

Japan Fisheries Association



NO.72, JAN. 2012

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Views and Opinions of Japan's Fisheries Industry

Seafood Expo

JFA chief hopes Seafood Expo will contribute to restoration of fisheries in disaster area

In an overview of the 13th Japan International Seafood & Technology Expo, held in Tokyo 27-29 July last year, Toshiro Shirasu, president of the Japan Fisheries Association (JFA), the organizer of the show, stated: "We are grateful that more than 25,000 people visited the show during the three-day period. The environment surrounding Japan's fisheries have become extremely harsh due to the impact of the Great Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that attacked the eastern and northern coasts of Japan on March 11, 2011."

"This year the expo was held under the slogan: 'Let's support fisheries in Japan.' I am pleased to report to you we had exhibitors from many sectors of the fisheries. Notably, we are proud to have had participation from regional and local autonomies and private companies in the disaster-hit area. From overseas, representatives from 14 countries participated, who, along with their messages of support, presented various types of seafood and fishery materials as well as valuable business proposals."

"Under the present difficult circumstances, it was encouraging for us to have the occasion, through this Expo, to exhibit excellent and attractive seafood from all over Japan and the world. I believe the show provided both participants and visitors with a good opportunity to deepen their understanding of the seafood products, learn and grow with each other, and utilize it as a valuable forum of business contacts. It is our sincere hope that this expo will contribute to an early restoration of fisheries in the disaster area and the further development of fisheries in Japan," Shirasu said.

Highlights of the Expo

-Opening with prayers for disaster victims

The 3-day Expo opened with silent prayers for the victims of the great earthquake/tsunami, followed by powerful call for the restoration of fisheries in Japan, led by Mayor Sugawara of Kesennuma, a principal disaster fishing city.



-Disaster area assistance corner

The Japan Fisheries Association established a corner to assist fishers in disaster area. Participants in the corner included regional and local autonomies from the tsunami-hit region. Also, 12 private fishing companies from the disaster area took part in the corner in the hope to demonstrate their well-being and their wish to have interchange with as many buyers as possible.



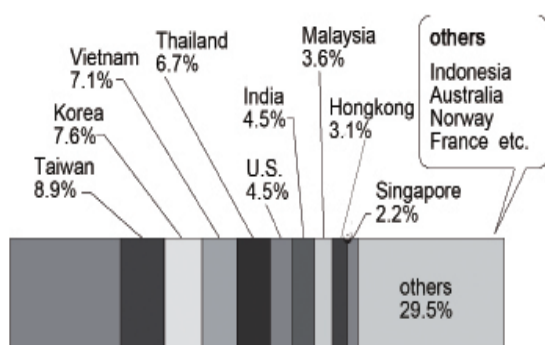
Results of exhibition



Visitors' business sectors



Foreign visitors



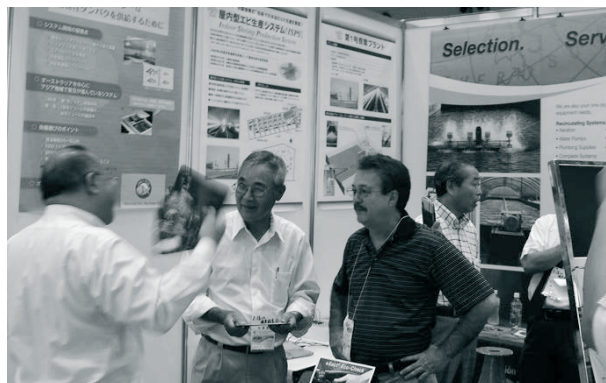
-Presentation of sushi cooking technique

With full cooperation of the sushi federation, presentation was made on ways to ensure safety and security of seafood, through sushi. Sushi cooks demonstrated before viewers the techniques to cook deliciously, using the raw materials provided by exhibitors. Furthermore, the test for International Certificate of Knowledge on Sushi was conducted with the aim to disseminate accurate knowledge in providing authentic sushi overseas.



-New organic seafood corner

The New Organic Seafood Corner, newly established this year, attracted many visitors. In the corner, land-based aquaculture technologies from Japan and overseas were presented, together with cultured fish. Also, trading houses specializing in organic seafood exhibited. In the seminar on land-based aquaculture, full 80 people participated, showing a rising interest in these new fisheries.



-Fresh fish/processed seafood exhibition corner

This was a newly established corner this year, in which exhibitors presented their fresh fish and processed seafood products with confidence.



-Energy-saving fish cooking methods

The energy-saving technique to broil and cook fish tastily using microwave oven drew attention of the visitors. In the contemporary lifestyle, consumers tend to pursue reducing cooking processes while they want to eat fish. Others dislike smoke or smell caused in cooking fish. The techniques catering to such consumer demand have a great potential in boosting fish diet in Japan.



MEL Japan

MEL Japan respects and encourages fishers' heart for responsible fisheries

Masashi Nishimura, MEL Japan Secretariat

Nearly four years have passed since Marine Eco-label Japan (MEL Japan) --the first seafood eco-labeling scheme in Japan--was launched.

From the outset, questions have often been posed as to the differences between MEL Japan and other overseas eco-labeling schemes. In what follows, I would like to present what I came to learn from these questions through implementation of the MEL Japan scheme from the perspective of the "spirit of compliance."

Although it was a short period of four years, I came to realize that the Japanese eco-labeling scheme took quite a contrasting approach from overseas schemes in terms of the order of its dissemination. This difference came to be realized on the basis of its actual implementation--not necessarily upon how the scheme was so designed from the start.

In other words, as a general tendency, certification under MEL Japan has been prompted and obtained by the willingness of producers, as opposed to retailers, to appeal to consumers and the society at large regarding their approach to sustainable fisheries.

After the certification of a fishery (i.e. certification in production stage), it becomes necessary to appeal to, and seek cooperation from, distributors, processors and retailers in order to actually deliver certified seafood to consumers. It requires time and energy to build up this system of cooperation. Propagation of MEL Japan-certified products, so to speak, starts from the time of the certification of a fishery.

This difference between overseas and Japan can be said to be largely due to the difference in social environment in which the industries operate, rather than the differences in the eco-labeling scheme itself.

Under these circumstances, a total of 13 types of fisheries have obtained MEL Japan certification to date. I believe this reflects the positive posture of Japanese fishers themselves toward fishery resource management, and it is the true value of fisheries eco-labels in Japan. Therefore, it is our hope, at the MEL Japan Secretariat, that the eco-labeling scheme would further spread in Japan, with the enhanced appreciation of this value among distributors, processors and retailers.

In MEL Japan, the processes in fisheries and distribution/processing are examined on the basis of the certification criteria. As it is a certification system,

Comments by participants

What follows are some of the outstanding comments from exhibitors and visitors:

-The customer assessment on our newly developed products was high. The show was useful as we were able to have many first-hand comments from our customers, which we believe will serve for the future sales promotion.

-We exhibited in the previous expos and we could feel firmly that the name value of our products has been enhanced.

-We had an excellent chance to publicize our products.

-We could conduct more than 1,000 samplings per day. We really thank for this occasion as we could finalize sales contracts with major companies. The results for our group were excellent.

-We could have unexpected buy orders from other exhibitors during the show. Such a chance could never have come unless we participated in the seafood show.

-We had consultations for large-lot buying from dealers.

-We had been thinking of canceling participation in the expo because one of our branches was damaged by the earthquake. But by attending the show, it was good that we could show us all right to our customers. We also organized a seminar during the show and had many participants and a good evaluation.

-We are very satisfied that we could exchange cards and start contact with many people from various industries and companies.

-I was also involved in the damage of the disaster. Now I know what actually happened in the disaster area, what is and will be needed in the future. Looking back the history of Japan, it seems that our country made a remarkable progress after it overcame the sorrowful situation. I believe we should trust our future and advance.

the board of examiners carries out a full-scale and close examination on the basis of detailed certification criteria.

But from the viewpoint of compliance, however, fisheries may not improve easily if examiners hold only to the position that fishers should be supervised through examination because they are originally incredible. I believe eco-labels become truly effective only when fishers seek certification because they want to make fisheries better, and after obtaining certification, they make further efforts to live up to their reputation.

Ultimately, compliance cannot exist without the "heart" of workers in each stage of the industry. It is desired that the eco-labeling scheme serves as a tool to encourage their heart.

It is our hope that MEL Japan will become a movement, not a campaign, that expands good will. We will make steady efforts in the hope that the good will links the sea with consumers, or the past with the future.

Topic

My collection of canned food stories

Canned Fish of Hope

Hayato Kurokawa

Kinoya Ishinomaki Suisan Co. in Ishinomaki, located in the region of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on March 11, 2011, is a seafood packer well known for canned mackerel, using primarily Kinka mackerel, a local type of mackerel found only in waters around the nearby island of Kinkazan.

The company gives special attention to producing fresh pack products from mackerels, sardines and other fish bought at the wholesale market that same day.

Kinoya--which calls itself the smallest cannery in Japan--was subjected to enormous damage by the Great Earthquake and Tsunami, with its office building, warehouse and factory utterly destroyed. In point of fact, the company was located only 50 meters away from the Ishinomaki fishing port.

President Kimura and the employees were completely at a loss in face of the enormity of the disaster. But, then, they found gold-colored cans of mackerel

glittering in the midst of the debris of the destroyed warehouse. The cans had been buried in the foul smelling sludge. But Kimura was convinced that the contents of the cans remained safe as they were covered by hard metals. Volunteers who came from outside Ishinomaki helped dig out and wash the cans with much care, and brought them to Tokyo to sell mainly in Setagaya Ward. As many of the Japanese readers might know through media reports, the products--called Canned Fish of Hope--became a big news story.

Why were the canned fish sold in Setagaya? It is because there are many lovers of Kinoya's products in the ward. Notably, a restaurant called "Sabanoyu" in Kyodo town, Setagaya Ward, has held many special food events using canned mackerel. There, many people who tasted canned Kinka mackerel found the food really palatable, and the word spread around in a short period of time.

Kyodo is a unique town which has tried to revitalize itself with canned mackerel. Now, more than 10 restaurants in the ward--centering on Sabanoyu--are offering their original menus using canned mackerel. As a matter of fact, Kyodo became a miraculous town overcoming the economic recession affecting the restaurant industry caused by the global financial turmoil in late 2008.

Sabanoyu owner Mr. Suda and his colleagues thought it was their turn to return the favor to Kinoya who had earlier contributed much to the revitalization of Kyodo, and they launched an assistance campaign for restoration from the disaster. Every week someone from Kyodo drove to Ishinomaki to deliver the rescue goods they collected and help dig out the buried canned mackerel and they brought them back to Tokyo. A team of volunteers to wash and keep storage of the cans was organized in Setagaya Ward to promote sales of the products.

In marketing, however, labels indicating the contents and other information on the products had fallen off. So the organizers collected relief donations equivalent with the tag price in exchange for the products. This approach seems to have touched people's heartstrings.

This rescue activity was taken up often by newspapers and television as a model case for assisting restoration of the disaster area. This is why canned mackerel from Ishinomaki came to be called "Canned Fish of Hope." As a result of this activity, the inventory of Kinka mackerel cans has run out. Then, at the end of October 2011, Kinoya organized a thanksgiving event. I also made a small speech at the event, as one who introduced Kinoya to Kyodo residents.

The proceeds from sales will partly be allocated to the restoration of Ishinomaki, with the remaining being given for the reconstruction of Kinoya Co. Although the company was able to begin marketing new products, with the cooperation of other firms, the process of its reconstruction is only at a starting point.

There are many other seafood processing firms that were subjected to catastrophic damage by the earthquake and tsunami. I am racking my brain on what I can do to help them. But, all in all, I believe such gentleness of the Japanese people to help one another will certainly become the driving force toward restoration from the disaster.



Canned mackerel recovered from debris