

Hida beef is renowned for its marbling



# Hida Beef

## From Gifu to the World

Hida beef cattle from Gifu Prefecture, located in the inland area of the main island of Honshu, are slaughtered for their meat according to international food-sanitation standards and Hida beef is now being exported abroad more and more.

Hida beef cattle graze freely in the abundant nature

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SINCE the modernization of Japan beginning around 150 years ago, the Japanese Black breed of cattle has been gradually improved, and the cattle are now collectively known as *wagyu*, meaning “Japanese beef.”

Today, approximately 90% of *wagyu* is of the Japanese Black breed and hybrids of this variety, and the high quality of the meat has made it popular both in Japan and overseas. There are over 200 brands of *wagyu* beef with different names based on production area and methods used for raising the cattle. Among these varieties, Hida beef has gained a reputation as a luxury brand, alongside Kobe beef and Matsusaka beef.

Kobayashi Mitsushi is the Representative Director of Hida Meat Agricultural Cooperatives (JA Hida Meat), an organization that processes and sells Hida beef. He says, “Farmers in the Hida region of northern Gifu Prefecture began raising cattle for meat about ninety years ago. In the mid-1970s, the entire region pushed to improve the breed, and from there, the delicious flavor of Hida beef became known across Japan.”

A bull named Yasufukugo, known as the father of Hida beef, played a major role at that time, producing more than 40,000 offspring. It is said that the majority of cattle with superior quality meat across Japan trace their roots to Yasufukugo.

In the Hida region of inland Honshu, location of the cities of Takayama, Hida and Gero, and the village of Shirakawa, there is a great difference in temperatures between summer and winter, and between day and night. As there is also heavy snowfall in the region’s mountainous areas, as seen in the snowscape of Shirakawa-go (see *Highlighting Japan*, January 2022), the area is blessed with clear water. According to Kobayashi, this environment is great for cattle, and the meat quality is improved by



Yasufukugo, the “father of Hida beef”

having the cattle grow stress-free among the abundant nature. Hida beef produced in this way features fat tightly woven into the fresh red meat, known as marbling. Even with ample marbling, the flavor is not too heavy, and you can enjoy the exquisite flavor of the soft meat that melts on your tongue.

Kobayashi says, “We began exporting the beef in 2010. Just like today, Hida beef was very popular then and as there is a limited supply being shipped, there is enough demand domestically, but there is a reason why we ventured into exports. While demand has fallen due to the pandemic, there are many famous tourist spots within Gifu Prefecture, including the World Heritage Site at Shirakawa-go, and many tourists from overseas visit. We want these tourists to enjoy Hida beef even when they return home and we want them to come back to the Hida region after being drawn in by the flavor of the meat.”

Kobayashi adds, “At the JA Hida Meat factory, which features some of the best hygienic management capabilities in Japan, we introduced international food-sanitation standards early on upon starting exports.”

As a result of being recognized as an export facility by the US, EU, and twelve other countries with extremely strict sanitary standards for meat, total exports reached more than 500 million JPY in 2018. In 2021, JA Hida Meat also established the Hida Meat Agricultural Cooperatives Consortium, a consortium between producing organizations and exporters, offering specific explanations about export measures to farmers, and actively engaging in activities to convey the appeal of Hida beef to businesses and buyers at export destinations by having people involved work together.

Prior to the effects of COVID-19, the number of foreign visitors to the Hida region was increasing, with, for example, tourists visiting Takayama as Hida beef hamburgers became popular among foreign visitors. Kobayashi says they are hoping that many people from around the world will visit the Hida region in the post-COVID period as they did before and enjoy the charm of the area, including local cuisine such as Hida beef hamburgers and Hoba Miso grilled beef, a dish that pairs well with sake. 



Hoba Miso with grilled beef is a specialty of the Hida region