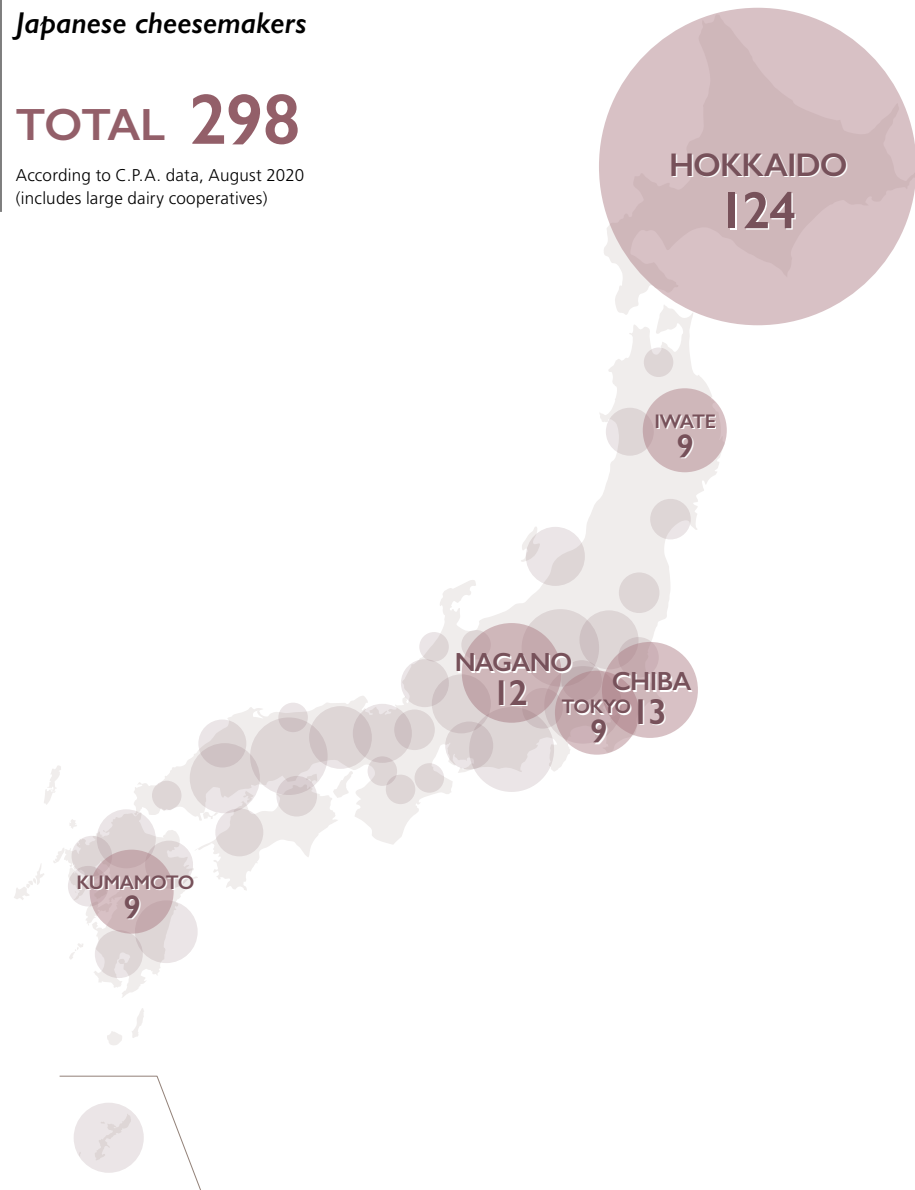


Japanese cheesemakers

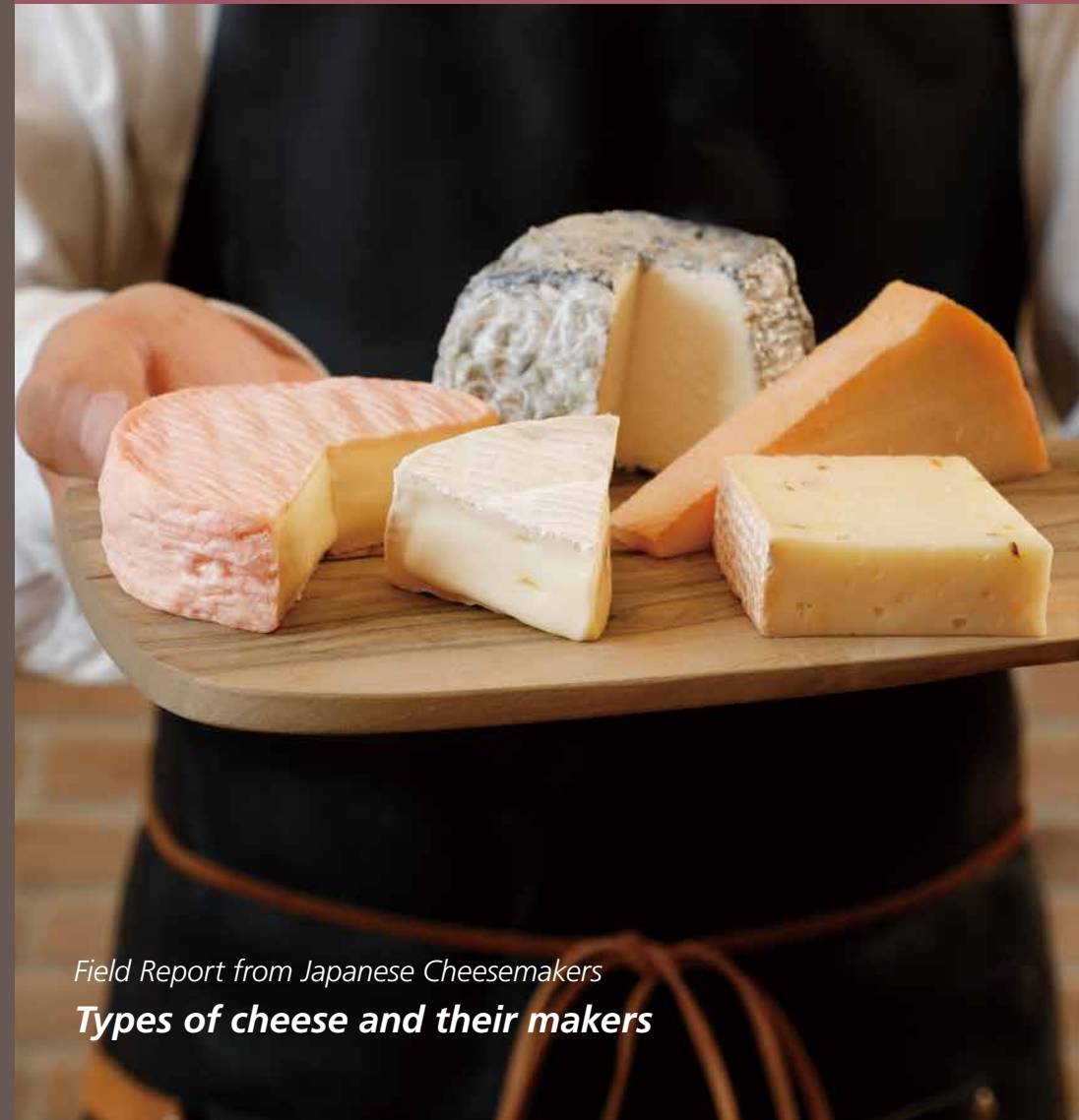
TOTAL 298

According to C.P.A. data, August 2020
(includes large dairy cooperatives)



A craft of excellence

Japanese Cheese Guide 2019



Field Report from Japanese Cheesemakers
Types of cheese and their makers



OSBL CHEESE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION (C.P.A.)

Iwakata blg 3F, 1-18-1 Uchikanda, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-0047, Japan
www.cheese-professional.com

Office for Strengthening Competitiveness of Japanese Dairy Products 2020
– under the patronage of ALIC (Agriculture & Livestock Industries Corporation)

Did you know?

Japanese cheese is

better now than ever before.



The Cheesemaker's Technique

As of 2019, there are more than 300 cheesemakers, large and small, throughout Japan.

Cheesemaking is a collaboration with the livestock and microorganisms of each particular region. Japan's cheesemakers work diligently to refine their skills, focusing on each and every batch. They humbly consider the results of their labor, sometimes with delight, sometimes with disappointment.

With the distinctive nature of Japan's four seasons, temperature and humidity vary day by day. The milk used in production, the conditions in the cheese making and storage rooms, even (though this is often taken for granted) personal physical condition are ever-changing elements of uncertainty.

But now the pool of manpower has deepened to the point where, when things just won't go right, it is possible to order texts from overseas or exchange information with fellow producers. Japanese cheesemakers are now entering competitions at home and abroad, winning prizes and acclaim for their creations.

Japan's tradition of craftsmanship is being proved once more in the field of cheese.



The raw material is high-quality domestic milk

Milk culture only spread in Japan from the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Awareness of milk's nutritional value spread, and it was made a part of school lunches after World War II. Then, in the 21st Century, "milk-as-food" products like yoghurt and cheese also became widely available.

Now, an increasing number of people are actually making cheese in all parts of Japan. While some are in spacious regions with abundant land for grassland and raising cattle, or regions proud of their fine water, we also find them in remote mountainous regions where it is precisely the small scale which allows meticulous management in the production of high-quality milk.

Recently, cheesemakers are pursuing distinctive cheese flavors not just from cow's milk, but also sheep, goat and even water buffalos' milk. All these varieties of animals are already settled in Japan and contributing to the production of delicious cheese.



Diversity of climate

Japan is a narrow country, stretching far from north to south with steep mountains and broad estuaries. This varied landscape contributes to a wide variety of produce and microorganisms, and this in turn leads to distinct food cultures in each region.

Just as each region hands down its own vegetables, soy sauce, miso and sake, so Japanese cheese is in the process of finding regional expression.

Collaborations with distinctive local produce are underway.

It's surely not long until Japanese people will also talk with pride of the cheese of their home region.



Field Report from Japanese Cheesemakers

Types of cheese and their makers

Have you eaten Japanese cheese lately?

Just as Japanese milk has become an everyday part of life, so domestic cheesemakers, large and small, have sprung up increasingly in recent years.

You can find all kinds of cheese representing their various regions, not only in cheesery shops, but at Michi no Eki service areas and airport shops.

Retailers and specialist cheese shops are keen to find a way to get at least one domestic cheese onto their shelves.

Why is this so important? The answer is simple: the cheese has become that delicious.

Just as for the 2018 edition, we will introduce each type of cheese and one of its representative producers in turn.

Fresh type
[Fromage blanc]

P.8



"Rakuno Mothers"
Aso Milk Farm

Fresh type
[Cream cheese]

P.12



Kaida Highlands
Ice Creamery

Bloomy rind type
[Brie and Camembert]

P.16



Tokachino Fromage

Washed-rind type
[Washed-rind cheese]

P.20



Hand-made cheese
Nasu no mori

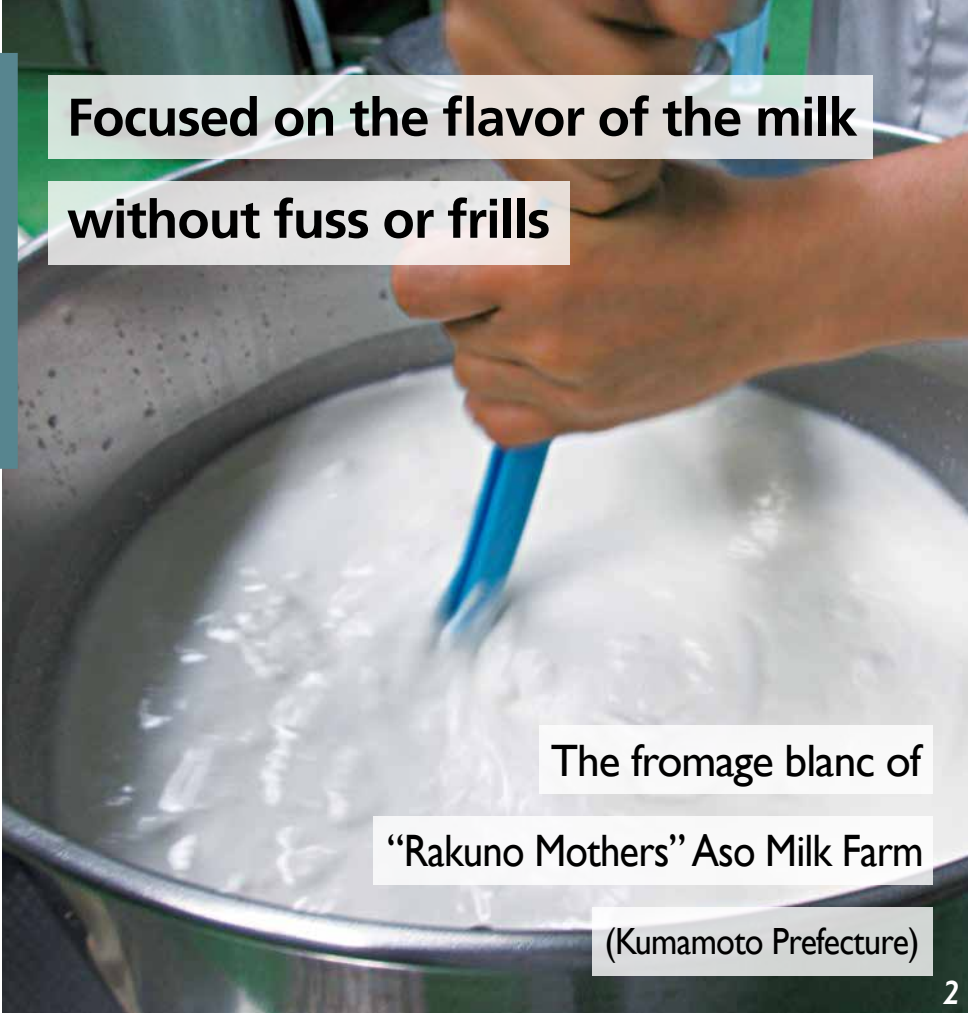
Semi-hard type
[Gouda]

P.24



Kisuki Dairy

**Focused on the flavor of the milk
without fuss or frills**



The fromage blanc of
“Rakuno Mothers” Aso Milk Farm
(Kumamoto Prefecture)

The making of Aso Milk Farm’s “Fromage Blanc Lisse”



1. Milk from five kinds of cows is pasteurized at low temperatures and left to cool. Lactic acid bacteria are added when the temperature reaches 32°C (90°F).
2. After leaving overnight to harden to about the consistency of yoghurt, it is stirred.
3. It is transferred to a basket lined with two straining cloths.
4. Liquid (whey) is drained off overnight.
5. The cloths are opened the following morning to show the glistening creamy cheese.
6. The cheese is moved to the filling machine.
7. After the first lot is removed for inspection, the rest is hand-filled into 185g (6.5oz) packs.



3944-1 Kawahara,
Nishihara, Aso, Kumamoto
Tel 096-292-2100
<http://aso-milk.jp/>

**The search for smoothness:
“Fromage Blanc Lisse”**

With fresh cheese, though the simple taste of the milk is front and center, the final flavor is also greatly affected by the cheesemaker’s philosophy. “I want to express the taste of the milk itself, and so I made this cheese with a unique smoothness and low acidity,” says Ryusei Shimizu of the Aso Milk Farm. Ever since the farm opened, Shimizu says his unchanging aim has been to create cheese that 100% of people would enjoy. “It’s an extravagant goal, isn’t it? But this facility was made to show dairy farming culture and the merits of milk itself directly to the customers. If

they don’t enjoy the cheese they buy here, we won’t be able to get them coming back for more.” By those in the know, Kumamoto Prefecture is regarded as one of western Japan’s greatest milk-producing regions. In 2000, the Kumamoto Prefectural Dairy Cooperative Association opened “Rakuno Mothers” Aso Milk Farm to provide members of the dairy industry opportunities to engage directly with consumers.

**Spreading the appeal
of milk culture**

Even for Shimizu with his thirty years of technical experience, the most difficult thing is having to make cheese from a mixture of five different kinds of cow’s milk. As well as the familiar Holsteins, Jersey and Brown Swiss, the Aso Milk Farm is also home to Guernsey and Ayrshire. The day, month, season, and birth cycle of the roughly 30 head of cattle

a. The farm pastures are also the playground for the livestock.



a



b



c

affects the balance of the milk, which in turn impacts the rate at which the cheese hardens. This presented an unforeseen challenge.

"It's very important for us to show that there are various kinds of cattle, but it is a big problem for us cheesemakers practically."

For the facility to spread knowledge amongst general consumers, it's not enough for the people behind the scenes to simply "make" stuff. But there is nothing more gratifying than if customers enjoy their visit, take some cheese home for their dinner, and for dairy farming to be part of the conversation over the meal. That is the ideal his team aims for together with the staff looking after the animals.

d. The Gruyere-style Aso-yama ("Mount Aso") is aged for eight months.



d



The head of the cheese-making plant and General Manager of the Aso Milk Farm, Ryusei Shimizu. Born in 1968, he had valuable earlier experience in cheese production, and has been involved with the facility since its foundation. "Kumamoto has excellent water. This is also an advantage when for making dairy products."

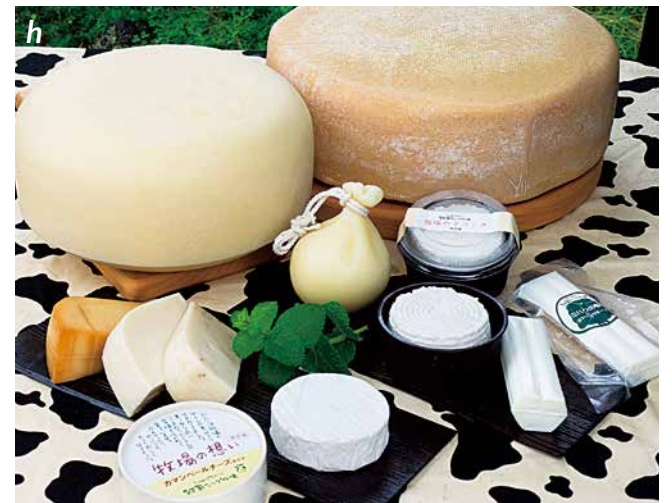
e. Their Caciocavallo cheese won an outstanding performance prize at the 2011 All Japan Natural Cheese Contest. f. The daily chance for the public to mingle the cows is always popular. g. "It's not so sour the way we make it, so it's delicious on its own or with white peaches," says Shimizu. h. Clockwise from top right is Aso-yama ("Mount Aso"), ricotta, string cheese Miruku no Ki ("Milk Tree"), Caciocavallo, Camembert Makiba no Omoi ("Dreams of the Farm"), Aso-no ("Aso Pasture", gouda-style cheeses with pepper flavor, smoked, and plain).



e



g



h



**Promoting the Region:
From Ice Cream to Cheese**

The cream cheese of
Kaida Highlands Ice Creamery (Nagano Prefecture)

The making of Kaida Highlands Ice Creamery's "Cream Cheese"



1. The milk is heated to 43°C (110°F) and put into a cream separator to skim the cream from the milk.
2. After adjusting fat content, a homogenizer is used to even out the content of the liquid.
3. It is then left overnight after lactic acid bacteria are added.
4. The following morning, the thickened cream is stirred while heated, and the liquid portion (whey) is removed.
5. The batch is put into cloth bags, and further liquid is strained off. The material for the bags is key to this process.
6. The batch is split into two and weighed down for one hour with different weights to give different levels of firmness.
7. The two parts are mixed to adjust consistency. After salt and stabilizer are added, the cheese is heated to 81°C (178°F) and then bottled.



4411-9 Kaida Kogen Suekawa,
Kiso, Kiso, Nagano
Tel 0264-42-1133
<https://www.hif.jp/>

Fresh local milk was the starting point

In the summer of 1999, an ice cream maker started work in the Kaida Highlands, known as a summer retreat from the Chukyo region centered on Nagoya. Dairy and other farmers cooperated in the venture to showcase local produce.

First on the menu was making delicious ice cream from the excellent, fresh local milk. To make it, they approached chef Nobuhiro Saito, who came from their region.

"The milk was a class apart, sweet and delicious. I thought if local produce was going to be used, my knowledge and experience as a chef in western cuisine would be valuable. It grabbed my interest." He made five different kinds of ice cream using local agricultural

produce. The understated sweetness of his original recipes was very popular, and his ice cream became a huge success simply by word of mouth. When the team saw this, they immediately suggested making some other dairy products. They extended the facility, and cheese making began in 2001.

In search of unheard-of softness

But Saito largely only knew what he had taught himself about making dairy produce. He had been on a cheese making course, but still had endless trouble even with mozzarella and gouda, the two cheeses he had learned about on it. Cream cheese was no less of a struggle. He had little information and less equipment. But he knew he wanted to make a soft-textured, light-flavored cream cheese.

"From when I was a chef, I always thought cream cheese that was too hard was annoying to use in the kitchen."

When he started, he not only struggled with the daily variations in milk quality, but also found the vital control of water content to be influenced by temperature, humidity and the texture of the cloth used for

a. The white birches swaying around the shop and workshop are a typical Highlands sight. b. The milk used for production comes from the Mantani Farm, 5 minutes away by car. There is some of the highest quality milk in the prefecture.



draining. There was one failure after another. However, after improving the cheese's texture by using a yoghurt homogenizer and taking a hint for the material for the straining cloths from a sake brewer acquaintance, much trial and error finally led to the perfection of a quite new, very soft type of cream cheese. This became a surprise winner of a top prize in a national competition. "I thought, 'Oh, so this is OK. There are no fixed answers in cooking, and this is the same.'" These words revealed the unexploited possibilities for cheese.



Kaida Highlands Ice Creamery CEO, Nobuhiro Saito, born 1970. While working to diversify the operation, he also cooperates actively with friends to raise awareness of Nagano cheese.



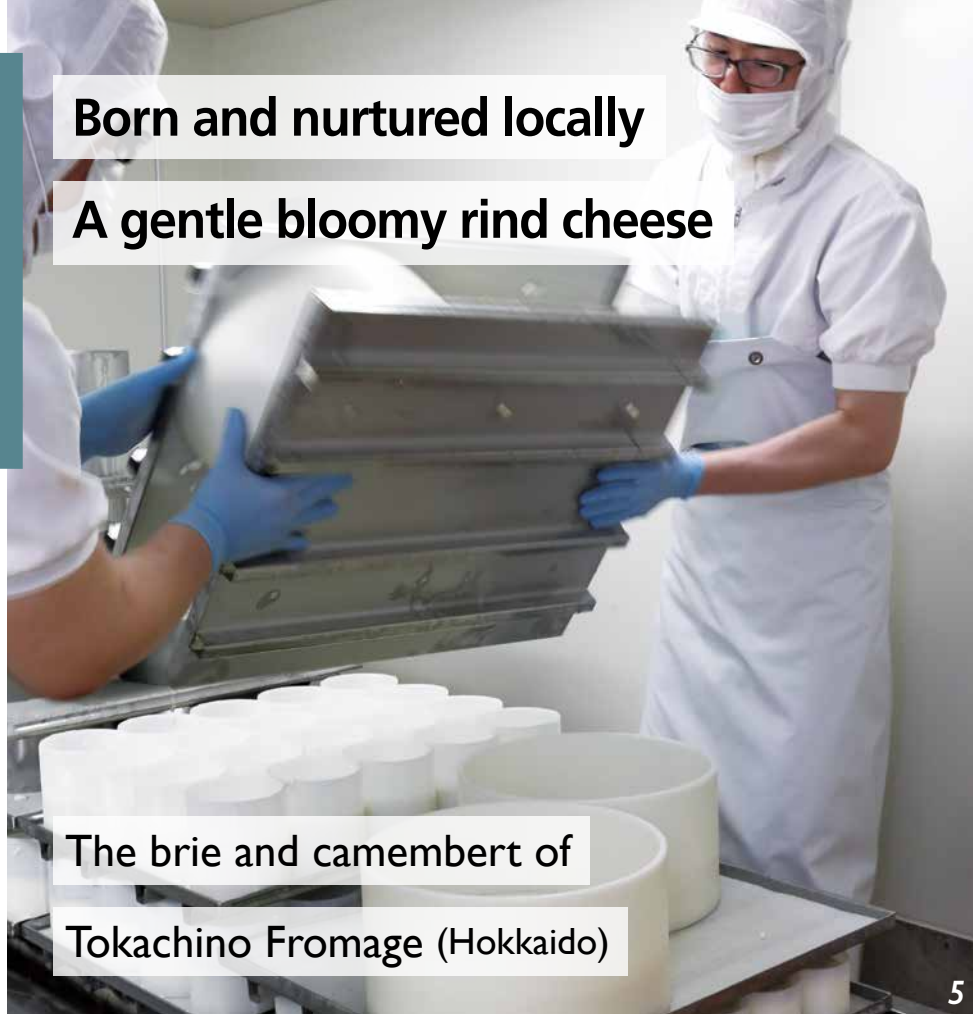
c. This Camembert, made using yeast to overcome bitter flavors, won the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' Prize in the All Japan Natural Cheese Contest in 2015. d. A recent introduction: bread made with flour from local Nagano wheat and whey from in-house cheese production. e. Of various kinds of ice cream made using local produce, the corn flavor has made a particular stir. f. Maturing Gouda cheese. g. Saito says, "Try the cream cheese with soy-flavored rice crackers; it really goes well." h. Back row from right: yoghurt; SNKY ("Sunky") yoghurt made with lactic acid bacteria from pickling vegetables; butter; cream cheese. Front row from right: Gouda; Mozzarella; Camembert.



Born and nurtured locally

A gentle bloomy rind cheese

The brie and camembert of Tokachino Fromage (Hokkaido)



The making of Tokachino Fromage's Brie de Tokachi



1. After pasteurizing the milk and adding lactic acid bacteria, rennet and cultures are added the following day.
2. After stirring well, the batch is transferred to a cheese vat. After being left to harden for a while, it is sliced with a wire cutter.
3. By stirring gently, the liquid (whey) is released from the solid curds.
4. The curds are collected and put into a perforated mold. Liquid drains out gradually, and the curds set under their own weight.
5. The mold is turned upside down. This is repeated three times.
6. The cheese is removed from the mold after being left overnight, and is soaked in brine to make it salty.
7. After being removed from the salt water and put into the aging room, it is matured for a week.



7-2 Nishi Nijo Minami, Nakasatsunai, Kasai, Hokkaido
Tel 0155-63-5070
<http://www.t-fromages.com/>

It all began with the decision to make this the location

Thanks to a cool climate, ideal for cattle, and excellent conditions for growing feed and fertilizer, the Tokachi region of Hokkaido Prefecture has more than thirty cheesemakers producing 70% of the national total, making it a mecca for natural cheese.

Norio Sekibe set up his cheesery in Nakasatsunai village on the Tokachi Plain in 2000.

Three years into his career at a major dairy manufacturer, just as the job was getting interesting, a competitor launched a rival product offered at just half the price. As a result, Sekibe's company quit producing cheese. Sekibe took over the unneeded equipment, quit the

company and, with his third son, Takanori, started a cheese plant with a focus on camembert. The deciding factor for location was the delicious water served at a restaurant there. With even mains water of such quality, he was sure that cows there would give delicious milk.

Don't work with bloomy rind cheese!

Sekibe remembers "When I first started learning about cheese making in the 1990s, I was taught by a Frenchman, Mr. Yvrand. He told me, 'It's still too soon for bloomy rind cheese (like Brie and Camembert) in Japan. Don't try it.'" So why do it anyway?

"I like that kind of cheese, it's really hard to make. The mold is a living thing, you see. But that's also the interesting part, and where I thought I could compete with similar products from the big makers. It also makes for quick product turnover."

So his fascination with making this kind of cheese took hold in his fifties. "In France, they spray the mold onto the surface of the cheese, as they say you get bitter flavors if you mix it into the milk. But I mixed it in



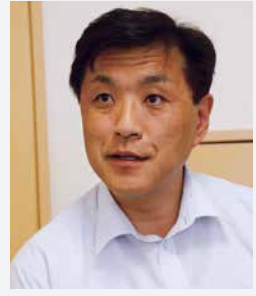
a. Local grass-roots support has led to many opportunities for the cheese maker. b. The shop pictured was renewed in 2010, at the same time as the new production center with sightseeing and seminar facilities was opened next door. c. The Tokachino Fromage trademark: not a weathercock, but a "weathercow". d. Back from left: Brie de Tokachi, Raclette. On cheese board, clockwise from left: "Bourbon Wash"; "Oishii Camembert" ("Delicious Camembert"); "Beru Ne-ju" (Belle Neige, "Beautiful Snow"). Sliced is a 120g (4oz) portion of the Brie. Right front: cream cheese; right center; Camembert preserved in sweet miso (soybean paste).



e. Sekibe has used electrolyzed water for washing and cleaning since 2000, and has cleared the HACCP guidelines set by Hokkaido Prefecture. f. Sekibe explains; "Even the same white mold gives a different taste depending on the size of the cheese". g. The cheese is wrapped so that air can circulate and the cheese can still breathe. h. The white mold variety is selected so as not to grow too long or too short.



The current chairman, Norio Sekibe. His down-to-earth way of talking reflects his personality.



His eldest son, Junya, currently president. He joined the company in his 40s, when he was a middle-school teacher, after being invited by his father.



The third son, Takanori, who is head of the cheese-making shop. He was a car mechanic into his twenties, when his father put him to work with high hopes of his dexterity.

anyway, and it turned out well," Sekibe says with a twinkle in his eye. He aimed to make a bloomy rind cheese with a mild flavor to appeal to Japanese tastes. His first customers were the locals.

"They welcomed me to their area, the farmers supplied me with delicious milk, and people spread the word about my cheese. I would never have managed it on my own, so I have nothing but gratitude for them." Looking back at history, development in Tokachi was driven by the cooperation of the civilian settler population, unlike the other regions of Hokkaido where development was directed by the bureaucracy. This may be why the people here tend to help each other out, cooperating even beyond the narrow bounds of specific occupations.

The next phase is already beginning

This kind of cooperation is evident in the cheese plant. Takanori, the mainstay of production since the

foundation of the company, had long wanted to make raclette cheese. This dream came true recently, adding another string to the firm's bow. His father then immediately gave him a further project: "Next is blue cheese." Takanori breezily accepted the challenge, and clearly enjoys the making of a living thing like cheese.

The eldest son, Junya, took over as President of the company in 2012. A former teacher, he says "Both teaching and the work of spreading the word about dairy products (which you might say are a symbol of Tokachi) are rewarding tasks contributing to the community." He explains his future ambitions like this: "While continuing to refine the taste and brand established by my father, I want to respond to the needs of the day by making more kinds of cheese." The Chairman as idea man, the President with his hand on the tiller, and the production chief, reliable maker of fine cheese. The quiet harmony amongst the three family members gives an impression of stability like a huge tree, roots spreading deep in the earth, and with wide-spreading branches.

Aiming for flavor and aroma to appeal to Japanese taste

The washed-rind cheese of
Hand-made cheese Nasu no mori
(Tochigi Prefecture)



738-4 Toda,
Nasushiobara, Tochigi
Tel 0287-73-5420
<https://nasunomori.jp/>

Making cheese while listening to the customer's voice

"Welcome, please taste some cheese." Today at the Nasu no mori cheesery, Ayumi Oshima, the person in charge of making their "Nasu Brown" cheese, is looking after customers with a practiced manner, dressed in her factory whites.

"Here, anyone who is free serves customers, all of us. Talking to customers gives us ideas, and when they say they enjoy the cheese, it really gives us energy."

At Nasu no mori, each employee is assigned the production of one of three cheeses. Oshima learned how to make Nasu Brown from her predecessor, and is in her third year in charge of this cheese.

The making of Nasu no mori's "Nasu Brown"



1. The milk that arrived the previous day is pasteurized for 30 minutes at 63 °C (145°F).
2. When it has cooled to 34 - 35 °C (93-95°F), lactic acid bacteria are added, then rennet is added to coagulate the milk.
3. The coagulated milk curds are sliced in the vat and left to stand for a while. Later, the curds are thoroughly stirred, causing the liquid portion, whey, to drain off.
4. The curds are put in cloth-lined molds.
5. The molds are repeatedly turned upside down, and the cheese is then removed after the eighth inversion.
6. The following day, salt weighing 1.8% of the cheese's weight is rubbed onto it.
7. The cheese is washed with salt water throughout the 3 or 4 weeks of aging. This removes damaging bacteria while encouraging the growth of the necessary *B. linens* variety on the surface of the cheese.

Every day she makes detailed records of times, pH and so on as she works, but even this information is not enough on its own to manage the curds which harden in a slightly different way every day. There is nothing for it but to gain experience by watching and touching. "But that's also the interesting part. When you are in charge of everything from start to finish, it's really fun to see the changes caused by the growing mold and *B. linens* bacteria," she says.

Japanese people's taste has changed

Apart from the owner, Kazuhiko Ochiai, the four staff of Nasu no mori are all women. "Ultimately, the member of staff for each particular cheese came to be the one who had a feel for it. Cheese is a living thing, and making it needs a lot of concentration. I find women are very good at it."

Ochiai started the plant in 2008. Originally a researcher at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries who visited stock farms all over the country, he had been able to have a few tries at cheese making. In those days, he always found himself thinking "I'd like to make tasty cheese myself after I retire." He



a. The new cheese-making plant, which was completed in spring 2019. Milk churns are casually placed in front of the chic one-story structure built amongst the greenery of the woods. b. Each person is in charge of one kind of cheese, but everyone helps out when speed is important. c. Times, temperatures, pH and such figures are always noted and recorded at key points. "I think about the next stage after looking at these figures," says Oshima. d. Test production of original local cheese. Ongoing experiments include isolating lactic acid bacteria from traditional Tochigi preserved vegetables for use in making a semi-hard cheese, and pairings with local beer and sake.



CEO of Nasu no mori, Kazuhiko Ochiai (right), and designated maker of Nasu Brown cheese, Ayumi Oshima. She says "Making cheese is really fun, just one discovery after another. At the moment, I'm aiming to make less smelly cheese." Ochiai says, "I hope she will further train her palate, and make the cheese which tastes best to her."



e. In front is Nasu Brown, 20cm (8in) in diameter. Moving clockwise, Brie de Nasu, Caciocavalla, Filata stick cheese, semi-hard Mori no Cheese. f. Brie de Nasu being matured. g. Semi-hard Mori no Cheese. The one in the foreground is two weeks old. Usually aged for four months or more, but eight or ten months' maturation gives still richer flavor. h. The milk used is from Brown Swiss cows, bought under contract from a local farm.

decided on the Nasu region, one of the nation's top dairy production centers, rented some land and raised Brown Swiss cattle, from whose milk he made cheese until five years ago. He carried his cheese around to local shops and business gatherings for people to try, and production increased. Now he buys milk from Brown Swiss and Holstein cows and uses them according to which cheese is being made.

It looked as if the plant was off to a smooth start, but the nuclear accident resulting from the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 was a great blow. He had to measure for radioactivity and ship the cheese with certification for two years.

"But the fact that more and more people support domestic natural cheese proved to be a following wind. You can see that more and more people are happy to eat pungent washed-rind type cheeses, and this shows that Japanese people's tastes are in a process of rapid change."

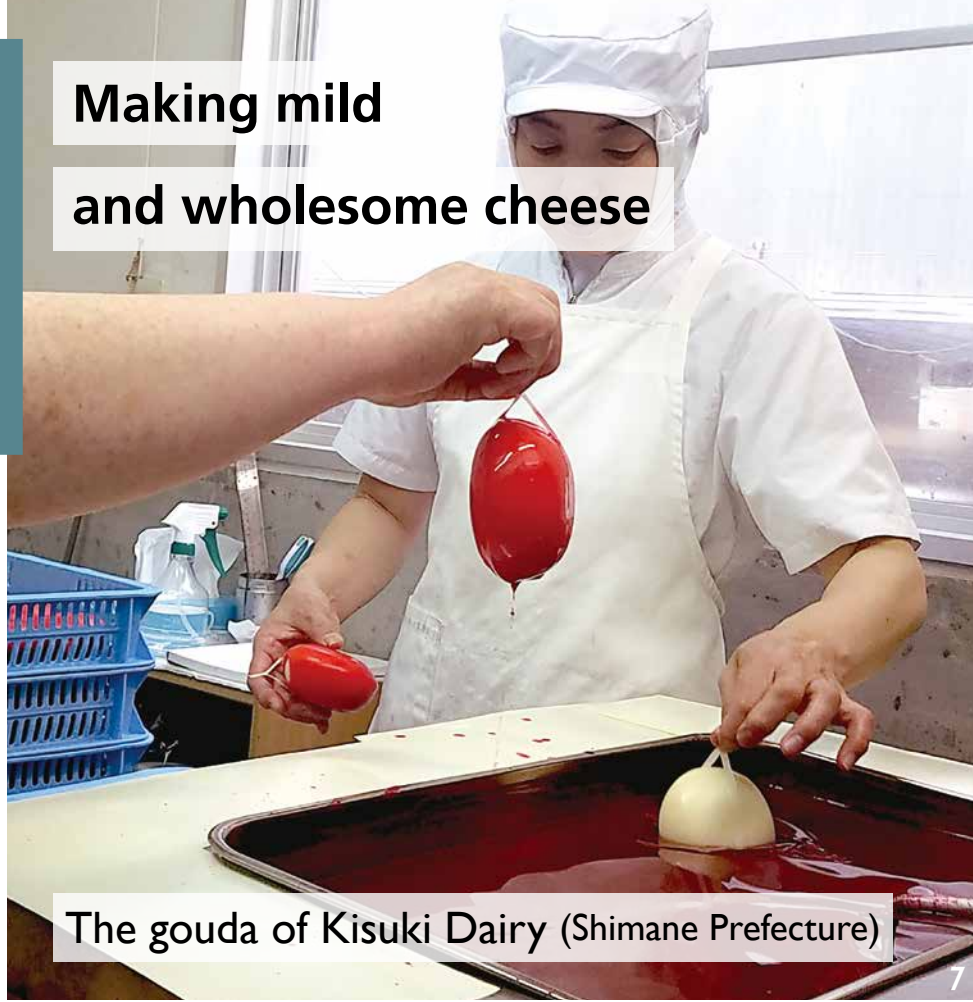
It's important to show people how to enjoy the cheese

Aside from the skills of the workers Ochiai has put in charge, the great strength of Nasu no mori is that they make their cheese while talking to customers and hearing their responses every day. It goes without saying that they taste each batch of cheese, but they also taste other producers' products and discuss packaging, and so are constantly updating the state of information in their company. From the point of view of the customer, it is also reassuring to be able to see the cheese being made on site.

Ochiai's current project is the development of a cheese original to the area. He says he aims for a cheese which would go with sake and be a natural part of Japanese cuisine.

"For example, we recommend the local specialty vegetables, daikon radish and turnip, parboiled then oven-baked with our Nasu Brown on top. Fish is good this way, too."

Making mild and wholesome cheese



The gouda of Kisuki Dairy (Shimane Prefecture)



228-2 Higashihinobori, Kisuki, Unnan, Shimane
Tel 0854-42-0445
<http://www.kisuki-milk.co.jp/>

Making safe and reliable food products

Here in a mountainous part of the Chugoku region is a dairy producer that pioneered natural cheese making around 40 years ago. Amidst the confused state of Japanese agriculture after the war, farmer Chukichi Sato aimed to grow safe and reliable food products and to supply them directly to consumers. To this end, he founded Kisuki Dairy. In 1978, he was acclaimed as the first person in Japan to introduce pasteurization: sterilizing milk at low temperatures in order to preserve its inherent flavor and characteristics. This kind of pasteurization leaves the microorganisms necessary for cheese production intact, so the firm quickly put its hand to cheese making.

The making of Kisuki Dairy's Izumo La Rouge



1. The milk is sterilized (pasteurized) at 72°C (162°F) for 15 seconds. First, lactic acid bacteria are added, and then rennet is added to coagulate the milk.
2. Once the milk has hardened into curds, it is cut into small pieces with a wire cutter and left to stand for a while, after which it is stirred to release the liquid whey.
3. The curds are collected, then cut into the size of individual cheeses.
4. The blocks of curd are put into mini-gouda molds.
5. The molds are stacked into cylindrical cases and pressed from above.
6. The cheeses are transferred to a water bath, then to a vat of salt water the next day, then the surfaces are dried.
7. The following day each cheese is dipped, first in white, then in red wax, then aged for two months.



The company motto was "Making foods that go with healthy living". That being the case, its products had to be easily accepted and enjoyed by all from the very young to the very old. Having created a range of such products, Sato had his eye on one particular young person. This was Eiji Kawamoto, who had joined the company on returning home from Tokyo after giving up his dream of being a rock musician.

Making cheese with an impact

"Cheese is a job for an artist. That is you."
After being told this, Kawamoto was put in charge of cheese making a year after joining the company. That was twenty-two years ago. Then, when he found out that there were contests for cheese making, his enthusiasm was fired. "I'm going to be the champion at this."
In the course of many struggles and disappointments, his mild-flavored standard, Izumo La Rouge (a miniature gouda), and other products won successive prizes. But he longed for higher honors and set to



a. The outer reaches of Unnan City where Kisuki Dairy is located are ringed by steep mountains. The milk for their products is sourced from the dairy farmers which are scattered along the Hiikawa River valley. **b.** The milk used for cheese making is of the highest quality in the region.



c/d. The whole company supports budding farms like this one, the "Farm with a View of the Dam". **e.** At the company's own Hinobori Ranch, they took the Japanese landscape into account and were the first in the country to buy the mountain-raised Brown Swiss breed as dairy cows.



f. "I was thrilled to see what had been milk in the morning turn into cheese by nightfall." Kawamoto, two other male and three female production staff work with this initial enthusiasm in mind. **g/h.** Izumo la Rouge (mini-Gouda) cheeses drying before being coated with wax, and Old Gouda awaiting its maturation for 12 months or more.



Kisuki Dairy Production Section, Acting Section Chief, Eiji Kawamoto, born 1968. "I would be delighted if my successors' own struggles also led them to see the importance of making mild, approachable cheese."



i. From the top left; Mozzarella, Old Gouda. Second row, from left: Camembert Izumo, Black Pepper Gouda, Izumo la Rouge (mini-Gouda). Front row from left: Yamata no Orochi-zu (a pun on the name of the Yamata no Orochi monster of Shimane mythology and chi-zu (cheese)), "Natural Snacker", Provolone.

develop new products with greater impact. He wanted to show the world his skills by making even one really exceptional cheese.

Proof of that kind of skill is naturally an advantage for the company, which welcomed his enthusiasm. Within a few years, Kawamoto had mastered his Old Gouda, a big, thoroughly matured cheese, and this won top prizes in a number of competitions. "But," he goes on, "by that stage I had already realized there were more important things than competitions."

It is because it is "everyday" food that it must be made with care

Essentially, food is meant to sustain people's health. That being the case, making cheese of consistent

taste and quality is a more important part of the job than making amazing prize-winners.

What really brought this home to Kawamoto was when he became father to a baby born at much less than normal weight. Watching his child, slow to grow and prone to illness, felt like walking on thin ice every day. Thinking of the growing child's health, he would say "Drink your milk, eat your cheese." Then, one day, he watched a TV documentary about a small, sick child. While he was sympathetically watching the mother feeding the child, he noticed his company's products behind her. "It brought home to me the role of the foods we make."

"We are making cheese to keep people healthy, so our role is to make it as easy and approachable for as many as possible. Our hope is that people will spread the word so that we will see cheese on their tables and as part of their daily diet just like rice."

This is the philosophy he came to after ten years' struggle.