

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Approved By:

Steve Shnitzler

Prepared By:

Sumio Thomas Aoki, Senior Marketing Specialist; Sarah Wright, Intern; June McCabe, Intern

Report Highlights:

This month's issue discusses the importance of seasonal trends and the current trends of autumn.

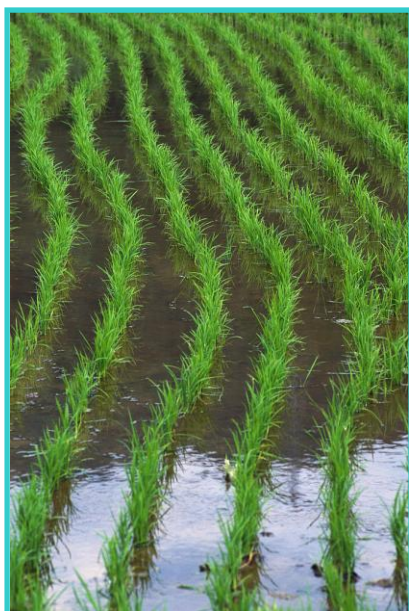
Japan Food Trends (JFT) communicates Japanese food and lifestyle trends that may help U.S. exporters to generate product and marketing ideas.

Food in Japan is much more than a daily caloric necessity but rather takes the same divine value as art or fashion. Both in the worlds of food and fashion, Japanese taste can often be portrayed as a rollercoaster of temporary fads. However, there is one constant cycle that even the teens of Tokyo's most trendy districts follow, that of the four very distinct Japanese seasons. The Japanese place great emphasis on this cyclical change and this is strongly reflected within the realm of food. Each season has a specific set of ingredients, dishes, and menu items that, unlike the West, are impossible to get any other time of year. Thus the food and ingredients available with each new season dominate restaurants and stove tops, truly being treasured as they are only visiting for a short time. This month's issue will introduce you to autumn trends and hopefully give you some insight into marketing with a seasonal twist.

Autumn Foods

Hatsumono

Japanese Food, <http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/japan/jfood.html>



The term *hatsumono* refers to the eating of the first foods of the season. If you talk food with anyone Japanese, they will be sure to mention how amazingly succulent and fresh the rice is during *hatsumono*, or first harvest. As in the United States, at the beginning of any season restaurants and grocery stores alike will promote specific agricultural products with extreme vigor. But, in many ways, the Japanese take it to a whole new level. The first harvest of any domestic agricultural product is viewed as that product's 15 minutes of fame. Products such as rice and vegetables are fresh off the farm and locals consume them almost in bulk in order to savor the high point of that product's season. This trend could be seen with the consumption of rice in August and September and will be evident as we enter autumn's mushroom season.

From the Editor

This rush for the freshest product is something that is currently only really seen with domestic agricultural products but could be applied as an important marketing tactic with seasonal imported foods. One example with U.S. foods is the popularity of the very first California Cherries arriving in May.

Seasonal Foods for Home-cooking,

<http://www.theanimeblog.com/japanese-culture-links/aki-no-mikaku-a-taste-of-autumn-in-japan/>

The Japanese are very fond of seasonal items sold by their favorite brands restaurants. They are equally fond of fresh fruits, vegetables and fish that traditionally eaten in specific seasons. One traditional fall fruit is *kaki*, or persimmons. Before these fruits are ripe, they are sour and unpleasant but once they mature they can be sugary and light. *Kuri*, or chestnuts, are often roasted and used as a filling, or *daifuku*. Additionally, in fall the chestnut-rice recipe, *kuri gohan*, is a popular home-cooked dish.

Matsutake mushrooms are another autumn favorite in Japan, but because their limited availability within the country, much of the supply of these delicious fungi must be imported. *Satsumaimo*, or sweet potatoes from Satsuma prefecture, are often cooked and served during fall festivals and outdoor events. The taste of Satsuma sweet potatoes is similar to those eaten in the United States, though they provide a more earthy taste and are often eaten alone in hand or on a stick. Lastly, *sanma*, or mackerel pike, are plentiful and cheap in the fall in Japan. Because of the price, they are consumed heartily during the months before winter sets in. All of these ingredients are both popular and can be combined with just a few other items to make a seasonal and delicious home-cooked meal.



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From the Editor

Both price and freshness play major factors into seasonal shopping. Providing imported seasonal foods at reasonable prices may allow importers an access point into an established season-conscious market.

Events

Autumn Festival in Yokohama, *The Japan Times*, 10/9/24
<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fv20100924ho.html>

With every season, there is a new reason to celebrate and autumn is no different. One traditional way to celebrate autumn is *momiji tōjisha*, meaning “red leaf parties”. In this tradition, people go to the



countryside and admire the maple trees in their autumn colors with accompanying seasonal lunch sets. Another common method of celebration is the autumn food festival, like the one held in Yokohama from October 1st to November 30th. A group of 5 restaurants has joined forces under the oath of celebrating autumn foods in order to provide a truly worthy celebration of a beautiful season. Often bringing in German and Oktoberfest ties through assortments of Munich-style beers and cuisine, these restaurants are not only celebrating traditional Japanese autumn dishes but are also looking to bring in earthy flavors from all over the

world. At affordable prices and with buffet style dining, this autumn food festival allows patrons to truly indulge their autumn cuisine needs to the fullest.

From the Editor

The Japanese love to get their festival on. Celebrating is a great way to relieve stress and outlets like this autumn food festival are just another example of that.

Limited Time Only

Autumn-Limited Beer, *CNN Global* 09/10/02

http://www.cnn.go.com/tokyo/drink/2-autumn-beers-your-drinking-pleasure-150078?quicktabs_2=1

You know that autumn has truly arrived in Japan when the red maple leaf design begins to pop up on aisle after aisle of your local Japanese supermarket or convenience store. Often one of the most affected sections of the local grocery stores is the beer aisle. The introduction of seasonal beers, such as Kirin's *Aki Aji* or "Autumn Taste," means that consumers can battle the cooler season with an earthier, richer beer with higher alcohol content at the reasonable price of 208 yen (\$2.47) for a 330mL can. These small modifications are added to help celebrate or emphasize the change or newness of the coming season. Offering these new seasonal products not only shows the innovativeness of the overall product line but these seasonal products are a great way to refresh your customer's interest or bring in new business. These limited time offers do quite well in Japan because trends change so rapidly and many products are simply never produced again; so if there is any inkling towards a purchase, it appears the Japanese are more likely to feel the pressure and at least try it.



From the Editor

Often using tools like countdown timers near the product or other strategies can really emphasize the limited time of the season or the limited people that are able to purchase the product, which can often push Japanese consumers to buy it on the spot rather than waiting.

McDonald's Taps into Seasonal Foods Market, 10/8/28

<http://news.walkerplus.com/2010/0828/2/>

While the spring has *hanami*, or cherry blossom viewing, its autumn counterpart is *tsukimi*, or moon viewing. Throughout the fall months, Japanese gather outside to witness the full moon and recount the tales of the celestial rabbit's trip to Earth (in Japan there is a rabbit in moon, not a man). The most notable limited time menu item for *tsukimi* the McDonald's Tsukimi Burger. The year 2010 marks the specialty burger's 20th year anniversary, demonstrating the Japanese's commitment to seasonal products. The burger contains an egg slice with yoke representing the moon on an egg white sky, a hamburger patty, bacon and a special teriyaki-like sauce. There are different variations on recipe every year, specialized to meet the consumer's latest taste. Because of the big anniversary, McDonald's Japan is offering this year's Big Tsukimi Burger with 2.5 times more meat. The relationship this burger has to a specific autumn activity plus its unique taste keeps McDonald's patrons coming back for more.



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From the Editor

What new variant of this solidifying tradition will they come up with next?

Fast food locations are often on the cutting edge of seasonal products in Japan. They have the capacity and knowledge necessary to promote these seasonal wonders in order to gain a base to keep these seasonal products in style year after year. Fast food companies, such as McDonald's, are well on their way to establishing new seasonal traditions within growing generations.

The Bottom Line

Seasons and seasonal products are a core and celebrated portion of the Japanese lifestyle. From festivals to specialty or limited time food options, the Japanese make a big deal out of these once a year products, because they literally are only available once a year. What does this mean for U.S. importers? Align your product with the beginning of a Japanese season. Use specific imagery, such as colored maple leaves for autumn, to emphasize the "specialness" of the product. With the importance of the seasons here, this may give your product a unique edge over other substitutes. There are 4 seasons, use them to your advantage.

Photo by:

Tsukimi Burger: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/syume/3910563689/in/photostream/>

Kirin Beer: <http://forum.gaijinpot.com/showthread.php?10901-Best-beer-in-Japan>