare

products exclusively sold at beauty salons as a premium item. The company has expanded its supply to China and India, and Kitamoto says the products have been particularly well received in China. "The industry is experiencing rapid growth, and our beauty segment has seen 170% annual growth," he states.

## Finding New Markets

For continued international expansion, Kitamoto describes Malaysia as a market with significant potential for the company's Fit Life Coffee. The product can help reduce glucose, which provides value for consumers with

diabetes. Malaysia's sizable Muslim population means that Koufuku Holdings is looking to expand its factories to Malaysia and obtain a halal certification. The company is pursuing an M&A strategy to estab-

lish a factory to ensure that it meets all halal requirements and can effectively enter the market. "If we obtain halal certification, we can tap into the broader Muslim market, which is estimated at 1.1 billion people," the president says.

With evolving environmental, economic and geopolitical challenges, Koufuku Holdings is closely monitoring the costs of farming, particularly for coffee and cacao. Increasing demand is driving up costs and creating a supply-demand imbalance. Kitamoto says that the company's strategy not only focuses on sales but also on procurement. "Without reliable access to raw materials, our operations cannot move forward. That's why we are also exploring overseas production for imports to Japan, ensuring a sustainable and diversified supply chain," he says.

Agriculture remains the backbone of civilization, and Kitamoto says that excessive use of the planet's resources is dangerous. "That's why we place great importance on environmental sustainability and health, ensuring that we respect and maximize the value of these materials to help build a more sustainable world."



First manufactured and sold unwashed rice product in Japan

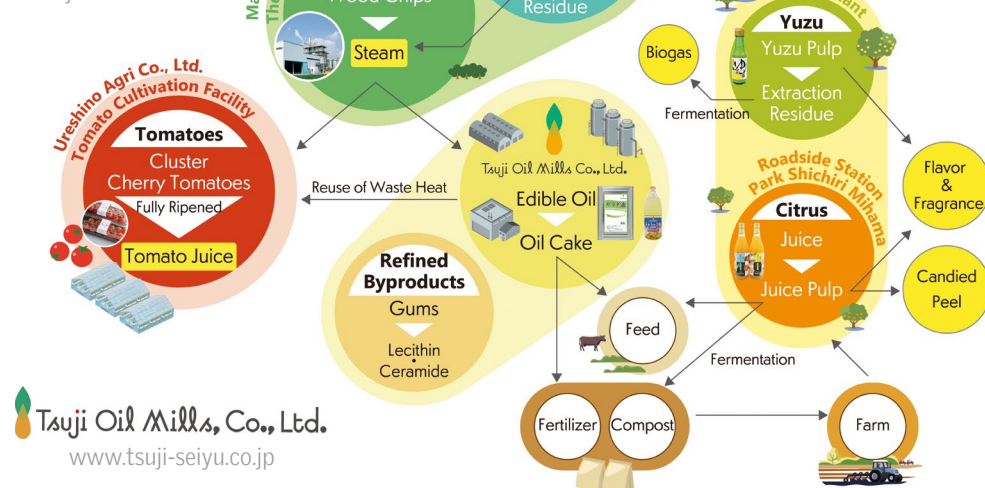


Rice cake made with brown rice

**Koufuku Holdings**

<https://koufuku-group.co.jp>

Circular model cycle  
of Tsuji Oil Mills



"One of our basic principles is to find new value in the effective use of unused resources."

Takehiko Tsuji, president,  
Tsuji Oil Mills Co., Ltd.

## Tsuji Oil Mills Advances Essential Oil Sustainability

Tsuji Oil Mills is working to create new value and develop new products from discarded materials, while working with communities to help solve environmental and social challenges. *By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Paul Mannion*

### Recycling for a Better Future

Tsuji Oil Mills, headquartered in Matsusaka City in the Mie prefecture, is a food manufacturer that aims to create a sustainable society by producing canola and corn oil. Since its establishment 78 years ago, the company has refined its proprietary oil-pressing and extraction technologies, while building a recycling-oriented business model that "finds new value in unused resources." The company is pioneering sustainability with its efforts to reduce environmental impact, coexisting with local communities and creating economic value.



Biomass steam plant

For 10 years, the company has been led by third-generation president Takehiko Tsuji, and his grandfather Seiichi Tsuji started the oil pressing business in the Mie prefecture. Under a sustainable management policy, the company is accelerating business diversification and regional cooperation.

The company's woody biomass boiler is located adjacent

to the main plant and utilizes thinned wood and construction waste as fuel to create steam for cooking oil production. This has resulted in a reduction of fossil fuels equivalent to 9,000 kL per year and a 23,000-ton reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In addition, excess steam and hot water discharged from the oil-pressing plant are supplied to the tomato greenhouses of an adjacent group company, Ureshino Agri Co. The 3.2-hectare greenhouse produces approximately 800 tons of table tomatoes annually, creating 140 local jobs.

### Lecithin Business

Research and development of lecithin began in 1968, and the lecithin business is now a core business of Tsuji Oil Mills. In 1971, the company started manufacturing high-purity soy lecithin, and high-purity powdered lecithin became a mainstay prod-



Various lecithin

uct. It began manufacturing enzymatically decomposed lecithin,



Hinoki cypress forest

which has high emulsifying power, and hydrogenated lecithin. This has dramatically improved stability, and the company has a product lineup suitable for food, supplements and cosmetics and feed. By building close relationships with its customers' R&D departments, it can modify lecithin to suit the intended use.

In addition, the Oil Mill Division extracts corn germ to produce corn oil and ceramide from the same corn germ, which is supplied for use in supplements and cosmetics.

### Yuzu and Hinoki Oil

In recent years, Tsuji Oil Mills has focused on extracting essential oil from unused agricultural and forestry resources, such as yuzu and hinoki cypress.

At its plant in Kochi prefecture, Tsuji Oil purchases and upcycles 2,000 tons of yuzu peels from local Japan agricultural cooperatives (JA) and recycles them into yuzu essential oil, using its extraction technology. In Mie prefecture, the company also produces hinoki essential oil from FSCTM-certified hinoki thinnings and crooked stumps. Hinoki essential oil and Hinoki aromatic distillation water are also FSC-certified products (FSC-C165649). The excellent fragrance and functionality of the oil are highly regarded both in Japan and abroad as aroma and cosmetic ingredients, and the chips from

the essential oil extraction are also reused as fuel for biomass boilers. President Tsuji is committed to utilizing unused resources based on his belief that "things that are considered worthless can become treasures if we apply our wisdom to them." The company doesn't imitate others and does what no one else can. Tsuji Oil Mills will continue to pursue the potential of unused resources and contribute to realizing a recycling-oriented society.



Hinoki Oil



# Hanamaruki Koji Innovation Unlocking New Markets

Hanamaruki is bringing traditional Japanese ingredients to modern plates at home and across the globe. *By Daniel de Bomford, Cian O'Neill and Sasha Lauture*

People's taste preferences change as they move through life, and often as people get older, the tastes their parents and grandparents enjoy become familiar comforts. But the experiences of those preparing them also transform the ingredients. In Japan, traditional favorites such as miso and koji remain as popular as ever, and now that global audiences have had a taste, these ingredients are finding their way across oceans.

For over 100 years, Hanamaruki Foods has been producing traditional Japanese foods such as miso and koji domestically and, more recently, abroad. Despite the shrinking Japanese population and market, company President Shuichiro Hanaoka isn't too concerned, as the Hanamaruki brand has a firm foundation with recognition across all generations. "Younger generations tend to prefer fast food, but as they get older, they are expected to become more interested in traditional Japanese food, such as miso soup, and seek a healthier diet," he explains. Furthermore, Hanaoka says the company is pursuing an aggressive international strategy, leveraging its advanced technology and quality craftsmanship. "We would like people around the world to know the quality of our products and realize sustainable growth."

Products like Aged Koji Powder are indicative of Hanamaruki's innovative spirit. The in-

redient serves a wide range of functions, such as enhancing the flavor in ramen, where it deepens the flavor of the soup. "In addition, we are now able to approach markets related to premixes and seasonings, where the introduction of liquid or paste forms has been a challenge," he says. Another example is its Liquid Shio Koji, which is less likely to burn than its traditional

miso paste counterparts. Both have found success at home and abroad, where renowned French chef Christian Le Squer, with three Michelin stars, has discovered the versatility of Liquid Shio Koji and has put it to use in his menus.

With the launch of the Hanamaruki Brewery Koji Laboratory, Hanaoka says that the company is creating products that are not bound by conventional wisdom and are leveraging new technologies that fit modern lifestyles. Hanaoka emphasizes that the company is confident in its technical capabilities and know-how accumulated over a century and wants to share this with the

world. "Now that the world is experiencing a Japanese food boom, we are developing products that will revolutionize the values of koji and miso of yesterday, aiming to become a global brand with an eye not only on Japan but also on the world," he says. Products such as its Oi Koji Miso, which revisits techniques the company used 70 years ago, reflect how it can capitalize on the mature market of Japan through the marriage of innovation with traditional Japanese cuisine. "Adding more koji during

fermentation produces a richer, deeper flavor, subtle sweetness and strong umami not found in regular miso," he says.

Hanamaruki places emphasis on how its products are marketed, in order to break into international markets. It suggests how to incorporate its ingredients into mainstream dishes that suit consumers' preferences. Furthermore, it works with local partners in global markets to establish its products. "Both miso and shio koji are relatively new seasonings in any country, so we believe it is very important to build good partnerships with distributors who have in-depth knowledge of the local market," he says. The company already has bases in the United States, China and Thailand and has a dedicated Liquid Shio Koji factory in Thailand. "We are also working to propose recipes and methods of use adapted to the food culture of each region," he says.



"My goal is to spread the excellence of miso and shio koji, the ancient, fermented foods of Japan."

Shuichiro Hanaoka, President, Hanamaruki Foods Inc.

With its 110th anniversary approaching, the company's carefully thought-out strategy to grow its presence in the domestic and international markets signals that Hanamaruki is poised for growth. The company is exposing entirely new generations and demographics of people to long-time favorites, updated to suit modern and diverse tastes. Hanaoka states, "My goal is to spread the excellence of miso and shio koji, the ancient fermented foods of Japan, throughout the world."



Aged Koji Powder



Oi Koji Miso



Liquid Shio Koji



Aged Koji Powder



Siam Hanamaruki Plant Thailand

# Odagaki Shoten's Black Soybean Heritage

Rooted in tradition, Odagaki Shoten preserves the legacy of black soybeans while driving regional revitalization and sustainable growth in Tamba-Sasayama. *By Daniel De Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Paul Mannion*



"We hope to contribute both to people's well-being and to sharing the health benefits of black soybeans."

Noboru Odagaki, president, Odagaki Shoten Co., Ltd.

*Osechi* plays an integral role in Japan's New Year's celebrations, where families share a variety of special dishes to wish one another good health and luck. Each box is a treasure chest, and each bite is a wish that connects families. One of the key ingredients in *osechi* is *tamba-*

*guro*—black soybeans, known for their sweet taste.

For almost 150 years, Odagaki Shoten has been supplying *tambaguro* to Japan, and President Noboru Odagaki says that half the population consumes it over the New Year's holiday period. "Our company revolves entirely around *tambaguro*. They're not only the foundation of our business but a vital part of regional and national culture," the president explains. The company strives to provide a stable and secure environment for producers, ensuring a steady supply to contribute to sharing the health benefits of black soybeans.

## Keeping Traditions Amid Changing Times

With the challenges of an aging workforce and fewer young people entering the industry, Odagaki Shoten has ensured supply by increasing cultivation areas, introducing harvesting machines and assisting growers. In the past, the beans were sorted by hand by the producer, but the company has stepped in and taken



Stone garden

over that process. The president states, "By easing their burden, we support continued production." *Tambaguro* itself is a local variety, native to the surroundings of Tamba-Sasayama. "Unlike other varieties bred for high yield, ours is cultivated for its deliciousness and popularity among consumers," he says. Because of the cultural importance of *tambaguro*, customers want the best and are willing to pay a premium.

Odagaki Shoten is also looking toward international markets to continue its growth trajectory. Despite the higher price tags, the president says the health benefits and taste justify the price. "We believe Western countries are particularly receptive to this message," he says. The president wants to show that *tambaguro* can also be used in Western sweets and even protein powder. The company is looking for distribution partners who share its values. It focuses on B2B exports to businesses that understand the appeal and can communicate its value to customers, such as chefs and food service providers.

with a wider audience, fostering renewed pride among residents and connecting the vitality of rural Japan to the future," he says.



Tambaguro

President Odagaki wants to see people from all over the world visit and participate in hands-on activities, such as cooking classes with local ingredients. "We warmly welcome international guests and hope many will come and experience the richness of Tamba-Sasayama for themselves."

Like the *osechi* composed of *tambaguro*, the beans themselves are part of something bigger that brings people together from across the world and contributes to regional revitalization. "I want *tambaguro* to be known and loved around the world as a delicious, healthy food that represents the heart of *washoku*."



Black soybean dolce



Summer limited-edition sweets



Black soybean tea

## From Tamba-Sasayama to the World

The company's commitment goes beyond the beans themselves and into revitalizing the region. President Odagaki serves as the executive committee chairman for the Tamba-Sasayama World Expo, which focuses on rediscovering and promoting the region's cultural heritage, such as Noh theatre and Tamba pottery. "The goal is to share these inherited values



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# Chiba Shoyu Expands Globally with Rich Tradition

Chiba Shoyu delivers rich, authentic soy sauce crafted through tradition and innovation and develops flavors for new markets. *By Daniel de Bomford, Cian O'Neill, Arthur Menkes and Paul Mannion*



"Our expertise lies in koji fermentation and soy sauce production."

Kyosuke Iida, president,  
Chiba Shoyu Co., Ltd.

For a local company, soy sauce manufacturer Chiba Shoyu has big dreams. President Kyosuke Iida says he wants the company to receive orders from around the globe. "Right now, we are a local company based in a remote area of Chiba, but my goal is to transform it into a global brand," he explains.

The company's Shimousa Shoyu (soy sauce) launched in 2004 amid a push for local production and consumption. Made with Japanese soy, wheat and salt and fermented in wooden

barrels with its Karatsuki yeast—which creates a unique umami flavor. Soy sauce aged in barrels absorbs the natural aromas of its environment, adding another layer of complexity. "The natural environment of our barrels and warehouse enhanced the soy sauce's aroma and taste, contributing to the distinctive character of Shimousa soy sauce," Iida explains.

To break into international markets, the company uses a customized approach for each customer. "Rather than offering fixed services, we focus on understanding each customer's requirements and ensuring we provide solutions that align with their vision," Iida says. Currently, the company exports to international markets, such as the United States, Europe and



Chiba Shoyu's flagship product,  
Shimousa Shoyu



Shimousa Shoyu slowly aged in  
wooden barrel cellars

Southeast Asia, through trading companies that act as wholesalers. Most of Chiba Shoyu's sales come through B2B and OEM private brands. In contrast, its branded sauces, like Shimousa, are considered premium products for high-end restaurants and discerning B2C consumers.

Chiba Shoyu is looking to continue its growth through partnerships, entering into new markets and sharing its expertise to export its Shimousa Shoyu and localized variations tailored to different global tastes.

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Chiba Shoyu Co., Ltd. [www.chibashoyu.com](http://www.chibashoyu.com)



# Developing Perfect Ingredients with Takesho

Takesho Food & Ingredients is leveraging years of ingredient R&D to develop new tastes for some of Japan's largest brands. *By Daniel De Bomford, Arthur Menkes and Sasha Lauture*

Finding the perfect ingredients has long been a challenging task for manufacturing at scale. Takesho Food & Ingredients looks to supply manufacturers with the perfect ingredients for their products, developing the solutions rather than just seeking them out. Toshinao Tanaka, president of Takesho Food & Ingredients, says that many companies try to visualize and quantify

deliciousness but lack the means to bring that vision to life. He explains, "Our advantage lies in our ability to realize deliciousness and enhance this characteristic in specific areas of processed food, using a mixture of various ingredients." The company's business structure centers around the "Science of Deliciousness," and its goal is to help its partners refine a perfect flagship product.

From its beginnings, the company has developed in three phases. Phase One, the procurement of food and ingredients, such as condiments and spices. Phase Two, identifying the best condiments for each manufacturing process, where it entered the business of pre-blending ingredients, seeking optimal combinations. Phase Three is developing and manufacturing its own ingredients. "Our business caters to dozens of major companies, with whom we have deep, established relationships," Tanaka explains.

The company has recently expanded overseas to Vietnam to

finance R&D and for OEM production. Collaborating with Can Tho University (CTU) and Aeon Vietnam, the company is promoting product development, utilizing the food and resources of the Mekong Delta region. In the process, it is enhancing high-quality human resource training, scientific research and contributing to local sustainable development. Takesho Food & Ingredients is also collaborating with local partners to create Millglobe, a brand of functional, sustainable, high-value powdered ingredients, such as shrimp powder, purple sweet potato powder and mung bean powder.

With Phase Three already established in Vietnam and Phase One currently under development, Takesho Food & Ingredients seeks to expand its business model across the world. Tanaka explains, "Through industry-academia collaboration, we aim to develop a business model that enables 'local-to-local' food valley creation."



"Our advantage lies in our ability to realize deliciousness."

Toshinao Tanaka, president,  
Takesho Food & Ingredients Inc.



MillGlobe®



Shrimp powder



Purple sweet potato powder



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