

# Sweet Work If You Can Get It: Spirited Seniors Making Great Confections in Hokkaido

**KANAMI YANAGAWA**

*At renowned Hokkaido confectionery firm Hori, over ten percent of the employees are over sixty years old. An open corporate culture and automation that streamlines and simplifies their workload has stimulated the desire of employees to work longer, ensuring that the company stays fully staffed and improves performance.*



**H**ORI Co. Ltd.'s leading product, Yubari Melon Pure Jelly, has been Hokkaido's top-selling summer gift for thirteen consecutive years. Kitakaro, a Hori subsidiary founded in 1991, produces mochi crackers and confections like cream puffs using ingredients from Hokkaido. The Hori group boasts combined sales of approximately ten billion yen, and continues to grow.

While lifetime employment has been fading in the Japanese labor market, Hori has many employees who happily continue to work beyond retirement age. In fact, more than a tenth of their workforce is over the age of sixty.

"I truly believe that the reason we work is not because we are healthy, but that we are healthy as a result of working," says company president Akira Hori. "I am happy when I hear my employees say they want to continue working long after retirement age, because they clearly see what they do as their purpose in life."

Making work easier is essential to ensuring that senior employees retain this sense of purpose. The primary example of this is the company's adoption of robots, which Hori says "was done to

reduce the workload placed on our employees, which is something we consider vital."

The Hori way involves having robots handle manual labor and monotonous tasks, while humans handle important processes involving taste and final quality checks. This reduces the physical burden on employees. The robots only serve to support the human workers.

The secret to making work easier isn't limited to the physical work environment. The president visits the company's farms and factories, where he chats with every employee to see if they are doing well. He knows all his employees by name—which is amazing enough—and presents them with cakes on their birthdays. What's more, he personally writes replies to the employee suggestion forms collected every month.

In addition, the company schedules study meetings, cherry blossom-viewing parties and company trips



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- 1 Over ten percent of Hori's employees are enthusiastic seniors
- 2 In the factory, employees work in tandem with robots
- 3 Akira Hori, president of Hori Co. Ltd.
- 4 Seniors working at a farm that produces the natural ingredients for Hori's confections

to develop a sense of unity. Employees are on an equal footing at these events regardless of their age, gender or employment status. This approach, along with the initiatives that accompany it, is likely why Hori employees want to stay on the payroll.

Hori also operates agricultural businesses that produce the natural ingredients used in their confections. "I feel joy from working and I want to continue working for as long as I feel healthy enough to," says the firm's oldest employee, 80-year-old Masao Saito. Yuko Kubota, sixty-seven, who works in the jelly manufacturing plant, emphatically states that, "Although I work hard from morning to evening, I feel like it's worth it. I want to work here for as long as I can."

"Emotions are conveyed through confections," Hori says. "The desire to make something delicious results in a completely different product." The

company's employees are clearly motivated and enjoy their work, which is likely why so many people love Hori's confections.

"We want to continue investing in equipment to create an environment in which people can work longer," Hori adds. "We also want to produce confections that take nutrition into consideration. We want our company, employees and products to all be healthy."

When seniors work in an environment where they have a sense of purpose, having the opportunity to extend their careers deepens their affection for the company and its products. That inevitably leads to better products. Hori offers a lesson in how employing seniors and giving them a place to shine helps a company thrive. **U**