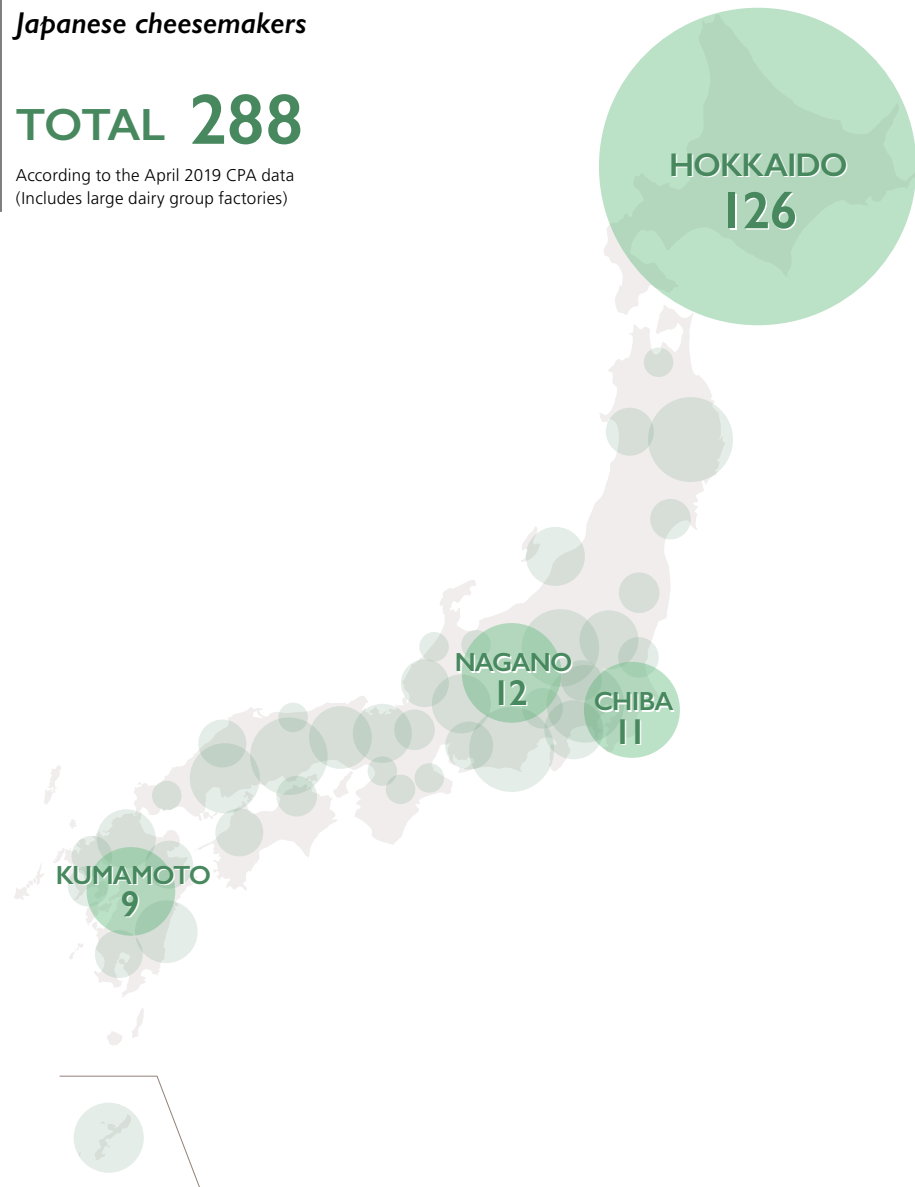


Japanese cheesemakers

TOTAL 288

According to the April 2019 CPA data
(Includes large dairy group factories)



A craft of excellence

Japanese Cheese Guide 2018

Japanese cheese-making field report

Types of cheese and cheesemakers



OSBL CHEESE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

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Office for Strengthening Competitiveness of Japanese Dairy Products 2019
– under the patronage of ALIC (Agriculture & Livestock Industries Corporation)

Japanese cheese-making field report

Types of cheese and cheesemakers

For a long time, Japan has explored various cheeses from countries boasting a rich tradition of cheese-making, including its characteristics, the manner in which they are eaten, and how they are produced.

"How delicious!"

"That's how they do it?"

"Interesting!"

But this period is finally over. The Japanese now know how to make their own cheese. Some manufacturers produce their milk on their own farm, and others source locally from trusted farms.

Although the cheese they make vary, the manufacturers all share the same mindset; they hand-produce, mature, and sell their cheese with care.

With this mindset, Japanese cheeses are made locally, right next to their home.

We now introduce some representative producers of different types of cheese and their factories.

Semi-hard / Hard cheese
[Raclette] P.4



Kyodo Gakusha
Shintoku Farm

Fresh cheese
[Mozzarella] P.8



Daiwa Farm

Blue cheese
[Blue] P.12



Atelier de Fromage

Goat milk cheese
[Chèvre] P.16



Mirasaka Fromage

Dessert cheese
[Dessert cheese] P.20



Niseko Cheese Factory

The Art of Making Raclette at Kyodo Gakusha



1. Add starter culture to pasteurized milk.
2. Add rennet in fermented liquid. Use fingers to judge the right time to cut the curd.
3. Cut the curd into small pieces using a wire cutter. Replace part of the liquid(whey) with warm water and stir.
4. Collect the curd and press with a stone weight. Cut the curd into the same size.
5. Put the curd into a forming mold, then cover it with a cloth. Press for 5 hours with a press machine.
6. Soak in brine for one day. Brush the surface with morge liquid.
7. 3 months later, it is ready for shipment.



Japanese cheeses are as good as traditional ones in Europe.

The raclette of Kyodo Gakusha Shintoku Farm (Hokkaido)

Cheesemakers in Japan (1)



Raclette has been made in Japan for more than 26 years

Today, raclette is very popular in Japan. But did you know that it has been made in Japan for more than 26 years? And that it has even been exported throughout Asia?

The story of this cheese began at Kyodo Gakusha Shintoku farm, which is located an hour's drive away from Obihiro Airport in Hokkaido.

In 1989, Nozomu MIYAJIMA, the representative of the farm, was advised to make raclette in Tokachi by an authority on French cheese, Jean Hubert. Hubert had the intuition that the Japanese

would love this deeply-flavored cheese, which is also relatively easy to make and suits the climate of Tokachi.

In 1992, Miyajima finally perfected a raclette, which amazed French craftsmen to exclaim "Excellent!" He decided to organize a cheese tasting in a department store in a nearby city, Obihiro. The raclette attracted many customers. However, as soon as the cheese was heated, a strong smell filled the room and the crowd faded away. Even the department store complained about the smell. It was a blow for Miyajima, who had bet a lot on his raclette.

Tokachi raclette: a less pungent raclette

The classic flavors of Swiss or French raclette can be too unfamiliar to the Japanese. This is the lesson Miyajima learned. He did some research on how to remove this intense flavor. After six months, he finally managed to produce a raclette without a strong flavor by controlling the microorganisms



9-1 Shintoku, Shintoku, Kamikawa, Hokkaido
<http://www.kyodogakusha.org>

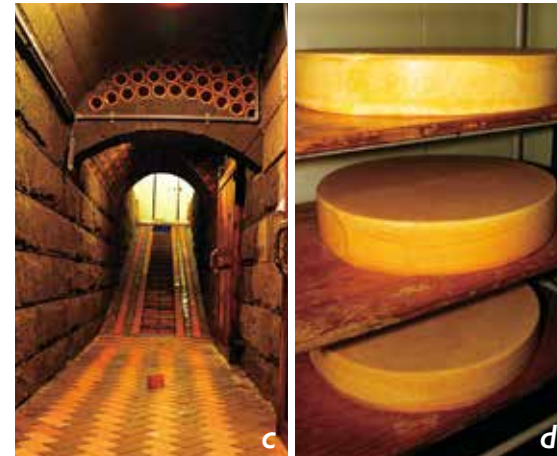
a. Cattle spend most of the days grazing on pasture in Tokachi.



b. Making of Camembert-like cheese with white mold. The HACCP system is adopted.



Nozomu MIYAJIMA: Representative of Kyodo Gakusha Shintoku Farm. Born in 1951. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, he moved to Shintoku. He leads a family and a team of 70 members. He has won numerous international awards and is one of Japan's leading cheese producers.



c. <Sapporo Nanseki>(soft stone), a fine natural stone, is used in the underground maturing cellar.
d. <SHINTOKO> cheese that looks like comté cheese.

on the surface of the cheese.

Despite his efforts, sales did not increase. However, 1998 was a turning point for Miyajima. He won the grand prize of the "All Japan Natural Cheese Contest". It was his delicate raclette that was chosen! His raclette continued to win prizes in several different international competitions. There are now eight manufacturers that make raclette in Tokachi and six of them share a maturing cellar. They also share water to wipe the cheese from moor hot spring and named their cheese "Tokachi Raclette Moor Wash". They are now responding to demand from abroad.

Surviving by making cheese

At Shintoku Farm, people who had difficulties finding a place to live in our society due to their special needs live and work together in a community. Since the establishment of the community in 1978, many people have knocked on the door. To meet their needs, Miyajima changed the direction

of the farm from shipping milk to producing cheese. He chose matured hard cheese as his main product since it is unaffected by trends.

"I always wonder what we need to do to survive. A slow-fermented cheese fits very well with our slow lifestyle." It was the Hokkaido Toyako Summit in 2008 when Miyajima began to gain confidence in Japanese cheese. He collected 18 cheeses from his fellow cheese producers to serve at the Summit, alongside French cheese. At the Summit, Japanese cheese was eaten much more than the producers had expected. The most surprised were the most prestigious chefs who were gathered from all over Japan and the people from the prefectural office and the Ministry of Agriculture. "Japanese cheeses are superb!"

Now the Japanese are becoming cheese connoisseurs. "With our water, our land, and our microorganisms, we must now make a cheese that can be easily accepted by the Japanese," says Miyajima, who seems to already anticipate the next step.

We make Japanese mozzarella



The mozzarella of Daiwa Farm
(Miyazaki Prefecture)



4073 Higashikata,
Kobayashi, Miyazaki
<http://www.daiwafarm.net/>

Stretching curd to get a fibrous texture

Of all the cheeses originated in Europe, mozzarella is now the most popular, especially in Japan partly because the freshness and the mild flavor is well suited to the taste of the Japanese. As the freshness of mozzarella is so important, it has to be made on the spot. This has attracted a number of manufacturers who have begun to tackle the production of mozzarella.

The town of Kobayashi is located at the foot of the Kirishima Mountains in the central region of Miyazaki Prefecture in Kyushu, the southernmost big island. Kazutoshi OKUBO, who has been absorbed in the realm of Italian cheese, is already a recognized producer in the world of cheese and his mozzarella has won a prize in a cheese

The Art of Making Mozzarella at Daiwa Farm



1. Add lactic acid bacteria (starter) and rennet to pasteurized milk.
2. Cut curd into small pieces using a wire cutter. Stir and let it rest for a while.
3. Discard the water (whey) and let the curd ferment.
4. Cut the mass into blocks and let cool in water. Cut them into smaller pieces and place them in a tank.
5. Pour hot brine (1.8%) into a tank and stir with a rod.
6. Discard the water and form the curd into one big mass.
7. The mass is cut into balls by hand then immersed in water.



competition. Work starts before 6:00am at his cheese factory. Milk is delivered directly from his own farm on the premises and pasteurized in the factory to form curd which will then be cut into small pieces. Then the water is discarded and the curd is allowed to stand for a while to promote fermentation. The more it ferments, the more fibrous the texture becomes. Then the big stage of making mozzarella begins. The mass is cut again into small pieces and put into a large tank. Pour in hot water and stir with a rod. Little by little, small pieces agglomerate to form a mass. Now let's tear. "With both hands, squeeze out one ball-size mass. Imagine the membrane on its surface holding the moisture inside. Now rip it off," Okubo says. This is how Mozzarella is formed into the shape of a ball.

"We make our own Mozzarella"

Three years ago, Okubo spent a week in Naples, Italy, and visited three cheese factories. After returning



a. There are 23 cows in total, including 7 brown-swiss. **b.** The water tank was installed in the back of the barn in 1993. Kobayashi city is very proud of its natural mineral water. "First you need to have good milk" is the advice from his master of the dairy.



to Japan, he tried to make mozzarella as juicy and smooth as the ones he tasted in Italy, but it did not work.

"The cheese hardened. I realized that imitating the Italian manufacturing process is not good enough." He carried out various experiments by varying the time and duration of fermentation. There was one principle he had learned through his experience in Italy that he wouldn't forget; make the finest fibers, let them hold moisture within and form them into a ball. Thus, he managed to produce his current mozzarella.

"Cheese making is difficult, and that's why it's so interesting. Mozzarella is the most difficult to make as it should be perfect when fresh. It has to be completed without maturation. In addition, the quality of the milk does not remain stable throughout the year."

The milk and the climate in Japan are different to those in Italy. "It's perfectly normal that Japan has its own procedure to make mozzarella," Okubo says.

c. Caciocavallo **d.** Our washed-rind cheeses are developed to suit Japanese tastes. **e.** Staff at the cheese factory see the whole process, i.e. their cows, milk, and cheese.



Kazutoshi OKUBO is the representative of Daiwa Farm. Born in 1955. After having succeeded the dairy farm from his father, he started manufacturing ice cream in 1996, and cheese in 2006.



Japanese cheeses are getting better

"Don't you think the taste of Japanese cheese has really improved? I learned a lot of things in various regions and from local producers with more experience than me, who encouraged me to make products that are better than imported ones. For my part, I teach others everything I know. I hope the Japanese cheese culture spreads to every corner of Japan."

Okubo talks in a very open and friendly way. He seems to have Italian cheerfulness and Kyushu warmth. But he has gone through hard time in his life. Since he inherited the dairy farm from his father, nothing had been easy, but he has managed to get by. He began to use fine local spring water at his dairy farm. As a dairy manager, he keeps improving the quality of his cheese and also takes good care of his cows and his long-time neighbors. He is blessed with good staff members and is planning to install a system to increase cheese production. Customers keep coming to his factory shop.

The Art of Making Blue at Atelier de Fromage



1. Every morning, cans of milk are transported from their farm.
2. Add lactic acid bacteria (starter) and rennet to pasteurized milk.
3. Cut the curd into pieces using a wire cutter. Stir to separate the whey from curd.
4. Sprinkle salt on the curd. Pour the mixture of powdered blue mold and water over the curd.
5. Put the curd in a forming mold and turn the cheese upside down, then turn over again.
6. Once the cheese is formed, rub salt into cheese and let stand for 3 days. Needle the cheese to create tiny openings.
7. Wrap the cheese in aluminum foil. After 3 months of maturing, blue mold spreads all over cheese. The blue is just ready to eat!



Did you know that the Japanese were very good at making blue cheese?

The blue of Atelier de Fromage (Nagano Prefecture)

Cheesemakers in Japan (3)



Birth of a new blue

"There is mold growing in the cheese!" Thirty years ago, dairy shops didn't know what to do with complaints like this. But today, rumor has it on the international scene that the Japanese excel at making blue cheese.

Everything began in France in 2015, when two Japanese blue cheeses won the highest prize, "Super Gold" at the blue cheese section of an international cheese competition. They were "Blue Cheese" of Atelier de Fromage and "SOGEN no AOZORA (Blue Sky above the Meadow)" of Takahide Farm Cheese Factory. The world was amazed. One of the two winners was Kazushi SHIOGAWA. When he tasted Gorgonzola dolce (sweet) for the first time, he was awakened to the world of the

blue. He wondered, "Why is it so delicious? Why does it taste so different from mine?" Shiogawa then got into a dispute with Mr. and Mrs. Matsuoka, the founders of the cheese factory. They did not have the same image of the blue they wanted to make. But they finally gave in to Shiogawa's enthusiasm and gave him a chance. "Since you insist, just go ahead and show us!". It was winter of 2012.

What Shiogawa wanted to achieve was a creamy blue that melts in the witch was dependent on how much fat content could be retained in the cheese. In the summer of 2013, he almost reached his goal. Then, in 2014, after winning the grand prize at a national competition, he turned his attention to the world.

"I managed to retain the nutty flavor that appears after maturation. That is the charm of Matsuoka blue." Thus, the new blue of the Atelier de Fromage was born.

Develop a stronger blue with more concentrated flavors

Atelier de Fromage is a pioneer that has been increasing cheese lovers in Japan from the very begin-



504-6 Mihari, Tomi, Nagano
<https://www.a-fromage.co.jp/>



a. Overlooking the nature from the store located at 900m up in the mountains. When the weather is fine, you can see Mount Fuji. **b.** There are Brown Swiss, Jerseys and Holsteins on the cheese farm. **c.** Hard cheese is their main product. Weighing 2kg each, between 1 500 and 2000 wheels are produced every year.



ning. The restaurant offers an activity called Life with Cheese. Shiogawa used to work in this restaurant. He once left his job but came back in 2006, when his former colleague asked him to make cheese with him. At the time, in the cheese factory, there was a technical expert who had been trained in France, as well as a leader who had vast knowledge and extensive experience. "Without them," Shiogawa says, "the cheese we make today would not have been possible."

"Right now, I'm making blue cheese with a saltier taste and more pronounced mold flavors. It's a cheese with a lot of umami and complexity; a completely original creation of mine. One could say that it is an accumulation of my previous blues."

It is also an acknowledgement of his respect for his masters.

In Japan, there are many good cheese producers

When you make different types of cheese in the same cheese factory, as is the case for Atelier de Fromage, management is very difficult because different microorganisms may interact with each other



d. < Cocon > is a moist and creamy cheese that melt once put in mouth. This cheese won the first prize at an international competition in 2017.



Kazushi SHIOGAWA, born in 1979, director of Atelier de Fromage. His loves blue cheese the best to make and eat. "I trust my own senses rather than machines in making cheese. I hope that more and more people in food industry will communicate the value of cheese carefully made by hand."



inside the factory. But that also has good sides.

"In Japan, there are two types of high-level technicians. Those who deepen their knowledge of a single cheese and those who make several types of cheese. To make several types of cheese, you must master the technique to perfectly judge the feel of curd. I believe there are many who have mastered this technique in Japan. This is our strength! "

"In Japan, grass and milk is grown with soft water. With them, we can make our local specialty with sweet and delicate flavors to echo *washoku*, traditional Japanese cuisine. This could be our goal," Shioyawa says.

There are other winners of cheese contests from the same region, Nagano Prefecture, which means that the region is blessed with good lactic acid bacteria from the area.

"We producers in the region need to work together to lead other regions to create excellent cheese culture."

It seems his real rivals are already in Japan.

The Art of Making Chèvre at Mirasaka Fromage



1. Milking takes place once a day, only in the morning.
2. Collected in a small shed on the farm, milk is filtered and refrigerated to transport.
3. In the factory, lactic acid bacteria (starter) and rennet are added to pasteurized milk to initiate curdling.
4. Curd is put into forming molds and allowed to stand. Curd is added to the brim when the surface goes down.
5. Unmold the cheese and place them on racks. Sprinkle salt over them.
6. 4th day. They will be left to mature for two more weeks.
7. After maturing, cheese is wrapped in a Japanese oak leaf, tied with a Japanese cypress fiber cord, left to stand for another week and then shipped.



Japanese sense of delicate taste opens up possibilities in the world

"Cheese is still considered a luxury product in Japan. That's why it must be excellent," explains Matsubara, revealing his conviction never to compromise. After learning the fundamentals of cheese making, he visited France and Italy to study its cultural background. After all these experiences, however, he did not restrict himself to fixed traditions and he really enjoys making his cheeses around the theme of the four seasons in Japan.

"I'm happy working until midnight. I began cheese making as a means to provide financial support to my dairy farm. And it turned out the perfect job for me!" he says.

"Taste preferences vary from country to country and region to region. Japanese people tend to prefer subtle, delicate flavors. To achieve such flavors without any unpleasant distraction, I consulted with several Japanese chefs."

Happy goat's milk makes cheese with pure taste

The chèvre of Mirasaka Fromage (Hiroshima Prefecture)

If the goats are happy...

How many people know that in Japan the number of cheese factories who raise their own goats are increasing and their excellent cheeses win prizes in international competitions?

One such producer is Mirasaka Fromage, located in a mountainous area of Miyoshi city in northern Hiroshima Prefecture. At the heart of the work of Masanori MATSUBARA, lies a conviction. "Cheese made from milk of happy animals can only be the best."

At the farm "Mirasaka Fromage", they raise about 60 brown-swiss cattle and goats in total. On our visit, we focused on their "Fromage de MIRASAKA Chèvre" to see how it is made.



1617-1 Nika, Mirasaka,
Miyoshi, Hiroshima

<https://m-fromage.com>



a. Goats stay in the barn at night. Cows stay on the pasture 24/7. b. Matsubara family



Sustainable dairy farming

The good thing about making cheese is that you can preserve the milk of animals without taking their life. In cheese making, the man and the animals can live together. So what does it mean to be a happy animal? For Matsubara, it is an animal that can run freely in the pastures, eat bark and leaves when they want, have enough rest, and raise their babies. Matsubara's dairy farm is called "Yamachi-rakuno" (dairy farming in mountainous areas) and the animals are not fed on concentrated feeds by humans, but instead natural grass. Milk production yield is not necessarily high, but thanks to the rapid decomposition of the feces, the grass of the meadow regrow quickly, which allows a cyclical use of the pastures. After finding the right hills for his project, it took him two years to convince the locals to let him make it happen. Because of the tight budget, he had learned forestry techniques by himself for two years and he began clearing the hills by himself.

Why is animal happiness so important to Matsubara? It comes from his experience in Australia, where he saw thousands of cows controlled by computers. The only task humans were responsible for was milking

c. Canestrato d. Raclette e. <HANAKAGO>(flower basket) cheese molded in a bamboo basket. f. <Miyoshi no ukai> (chèvre) g. <Fuji-san 'KIN' (gold)>(chèvre)



Masanori MATSUBARA, born in 1974, representative of Mirasaka Fromage. He majored in dairy farming at an agriculture management and technology college. Having lived in the United States and Australia, he founded his cheese factory In 2004. Then, in 2006, he cleared eight hectares of land by himself to raise goats. His goal is to use only Japanese grass.

the animals before dawn. One day, while carrying the carcass of a cow with his tractor, he found himself surrounded by a herd of upset cows.

"I thought they were furious and saying to me, 'We give you our milk but you abuse us!' When I got home, I could not stop my tears. This is not right for cows, men, or the environment. I made up my mind to leave this job."

Then he wondered why the cows complained to him. "It was a message for us humans. So, I said to myself that I must listen to them and do what they want me to do. In Japan, the forest covers 70% of the land. If we can harness only 10% of it, we will be able to show our children a hometown where cows and goats graze peacefully on the grass of the Satoyama, forests between wilderness and civilization where humans and animals can live together. Then, it will no longer be necessary to import concentrated feeds. That's why I need to be successful, so that others can follow me." This is the starting point of Matsubara's journey.

"I must not waste a drop of milk, and the cheeses I make have to be absolutely excellent!" He spoke with conviction.

The Art of Making Dessert cheese at Niseko Cheese Factory



1. Three to five days a week, milk collected from three neighboring dairies arrive early in the morning.
2. Separate fat (cream) from pasteurized milk. Add milk, starter culture, and rennet to initiate curdling.
3. Put the liquid into forming molds using a ladle.
4. It is essential to coagulate the curd. Turn them over several times.
5. Sprinkle salt on both sides.
6. After three days, each cheese is weighed and shaped by hand.
7. Cover the cheese with diced dried fruit (papaya and pineapple) soaked in rum.



always wanted to make a cheese like that with dried fruits, but it did not work for a while. One day, an acquaintance chef made some dessert with Kondo's cheese, which inspired Kondo in a new experiment. The new cheese won a prize in a contest. Then, he went on to add other flavors such as "yuzu citrus" and "rum-banana". With "yuzu citrus", he won another prize in a contest.

"My father called me, but I refused at first"

Niseko Cheese Factory was founded by Kondo's father, Takashi, in 2006. Takashi used to work in a big shop but left his job as he was attracted to the idea of selling something made by his own two hands.

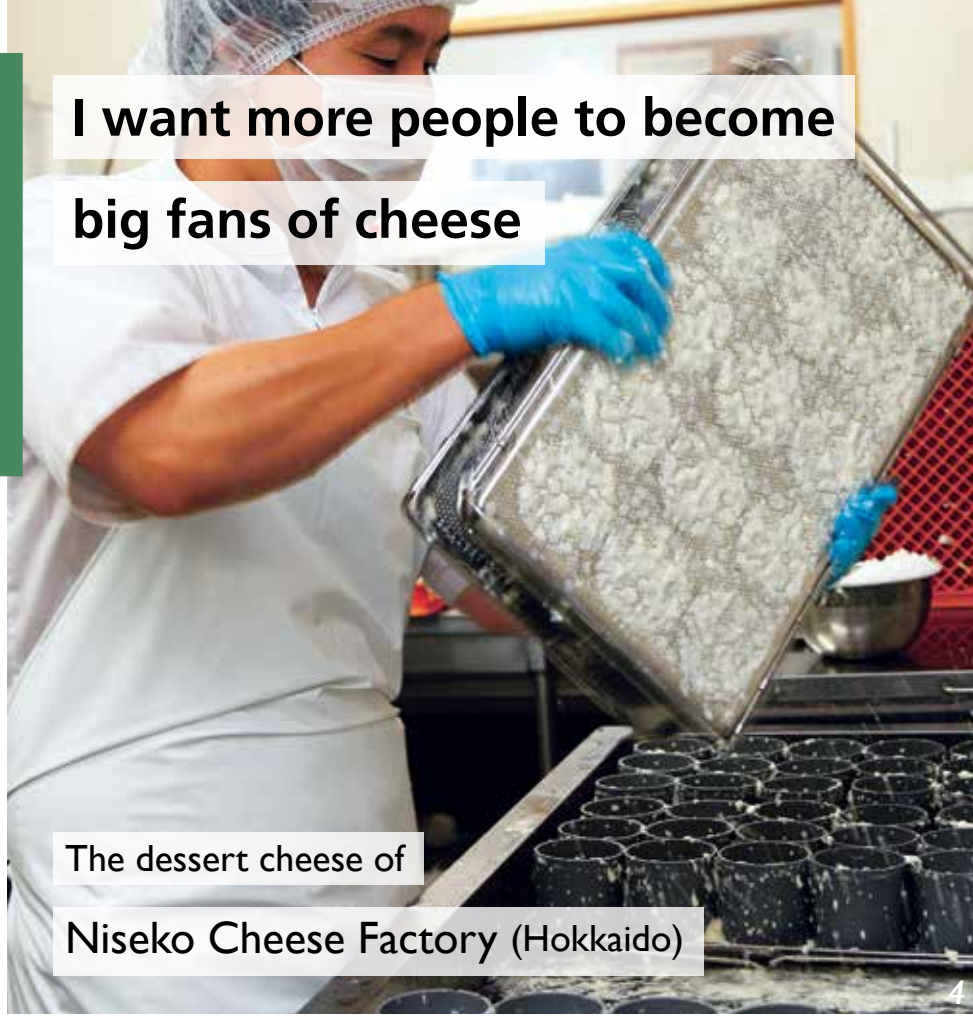
"I want to do what no one has done yet." As he loved product development and cheese, Takashi left Sapporo for Niseko. There were a couple of small dairy farms where the cows were taken good care of. He made good cheese with their milk which boosted sales.

"I want you to help me." Takashi asked his son in his second year. However, his son was also work-

I want more people to become big fans of cheese

The dessert cheese of Niseko Cheese Factory (Hokkaido)

Cheesemakers in Japan (5)



I want to do something unconventional

The history of artisanal cheese factories in Japan dates back only a few decades. Today, there are a lot of young producers who attempt to make cheeses in their own ways and they succeed to do so.

"I too, want to make my cheese in an unique way," says Hiroshi KONDO from Niseko Cheese Factory.

"I learned the basics at seminars. But when I got stuck, I wasn't afraid to break a tradition and the result was better. When I was making 'Sekka (snow flower)' with papaya and pineapple, at first I was told that it was not authentic but I did not give in."

There is a cheese that looks like Sekka in France, and Kondo had



263 Soga, Niseko, Abuta, Hokkaido
<http://www.niseko-cheese.co.jp>



a/b. Mimolette is still on its way to perfection. c. <Ku>, inspired by Bleu de Gex in France, is being matured. d. Washed rind cheese e. First generation: Takashi Kondo. Second generation: Hiroshi Kondo. f. Store on the left and the factory on the right.

ing in a retail store at the time, and didn't think that his father's cheese factory would last. He continued to reject his father's offer for three years. But, little by little, he began to change his mind. He came to think that selling products that he really loved would be more interesting than selling something he didn't believe in.

In 2010, he started to work in his father's cheese factory and learned how to make cheese from scratch. He also went to seminars and found it difficult to agree with his father's way of making cheese and its taste. He wanted to make his own taste and flavor. He wanted to make a cheese without bitterness and harshness. In 2012, he managed to make his blue cheese, "Ku", which won a prize the following year. Little by little, the father-son duo began to make different cheeses.

I still have a lot to try

"I was raised on a diet of rice and miso soup until age 30, so I did not really want to eat cheese.



g. Gouda soaked in red wine grape pomace. h. Custard pudding made with gouda cheese and daifuku, traditional Japanese sweets, made with fromage blanc. i. <Ku> flavored with Sake lees. j. Caciocavallo and String cheese.



Hiroshi KONDO. Born in 1980, he is the second generation at the Niseko Cheese Factory. He started working with his father at age 30. "In the last five years, the taste of Japanese cheeses have greatly improved. I appreciate your support for hard-working young cheese makers!"

That's why it would make me really happy to see others with a similar upbringing discover the deliciousness and become attracted to cheese. My role is to attract more and more people to the world of cheese."

That is why Kondo seeks to achieve a pure and simple taste, which can easily be accepted by those who have delicate palates like many Japanese do. The international recognition gained through competition boosted his self-confidence.

When he encounters difficulties, he freely exchanges information with other young manufacturers in his network or does research on the internet. This is how he ended up mixing several lactic acid bacteria to improve the taste of his cheese. However, he avoids excessive studying or fixating on a single answer, and instead prefers to improve his taste step by step, relying on his intuition.

"From time to time, the taste might go off. But try to taste it again a year later and you will be amazed at the improvement." His words were full of energy.