

# FROM EDO TAVERNS TO AI CONFECTIONS

BLENDING CENTURIES-OLD TRADITIONS, NATURAL ABUNDANCE AND CUTTING-EDGE INNOVATION, JAPAN'S CUISINE CELEBRATES HERITAGE WHILE REIMAGINING FOOD FOR A GLOBAL FUTURE. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

**J**apan's food culture is a living harmony of tradition, environment and innovation. From centuries-old sake brewing and tea cultivation in volcanic soil to AI-crafted confections and globalized sweets, it is a cuisine that honors the past while shaping the future. Every bite tells a story of heritage, nature's gifts and a relentless drive to reimagine flavor.

## Traditional Roots for Modern Cuisine

The country's traditions stretch back centuries and are carried on by sake brewers like Toshimaya, which has a history spanning over 400 years. The company's founder, Juemon, opened the country's first *izakaya* (Japanese-style tavern). President Toshiyuki Yoshimura considers the company's recent opening of the Otoshimaya Sake Shop in Tokyo, which blends Edo-era traditions with modern sensibilities. "We serve tofu dengaku, just as in the Edo era, but we also created a new snack we call Otoshimaya Butter—made by blending butter with sake lees and dried fruit."

Tablemark is recreating traditional Japanese favorites and making them accessible by prioritizing simplicity and authenticity. President Yosuke Matsuda states that replicating traditional craftsmanship is a complex process, and the company strives to stay as true to the original as possible.

"Our mass-produced products follow the traditions of Japanese craftsmanship, refined over decades," he explains. "Our goal is to

reproduce that authenticity while also mass-producing these items at scale." Its signature product, Sanuki Udon, can be prepared in the microwave in three minutes.

AI Craftsman THEO, created by JUCHHEIM, is helping preserve the art of Baumkuchen. President Hideo Kawamoto says THEO is dispatched across the country, much like craftsmen of old. "Our aim is to take the recipes, design data, and technical know-how of master confectioners, digitize them, and create a recipe and technique 'data bank' in the cloud," he explains. As THEO works with masters of the craft, it can record their techniques and recipes, protecting the IP rights for the original creator while allowing anyone to reproduce their Baumkuchen.

## Nurtured by the Environment

Japan's unique environment is a boon for food like Aichi-based *nori* (seaweed) manufacturer Nagai Nori, which benefits from the region's mineral-rich waters. President Kazuhiko Hisada notes that the biggest differentiator for Japanese *nori* is its taste; each production area has a distinct flavor profile. "This is why we carefully select regions known for offering the best combination of taste and nutritional value," Hisada says.

Tea producers Shimodozono have an ideal location in Kagoshima, where the temperate climate and volcanic soil create perfect conditions for higher yields and faster growth. President Mami Shimodozono says the company's Bio Farm in Kodono has perfected the taste of organic tea. "That allows consumers to make a choice based on" ►



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# ROKKATEI BRINGS TREATS STATESIDE

ROKKATEI IS SHARING ITS ICONIC SWEETS ABROAD, WITH AMERICA FIRST IN LINE TO TRY ITS FAMOUS TREATS. *By Daniel de Bomford, Cian O'Neill and Kyann Edouard*

**T**he four distinct seasons in Japan have given rise to a culinary culture just as varied. Hokkaido's Rokkatei embodies this change in their sweets, having created seasonal delicacies and irresistible sweets since 1933. "Our approach to confectionery values seasonality and the subtle differences that each moment brings," Rokkatei President Fumihide Oda says.

Rokkatei brought its famous sweets to the United States, with its first store opening in California. Alongside, the company is bringing its philosophy of using local ingredients, such as raisins grown in California, to produce delicious treats that reflect the flavor and nature of the area.

"It's not just about taste; it's about capturing that fleeting instance in nature and transforming it into a confection," Oda affirms.

The company has showcased its signature sweets, including Marusei Butter Cookie Sandwiches, White Chocolate Strawberries, buttery cookies, rich milk chocolates and madeleines.

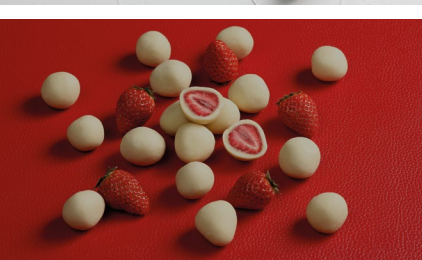
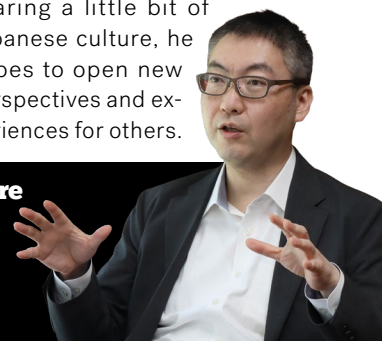
The symbol of Rokkatei is its Marusei Butter Sand, its first and most beloved treat. Made with rich Hokkaido buttercream, white chocolate, and rum raisins

layered between two buttery cookies, it captures the spirit of Rokkatei's craftsmanship: simple yet luxurious, nostalgic yet timeless.

For Oda, the company's American expansion is both strategic and about sharing culture. The United States, particularly California, is a place where many Japanese aspire to work and live. Oda himself was among them. By sharing a little bit of Japanese culture, he hopes to open new perspectives and experiences for others.

**"Experiencing another culture broadens your perspective."**

**Fumihide Oda**  
President, Rokkatei



▶ their lifestyle or personal values, without having to compromise on flavor," she says. Fed by the pristine Iwashimizu spring water, Bio farm exemplifies the company's harmony with nature.

### Evolving to Delight Modern Tastebuds

With the global rise of Japanese cuisine, niche ingredients like *menma* (pickled bamboo shoots) are finding new life. While the ingredient has almost been inseparable from ramen, Marumatsu Bussan President and CEO Daisuke Matsumura says his company is dedicated to taking menma global. "As a pickled bamboo shoot company, our goal is to make our products globally recognized and an integral part of diets around the world," Matsumura says.

"When it comes to sweets, Japan has a deep tradition, one where old and new coexist in daily life," says sweets manufacturer Rokkatei President Fumihide Oda. Rokkatei emphasizes the use of local ingredients that change with the seasons, offering a diverse

range of experiences. The company has just opened its first store in California, offering its signature sweets, including the Marusei Butter Cookie Sandwiches.

Likewise, Mary Chocolate offers customers a variety of unique flavors and experiences. President Yoshiteru Koyamatsu observes that customers are willing to pay a premium for products that align with their personal tastes. Speaking on Valentine's Day, he says, "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." The company aims to remain agile, creating chocolates for various occasions, and seeks to go beyond by creating personalized chocolates.

Japanese cuisine is a conversation between history, environment and innovation. Rooted in centuries-old craft, nurtured by rich landscapes, and propelled by modern creativity, it embodies balance and reinvention. Tradition grounds it, nature sustains it, and innovation ensures its place at the global table.

## TOSHIMAYA: 400 YEARS OF SAKE

DISCOVER FOUR CENTURIES OF AUTHENTIC TOKYO SAKE TRADITIONS, AS TOSHIMAYA BRINGS AWARD-WINNING EDO SAKE OJI WORLDWIDE.

By Daniel de Bomford and Paul Mannion

**L**ike many of the great sake brewers, Toshimaya can trace its roots back hundreds of years. The company's founder, Juemon, opened the country's first *izakaya* (tavern) more than 400 years ago, and today, President Toshiyuki Yoshimura follows in the founder's footsteps with the Toshimaya Sake Shop in Kanda, Tokyo.

The intimate setting and the traditionally crafted sake strike at the heart of the Toshimaya philosophy, "Continuity with Change." Yoshimura explains, "We must preserve tradition where it matters most, but we must also adopt new technologies where they add value." The company strives to maintain credibility, trust and sincerity,

while adopting new strategies for marketing, product development and distribution.

Toshimaya is expanding its exports of sake to new markets with innovative products. The company's award-winning "Edo Sake Oji (Edo Sake Prince)" is made entirely from ingredients sourced in Tokyo and is exported to the United States, France, Italy, Singapore and other countries.

The company's focus on preserving tradition is giving sake enthusiasts around the world the opportunity to experience authentic sake culture, and Yoshimura hopes that they will hold these experiences of enjoying sake and carry the tradition into the future.

**Toshiyuki Yoshimura, Ph.D.,**  
16<sup>th</sup> President,  
Toshimaya Corporation



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## MARUMATSU BUSSAN EXPANDS MENMA GLOBALLY

MARUMATSU BUSSAN IS GROWING THE REACH OF MENMA INTERNATIONALLY, BEYOND THE RAMEN BOWL, THROUGH ITS EXPORTS TO THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE AND ASIA.

By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O'Niell



**A**s appreciation for Japanese food continues to grow around the world, Marumatsu Bussan aims to introduce *menma*, pickled bamboo shoots, to the world.

Menma is a staple in ramen dishes and is rich in dietary fiber. While president and CEO Daisuke Matsumura is betting on its association with ramen, he also sees opportunities to localize the ingredient for new markets. The business is currently exploring new ways to incorporate menma at the table, citing global health trends as a particular area of opportunity, with dishes like vegan ramen proving popular overseas. "Our goal is to make our products globally recognized and an integral part of diets around the world," Matsumura explains. "Marumatsu Bussan is a company dedicated to taking menma global."



**"Our greatest strength lies in our flexible approach."**

**Daisuke Matsumura**

President & CEO,  
Marumatsu Bussan Co., Ltd.



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# SHIMODOZONO BREWS GLOBAL GROWTH

SHIMODOZONO, A LEADING JAPANESE TEA PRODUCER FROM KAGOSHIMA, EXPANDS GLOBALLY WITH ORGANIC SENCHA, MATCHA AND HOJICHA, BLENDING CULTURE AND MODERN TECHNIQUES TO REACH NEW TEA LOVERS WORLDWIDE. *By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O'Neill*

**B**oil the water, steep the leaves, enjoy the aroma, serve the tea: a simple ritual practiced for thousands of years across the world. A habit that has followed humanity, connecting us, whether through a reverent ceremony or a conversation between lifelong friends.

extensive tea-growing experience, it has adhered to the strictest quality controls while maintaining the same great taste of the tea.

At the Bio Farm, the company cultivates seven hectares of organic, fertilizer-free tea. Rooted in Heian-era tradition and nourished by pure Iwashimizu spring water, the farm grows 12 varieties, including Yutakamidori



In Japan, tea is an art, a ceremony and fellowship all in one. The country's rich tea culture has transcended tradition, and now Shinodozono is bringing it to global drinkers, from novice enthusiasts to aficionados alike.

President Mami Shimodozono says that while matcha remains Japan's most popular tea, the country's wealth of varieties, such as *sencha*, *hojicha* and *genmaicha* are gaining global attention as health and environmental consciousness become increasingly important to consumers.

"Our main point of differentiation lies in our roasting techniques and technology," the president explains. "The flavor we're able to produce through our proprietary methods is something other companies can't replicate—that's what makes our tea unique."

Quality begins with tea cultivation, and the company's location in Kagoshima is ideal for that. The temperate climate and mineral-rich volcanic soil prevent the tea from being waterlogged during the season, resulting in faster growth and higher yields.

Shimodozono has worked with its farmers to establish its organic Bio Farm in Kodono, Kawanabe Town. Leveraging the company's

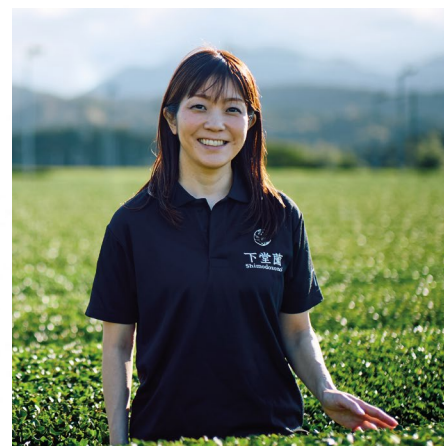
and regional species. By embracing biodiversity and mountain microclimates, Shimodozono produces high-quality Kagoshima teas.

"I want to create a space where we can truly share and convey the value of Japanese tea—and for me, that place is our Bio Farm," the president says. "Personally, I see it as a kind of power spot; it's somewhere I can relax and recharge."

Education is key to adding value and driving demand, and Shimodozono is looking to leverage its Bio Farm to that end. "We're considering ways to invite people to visit our Bio Farm, where they can engage in hands-on experiences and learn more about tea cultivation," she says.

While Europe already is familiar with loose-leaf tea like *sencha*, it remains something of a novelty in America, where powdered matcha is the more prevalent of Japanese tea varieties. President Shimodozono wants to change that. "I believe that there are many more ways to enjoy *sencha*. In fact, *sencha* allows you to adjust and tailor the taste to your preference," she says.

Shimodozono is carrying Japanese tea culture to the next generation, ensuring that the rituals and fellowship that surround the beverage are safeguarded.



**"Shimodozono is a company that is constantly innovating and striving to bring happiness."**

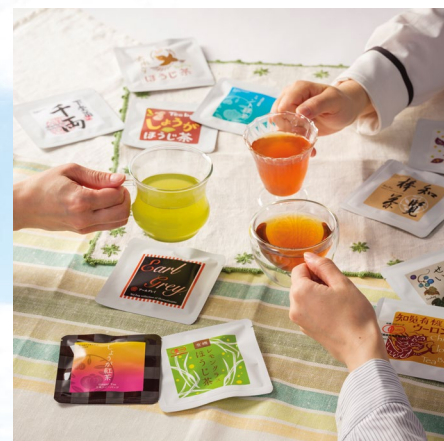
**Mami Shimodozono**  
President, Shimodozono Co., Ltd.



**下堂蘭**  
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# HOW NAGAI NORI BRINGS JAPANESE NORI WORLDWIDE

NAGAI NORI IS BRINGING THE JAPANESE FAVORITE TO THE WORLD, WITH BOTH TRADITIONAL AND MODERN REIMAGININGS OF THE STAPLE INGREDIENT. *By Daniel de Bomford and Arthur Menkes*



**Kazuhiko Hisada**  
President, NAGAI NORI CO.,LTD.



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Every region of Japan has its own character, and each city offers its own specialties and flavors. That distinctiveness comes from the ingredients themselves and the traditions that shape how they are grown, harvested and prepared. In Aichi Prefecture, for example, seaweed has long been at the center of the story. The region's rivers, rich in minerals, create conditions that give local nori its depth of flavor. It is here that Nagai Nori built its reputation, transforming a regional specialty into products that have earned recognition both at home and abroad.

Founded in 1947, Nagai Nori was instrumental in shaping nori manufacturing in Aichi Prefecture. President Kazuhiko Hisada says that the region is renowned for its three rivers, which carry essential minerals vital for nori production.

Twenty years ago, Japan was producing more than ten billion sheets of nori annually, and competition was intense. "We focused on ensuring a stable supply and maintaining high quality. By prioritizing taste and consistency, we were able to build trust with many reliable customers—and with strong customer relationships comes strong profitability," he explains.

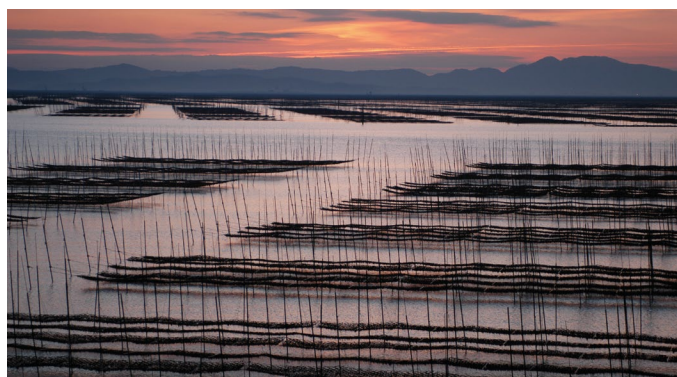
The company produces a variety of nori-based products, from the staple roasted sheets to seasoned pieces and toppings. Its Korean-inspired Jaban Nori won the Monde Selection award six consecutive years. The flavor has been adapted to suit Japanese taste, which Hisada says accounts for its wide-

spread acceptance in Japan. Furthermore, its Korean roots make it popular in Korea. "There are similar products on the market, but I think our carefully fine-tuned flavor appeals to the broadest possible audience," he says.

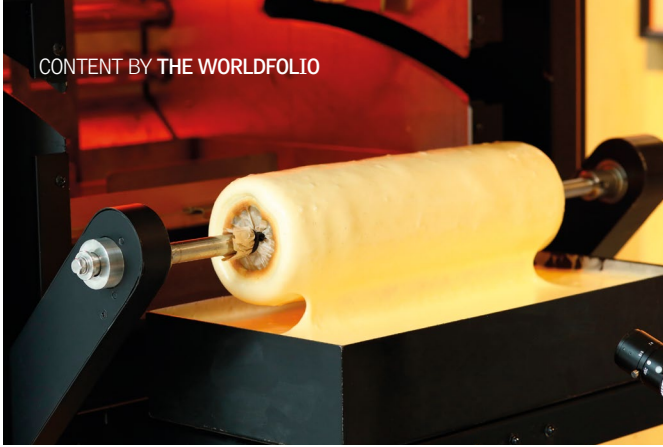
Nagai Nori has expanded into adjacent food segments, such as health foods and shiitake mushrooms. As a type of dry food, the company is already familiar with the production process of nori, and Hisada says that it "felt like a natural progression." The company is also developing new products made with nori, which is a key part of its strategy.

Consumption of Japanese cuisine, *washoku*, has quickly grown in the past decade, and total exports are comparable to Japan's traditional strong export sectors. With its sights set abroad, the company is eyeing the United States market as well as Southeast Asia. However, Hisada anticipates a challenge. In Southeast Asia, especially, Chinese and Korean nori suppliers and products already are well entrenched, he says. "That's why it's important to promote the distinctive taste of our products and highlight their superior flavor."

That adaptability gives the company confidence as it looks abroad. The company's role has evolved from being a mere supplier to being a tastemaker, introducing people from around the world to the wonders of nori. By doing so, Nagai Nori hopes to turn a local specialty into a familiar presence on tables worldwide.







# AI PRESERVES JAPAN'S CAKE CRAFT

JUCHHEIM BLENDS HERITAGE WITH HIGH TECH. ITS AI ASSISTANT THEO PRESERVES BAUMKUCHEN RECIPES, SUPPORTS ARTISANS AND ENSURES THAT CRAFTSMANSHIP THRIVES IN JAPAN'S RAPIDLY CHANGING FOOD INDUSTRY. *By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O'Neill*

**T**he hand of a skilled craftsman can turn the mundane into something incredible. In an era of mass-produced goods, the craftsman's time and care are becoming increasingly difficult to find, and fewer young people are embarking on the lifelong journey to mastery. In the modern era, however, technology is not intended to replace masters but to augment them and assist in preserving their knowledge and skills for future generations.

Baumkuchen-masters Juchheim are using AI and robotics to create a tool for baking artisans to preserve and share their techniques. Baumkuchen, the German delicacy known as tree cake or log cake, arrived in Japan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and quickly became a popular sweet treat.

Juchheim was instrumental in spreading the cake throughout Japan, and with its headquarters in Kobe, it stands at the nexus of the digital revolution in Japan. Its new initiative, THEO, is an AI-powered baking assistant. "THEO is not designed to replace artisans but to support them, to help transfer skills, and to ensure consistency without sacrificing craftsmanship," says President Hideo Kawamoto.

THEO has a built-in system to preserve recipes and baking techniques, which allows artisans to retain ownership while benefiting from sharing their personal skills through a "recipe copyright."

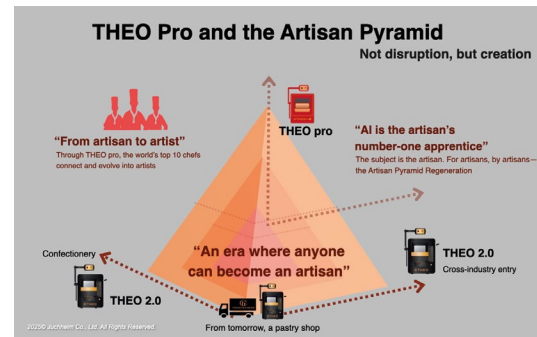
Positioning itself as an "AI craftsman," THEO has been dispatched across the country to share the skills of master craftsmen, which Kawamoto likens to the way skilled artisans shared their skills in years past.

The company aims to take recipes and techniques, store them in the cloud, then distribute them with THEO, thereby training the next generation. "This system will allow anyone operating THEO to access and reproduce authentic artisanal quality," Kawamoto explains.

At the same time, the company can track recipes and pay royalties to the recipe inventors. These funds can be reinvested into the

Kobe municipal initiatives and local confectionery associations. "In this way, the community benefits, the artisans are rewarded, and their craft is preserved and shared," he says.

Rather than replacing humans, THEO assists humans in carrying on a small part of humanity's legacy, ensuring that a little piece of culture maintains its human touch.



**"It is not simply about efficiency, but about joy, heritage, and human connection."**

**Hideo Kawamoto**  
President, Juchheim Co., Ltd.

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CONTENT BY THE WORLDFOILIO

# Bringing Authentic Washoku Worldwide

TableMark blends authentic Japanese craftsmanship with modern convenience, transforming traditional dishes like udon and okonomiyaki into accessible frozen favorites enjoyed by households worldwide. *By Daniel de Bomford and Arthur Menkes*

Japanese cuisine is winning hearts across the globe, with more than 200,000 restaurants now serving washoku abroad and exports topping JPY 1.5 trillion. At the forefront of this wave is TableMark, a pioneer in frozen foods that fuses centuries-old culinary craftsmanship with cutting-edge innovation. Through offerings like convenient yet restaurant-quality udon and okonomiyaki, the company has built its reputation on bringing authentic Japanese flavors to kitchens everywhere.

"Our mass-produced products follow the traditions of Japanese craftsmanship, refined over decades," says President Yosuke Matsuda. "Our goal is to reproduce that authenticity while also mass-producing these items at scale."

TableMark's purpose of "Bringing Joy to Meals and Fun to the Table" captures its desire to deliver happiness through surprise and innovation. Today, that philosophy extends beyond Japan. Instead of simply exporting products, the company develops offerings tailored to local tastes, ensuring its mission resonates with families and communities worldwide.



Gotsu-umai Okonomiyaki



Sanuki Udon

TableMark has built its reputation on making authentic Japanese meals simple and accessible. In 1962, the company first answered Japan's labor shortages with quick-cooking frozen fried shrimp that eased the burden on schools and workplaces. By 1974, it introduced what would become its signature: Sanuki Udon.

Fast forward to 2024, and that same product holds a Guinness World Record as the world's best-selling frozen noodle. Traditional udon takes time and effort to prepare, but TableMark's udon delivers a unique firmness that gives a pleasant bite in just three minutes. "Preserving the traditional methods behind these dishes is central to our mission, but we

also want to make them easy and convenient for everyone to enjoy," says Matsuda.

Udon itself is far from one-size-fits-all. With variations in length, width and softness, it reflects a wide range of tastes. TableMark's R&D keeps pace with those shifting preferences, fine-tuning its noodles while applying the same expertise to ramen and other staples. As Matsuda explains, "Our job is to meet all of these different requirements and continue to innovate within the category."

Innovation has also fueled TableMark's expanding lineup, from classic favorites like okonomiyaki to new lifestyle offerings such as its plant-based Beyond Free brand. Designed for consumers with allergies, dietary restrictions or personal preferences, Beyond Free reflects the company's commitment to inclusivity. "Beyond Free allows us to reach those customers and broaden the inclusivity of our product lineup," says Matsuda.

Looking ahead, TableMark sees international expansion as the natural next step. The United States remains its largest over-



"Our mass-produced products follow the traditions of Japanese craftsmanship, refined over decades."

Yosuke Matsuda,  
President, TableMark Co., Ltd.  
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seas market, but the company is actively exploring opportunities across Asia and beyond. Through future collaborations with a diverse range of partners, TableMark is ambitiously working to adapt its recipes to local tastes while staying true to its Japanese roots. For Matsuda, the goal is clear: to make washoku not just a niche cuisine but an everyday option worldwide.

By marrying Japan's culinary traditions with modern convenience, TableMark makes dishes once limited to specialty restaurants available in kitchens worldwide. From three-minute udon to plant-based meals, the company turns authentic flavors into everyday experiences, ensuring more people can savor the taste of Japan—simply, quickly, and joyfully.

As Matsuda explains, "Ultimately, our goal isn't merely to introduce our products to international audiences but to offer an experience that conveys true flavor, delight and fun."



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