

# Exporting Japanese Produce to Global Markets

*In recent years, overseas demand has been rising for Japanese agricultural, forestry, and fishery products (AFFP), including fruits like strawberries and melons, vegetables, livestock products, marine products, and processed foods. The increase in exports has been particularly noticeable in Asian countries and regions, such as South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, where new markets for Japanese products are taking shape. Here Masaki Yamada reports on the increasing international popularity of Japanese agricultural, forestry, and fishery products.*

## Buoyed by the Health Boom

According to figures from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF), the value of Japan's AFFP and processed food exports totaled ¥431.2 billion in 2008. Given that the figure for 2004 was ¥295.4 billion, that means that exports have risen by almost 50% over the past five years.

Due to the strong yen and other factors, the figure was actually down 0.6% year on year, but this decline was marginal in comparison to the fall in the value of auto and video-equipment exports, which declined by 5.8% and 9.8%, respectively.

“The background to this rise in exports of Japanese AFFP and pro-



Jun'ichi Takeuchi

cessed foods is first a result of the great popularity of Japanese foods,” notes Jun'ichi Takeuchi, director of the Export Promotion Office of MAFF's International Affairs Department.

“This is a reflection of the fact that people around the world are more conscious of their health. There are said to be about 24,000 to 25,000 Japanese restaurants around the world right now, and in the past few years they have been spreading to Asian countries as well as in developed countries in Europe and North America. They are mainly sushi restaurants, but recently the number of restaurants that serve noodles like *udon* and *ramen* and full-course *kaiseki ryori* cuisine have also been increasing.

“Another reason for the growth in exports is the rapid economic growth in Asia in recent years, and the accompanying growth in the wealthy population. More people are buying high-priced, high-quality Japanese-grown fruits like melons and strawberries as gifts. Of course, the fact that Japanese AFFP and processed foods are safe and reliable and that there are varieties available for every season are other reasons that exports are on the rise.”



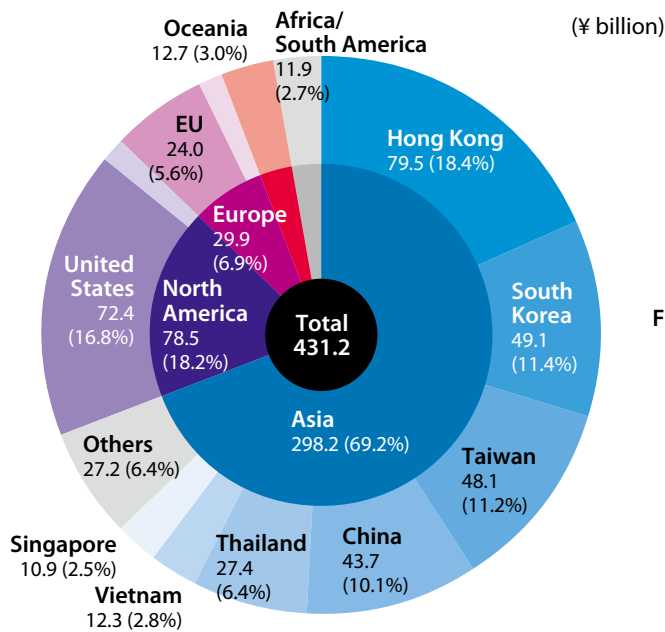
Aomori's Fuji apples are popular in foreign markets. ©PANA

## High Quality and Delicious

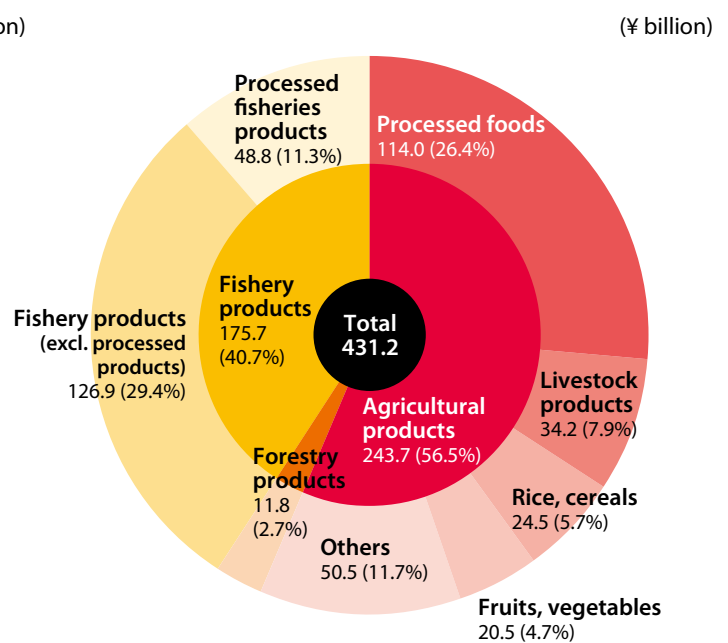
Looking at Japan's AFFP and processed food exports by region, Asia accounts for 69.2% of the total and North America for 18.2%. By country and region, Hong Kong is the biggest export market, accounting for 18.4% of the total, followed by South Korea (11.4%), Taiwan (11.2%), China (10.1%), and Thailand (6.4%). In Hong Kong, a wide range of Japanese food items are available at local supermarkets as well as at those serving the Japanese community, and there are over 800 restaurants that serve sushi and sashimi.

The view that Japanese food products are delicious and of high quality has taken root. In Bangkok, Japanese food was once closely associated with special menus at fancy restaurants, but recently it

**Japan's AFFP and Processed Food Exports by Country and Region, 2008**



**Japan's AFFP and Processed Food Exports by Product, 2008**



Note: Figures in parentheses are shares of total exports.  
Source: Compiled by MAFF based on the *Trade Statistics of Japan*.

has become available in a wider range of restaurant types, from family diners to conveyor-belt sushi, and is enjoyed by a broad customer base, centered on the younger generation. In China, all-you-can-eat Japanese-style bars are gaining popularity, while specialized restaurants serving sushi and tempura are also on the rise. Japanese food can now be counted among the standards of Asian cuisine.

By product type, agricultural products make up the bulk of the value of Japan's farm exports at 56.5%, followed by fishery products at 40.7% and processed fishery products at 11.3%. Even within the category of agricultural products, there are many different product types, from fruits, vegetables, livestock products, and grains to condiments like soy sauce, miso, and Japanese-style snacks like *senbei* and *dorayaki*. Soy sauce in particular has become a common item in kitchens around the world.

Looking at individual items, three products stand out in terms

of year-on-year export growth: pork at 79.4%, strawberries at 58.3%, and *sanma* (Pacific saury) at 55.7%. For all three, exports are primarily to the Asian market.


### Competitive Brand

Amid the robust performance of Japanese AFFP and processed food exports, fruit and livestock products in particular have been favorably received for both their flavor and appearance. This high-quality image is becoming so firmly embedded that the label "Produce of Japan" has essentially become a brand in its own right. Needless to say, behind this development are the tireless efforts and ingenuity of the producers.

"To produce beautiful apples, the farmer rotates each fruit individually at set intervals to ensure that the color is even," says MAFF's Takeuchi. "The entire surface of the fruit is thus exposed to the same average amount of sunlight to prevent uneven coloring. That kind of attention to detail in growing fruits is probably unique to Ja-

pan. Similarly, for items like strawberries, which are easily damaged, some producers have gone so far as to develop their own special shipping cases to prevent the fruit from being crushed during shipping.

"There are also some local governments that are actively working with local farmers to research breed improvements and cultivation techniques so that they can produce even better-tasting, higher-quality products. This sort of passion on the part of producers is what has elevated the 'Product of Japan' label into a globally competitive brand."

In order to support producers' proactive initiatives, MAFF invites overseas buyers to Japan for seminars, where information on the food markets of export partner countries are distributed to domestic producers. The ministry also creates pamphlets and distributes them abroad to transmit information about Japanese AFFP and processed foods. 

Masaki Yamada is a freelance journalist.