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Approved by:

Michael Conlon, ATO Director
AmConGen Osaka/Kobe

Prepared by:

Sumio Thomas Aoki, Senior Marketing Specialist
Chika Motomura, Marketing Specialist

Report Highlights:

This issue reports on news articles about new healthy food products. For example, tofu, a Japanese traditional food product, is rapidly gaining popularity in Japan because of its healthy image. A variety of soy-based foods are now being launched.

Japan Food Trends (JFT) communicates Japanese food and lifestyle trends that may help U.S. exporters to generate products and marketing ideas.

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Editor's Notes

Metabolic syndrome, or simply "Metabo," is a new buzzword among Japanese. As annual anti-diabetes physical check-ups have become obligatory for those aged 40 to 74 in Japan, the Japanese, known to be the world's most health-conscious people, are becoming even more health conscious. This means greater demand for health foods in the Japanese market. Functional food products have been showing a steady growth for some time, but a traditional Japanese food product, tofu, and other soy-based foods, are now rapidly gaining in popularity. As you will read in this issue, even ready-made noodle manufacturers are trying to keep up with this trend. Finally, we can't forget umami's 100th anniversary. (Note: In this report, US\$=90Yen is used as the exchange rate.)

Soybeans & Health

Soy-based foods are proving a hit with health-conscious consumers *The Daily Yomiuri*, January 6, 2009, p3 (*Kyodo News*) and *Shokuhin Sangyo Shimbun*, December 8, 2008 p.2

Amid mounting concerns over obesity among the Japanese, a variety of soybean products are being marketed and gaining popularity. Here are some examples. "No cholesterol" and "less fat" seem to be the key factor here.

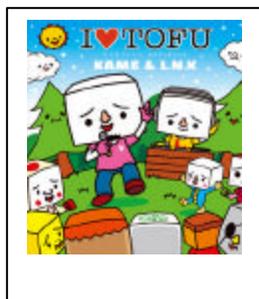
Kracie Foods Ltd. put iced soy milk on the market last September. It tastes like ice cream but doesn't contain cholesterol. The company expects the cholesterol-free ice cream market to reach \$77 million (7 billion Yen) in 2010. The market size in 2007 was around \$22 million (2 billion Yen).

Otsuka Pharmaceutical Co. began marketing nutritional "Soyjoy" health bars in 2006. Sales during the first year were \$55 million (5 billion Yen) and grew to \$167 million (15 billion Yen) the following year. Sales were expected to jump to \$222 million (20 billion Yen) in 2008. It is said that the product appeals to a variety of customers: young women who are dieting, young men who are looking for an addition to their lunch, and even senior citizens who find the product simply interesting.



Patina Co. launched "SoyMayo," mayonnaise-like sauce, a year and a half ago. It is made from soy milk not egg yolks. So far, 400 retail stores, mainly department stores and high-end supermarkets, are selling the product. As it doesn't contain cholesterol and its calories are only two thirds of regular mayonnaise, it appeals to a variety of sectors of the market. Now, the company is targeting major supermarket chains such as AEON.

Tofu PR Song, "I LOVE TOFU" *Shokuhin Sangyo Shimbun*, December 15, 2008, p3



It seems that the popularity of tofu is now turning into a "tofu fever." The Japan Tofu Association, an association of major tofu manufacturers in Japan, is introducing "I LOVE TOFU" as its new PR song with cute tofu characters. This hip-hop song goes like:...

"Made from soybeans full of energy of the sun and the earth,.
Tofu gives you the pep in your life." .

If you are curious, you can listen to the song by visiting <http://www.tofu-as.jp/topics/2008/1023.html> (in Japanese)

The song is being played at tofu corners of some food retail stores.

(The image is from Japan Tofu Association website.)

Healthy Ready-made Ramen

Cup Noodle Light Nikkei Trendy net,

<http://trendy.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/news/20081218/1021966>



Even ready-made noodle manufacturers are trying to catch up with this latest health trend. Nissin Foods Co., a major instant noodle manufacturer, is launching new dietary products, "Light Cup Noodle" and "Light Seafood Noodles." They contain only 198 kcal, about half of the regular cup noodles. The company has applied a new "Mist-air-dry" method instead of deep frying noodles in order to reduce calories. They hope to reach annual sales of \$444million (40 billion Yen).

(The image is from Nikkei Trendy Net website.)

Topic: the Hundredth Anniversary

UMAMI Nikkei MJ January 1, 2009 p.9, *Shokuryo Jokai Shimbun*, January 1, 2009 p.7, and

<http://www.umamiinfo.com/>

Hot selling products in Japan are said to be launched in the years that end with the number 9. Sony's "Walkman", Nintendo's "Game Boy" and "Ueshima Coffee", the first canned coffee in Japan, are some examples. This legend goes all the way back to 1909, when Ajinomoto Co., Inc. began marketing "Umami" seasoning. Umami is the fifth taste of human beings discovered by Professor Kikunae Ikeda. He recognized the taste and determined it did not belong to any of the basic tastes known at the time, which were sweet, sour, salty and bitter. He discovered that an amino acid called glutamate was the umami taste. Professor Ikeda went on to develop umami seasoning. It has been 100 years since it was launched in the Japanese market.