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Market Development Reports

Japan Food Trends

2009

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Report Highlights:

Confectionery market trends, an innovative healthy vegetable snack line, food safety and labeling, and the restoration of whiskey as well as other Japanese food market trends are covered in this issue.

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

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Editor's Note

After monitoring media and store shelves for market trends and then selecting only the best for each issue of JFT the more dynamic Japan's food and beverage market seems. In the United States, we have many cultures interacting all the time allowing us to enjoy many international foods and beverages. The Japanese seem to have done something similar through their eagerness to import food culture from all parts of the world.

While strolling down Tokyo's main streets and back streets you will be enticed with Indian, Italian, Chinese, Spanish, German, Brazilian, of course Japanese and American cuisine. International foodstuffs and products are also sold in supermarkets for the Japanese to enjoy at home.

There is much to enjoy and also some important developments in the area of food safety that we would like you to know.

Confectionery

Confectionery Improvements, *Shokuhin Sangyo Shinbun*, May 11, 2009, p4

According to the Japan Confectionery Association, production volumes and sales amounts for most confectionery categories except for gum increased in 2008. It seems last year's ingredient price increase, which led most manufacturers to reduce the sizes of their packages in order to avoid increasing their list prices, helped sales. Now that ingredient prices have settled, manufacturers are going back to review prices. The review will also cover recipes, packaging and competition.

From the Editor:

Even with all the economic hardships the Japanese continue to enjoy their food and I bet they would be willing to spend their last penny (yen) on food.

Here is something new that knead confectionery and healthy foods together.

Introducing "Pot-au-feu": The Healthy Snack, *excite.news*, <http://www.excite.co.jp/News/bit/E1224063360606.html>



Vegetable cookies
Excite news



Vegetable chocolate bars
Excite news

A new snack series hit the market, 25 in all. The concept is quite simple. Basically, the creators incorporated vegetables into various snack forms such as crackers, cookies and chocolate bars as a way to eat healthy and delicious snacks and to avoid traditional snacks that may stimulate guilt.

An example of the product is Vegetable Cookies with onion, pumpkin and chocolate chips (above left). Another is the Tomato Chocolate Stick (above right, red packaging)

There is another reason for the creator's desire to use vegetables. That is to support the local farmers and increase vegetable consumption.

Food Safety

Third Party Approval System for Health Products, *Shokuhin Sangyo Shinbun*, April 30, 2009, p1

The purpose is to provide an approval system that will ensure safety of health products and in turn enhance consumer confidence. The number of health products and sales volumes continue to increase each year. In order to help consumers enhance the image of health products, the Japan Health Food & Nutrition Food Association (JHFA) was mandated to establish third party organizations to develop systems and to implement them.

JHFA (pronounced "JEFFA") established the Approval Advisory Board* and the Certification Association* to execute the approval process and certification of approved products. Companies with certified products can place "JHFA Safety Seals" on their products. Two specific areas will get the most concentrated efforts, which are ingredient safety checks and manufacturing process quality control.

*Official English names are unknown at this time

JHFA's website address: <http://www.jhnfa.org/index.htm> (Japanese only)

From the Editor:

These systems are wonderful and manufacturers will like the JHFA Safety Seals. It will be necessary to hire and maintain technicians to make the system work. Much time is required for a health product to be approved in Japan. This system may make the process even lengthier.

Speaking of approving processes, Japan now has a Food Label License program. There have been too many mislabeled products, misleading product labels and probably a lack of awareness of the importance of food labeling recently that probably prompted the creation of this program.



Food Safety Promotion and Food Labeling License Program, *Nikkei MJ*, April 29, p4

←Text book image from Junkudo Book Web

Companies from various areas of the food industry such as COOP Sapporo and House Food Company worked together to establish the Food Labeling License Program. According to the article, the program is

supposed to enhance consumer faith in the safety of food products.

The Food Labeling License Association <http://www.shokuhyoji.jp/index.html> (Japanese only) was established on March 17, 2009 and the first examination will take place on November 24, 2009.

From the Editor:

I can't say for sure whether having licensing will help consumer faith in food labeling. Perhaps the streamlining of government agencies that are responsible for food safety policies may help more, but much of the scandals were caused by only a handful of individuals who probably had financial or other difficulties. Of course, there is no excuse for their conduct, but another license???

How about another round? Another round of whiskey though. You see, the smell of whiskey is in the air in Japan. According to industry sources, whiskey is getting a big promotional push from Japanese whiskey manufacturers.

Whiskey

Finally: The Year of Whiskey Restoration, *Shokuhin Sangyo Shinbun*, April 2, 2009, p4

We have reported in previous JFT news that bourbon exports to Japan are increasing each year and a bar was opened by a woman for women to enjoy whiskey and other liquors. According to Sokuhin Sangyo Shimbun (literally translated, Food Industry Newspaper), the Japanese single malt whiskey market expanded thanks to domestic promotional efforts and the international attention that Japanese whisky, Yoichi 1987, captured after receiving the World Whiskey Award 2008.

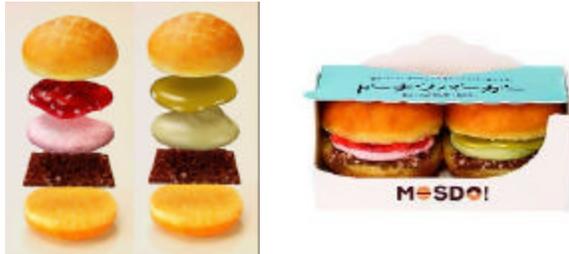
There seem to be two target segments. The first target is the entry level drinkers. Suntory reintroduced their Kaku-bin Hi Ball drink that mixes Kaku-bin brand whiskey with soda water and ice. It is a very light drink that costs less than a beer or chuhai. A survey of drinkers who tried Hi Ball for the first time found that they thought the Hi Ball drink was crisp and easy-to-drink.

The second segment is the thirties and forties age group. The 40 year old age group caught the tail end of the 1980s whiskey boom. The whiskey manufacturers are emphasizing the easy-to-drink image, smoothness, of these consumers with a crisp and clear taste. Commercial promotions and "Ready To Drink (RTD)" (usually canned) products are successfully penetrating this group.

Suntory has even opened Splitz' Aoyama with co-owner Mr. Kazama to provide a drinking atmosphere and menu lineup for women to learn about whiskey and enjoy its variations. <http://www.suntory.co.jp/news/2008/10274.html> (Japanese only)

Trendy Products

Check it out! Group companies Mister Donut and Mos Burger designed together “Donut-burgers”. Mister Donut’s Donut-burgers use donut buns that sandwich tomato-like strawberry sauce and whip, and a chocolate based patty. The other treat has lettuce-like maccha (green tea) sauce and whip instead. These are bite size portions.



From TokyoWalker website

On the other hand, the hamburger chain, Mos Burger, kept the beef patty, tomato and buns, but put a whole in the middle. In the middle of the patty they put a mayonnaise based wasabi sauce.

From the Editor:

I haven't tried any of them yet, but even though they look different they look tempting to eat.



Source: Asahi.com