



Koji Inoue

Growing Japan's Global Food and Agriculture Marketplace Potential

The Japanese government has set a target of one trillion yen (circa US\$ 9 billion) in exports of agricultural, forestry, fishery and food products for 2019. We spoke to Koji Inoue—Director-General of the Food Industry Affairs Bureau in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries—about the various initiatives the government is employing to meet the goal.

YUKIKO ISHIKAWA

Please tell us how you plan to bring more of Japan's agriculture, forestry, fishery and food products to the global marketplace.

We're promoting exports of those products and also striving to meet the demand from international tourists visiting Japan, otherwise known as inbound demand. In 2017, Japan's total exports of agricultural, forestry, fishery and food products totaled around 807.1 billion yen (US\$ 7.3 billion). If you add the food products foreign visitors purchased and took home, which came to around 350 billion yen (US\$ 3.2 billion),

and the around 890 billion yen (US\$ 8.1 billion) they spent on food and beverages in Japan, that's a huge market worth over two trillion yen (US\$ 18.2 billion).

Expanding this market is a major theme in turning Japan's agricultural, forestry, fishery and food industries into growth industries. In terms of specific export items, instead of products like scallops, pearls and tobacco that enjoy large export volumes, we're seeing a trend toward more typical products such as beef, strawberries, green tea and rice.

What specific measures are you taking to reach the 2019 goal of one trillion yen worth of exports?

One large-scale measure I'd like to mention is the establishment of the Japan Food Product Overseas Promotion Center (JFOODO). JFOODO conducts PR for Japan's agricultural, forestry, fishery and food products abroad to raise consumer awareness and expand the market. We also connect and match local producers with Japanese and overseas trading companies, overseas food service companies and retailers. In the past we have helped producers exhibit their goods at food fairs outside of Japan. Our next step was holding the first "Japan's Food" export fair at the Makuhari Messe international convention complex in Chiba Prefecture in October 2017, drawing about 2,800 buyers from 70 different countries. It was so well attended that the spaces for business negotiations were always full. We've greatly increased the scale this year and expect 4,000 visitors from 80 different countries.

Branding and the protection of rights are also essential to ensure that Japanese products are evaluated fairly. We help Japanese brands register plant varieties overseas, and also have the Geographical Indication (GI) protection system (see pp 8-9) to safeguard products with unique production methods and natural characteristics of their production areas, such as climate and soil conditions. Other methods of branding include G.A.P.¹, an agricultural process control standard that indicates that producers have considered issues such as food safety, the work environment and environmental conservation, and with JFS², a Japan-based certification for food safety control. We



Logo of the Geographical Indication protection system

encourage producers to acquire these types of certifications as part of their branding.

What is the global market outlook for products from the Japanese agriculture, forestry, fishery and food industries?

In the past, there were concerns that health-oriented Western countries might shy away from heavily marbled Japanese beef. However, introducing this kind of beef in conjunction with *sukiyaki* and *shabu-shabu* preparation methods greatly increased demand. So, instead of just trying to sell a product as is, connecting it to the best ways to eat it and the overall food culture of Japan is an ingenious and essential step for expanding exports. We're also seeing growing interest in Japanese food because of things like the rapid increase in Japanese restaurants all over the world. By taking advantage of this opportunity, we will be able to revitalize local Japanese industries, and create a better future out of this trend.

However, instead of each group acting independently, we need to focus on services like SAVOR JAPAN³ (see pp 10-11) which combine food and tourism to highlight the appeal of Japan's various regions. **7**

1 G.A.P. is an international third-party certification for Good Agricultural Practices (G.A.P.), currently covering over 120 countries and recognized as the international standard.
2 JFS standard: A food safety management standard originated in Japan, which established and operates the standards and certifications of the Japan Food Safety Management Association (JFSM).
3 SAVOR JAPAN
<https://savorjp.com/en/>