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sustainable japan

Japan President Bernardino aims for company to lead on sustainability

Puratos: Good food, good company, better future

Name: Jean-Pierre Bernardino
Title: President & Representative Director, Area General Manager for North-East Asia
URL: <https://www.puratos.co.jp/ja>
Hometown: Lisbon
Years in Japan: Over 30

Leaders & Readers

LOUISE GEORGE KITAKA
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For Jean-Pierre Bernardino, there is nothing quite like working in an industry that connects people with good food, which as he points out is "the essence of human life." Moreover, Puratos is a company that is firmly committed to sustainability at every step of the manufacturing process, and Bernardino is keen to see the Japanese side of the business become a leader in this aspect.

Bernardino's earliest encounters with Japanese culture were through watching anime as a child growing up in Portugal. Later he went on to learn Japanese at business school in France, and spent a year studying in Tokyo as part of his program. Since graduation he has worked for various international companies here in Japan, building a career primarily in the food and beverage industry.

Puratos produces ingredients for bakery, patisserie and chocolates and celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019. Headquartered in Belgium, it has a presence in over 100 countries and more than 9,000 employees around the world.

"I think Puratos is unique because it's an international company but yet is still a fam-

ily business. That allows for a special atmosphere we call 'Puratos magic,' which gives a high level of autonomy to people wherever they work, particularly in the subsidiaries like here in Japan," Bernardino explained.

"While there are, of course, global corporate guidelines and policies in place, each local company has a lot of flexibility to adapt to the specific needs of the local markets," he said.

"We have a long history in R&D, both at headquarters and in each country, which makes us very innovative, not just in terms of taste but in all areas of functionality," Bernardino said. "Locally we have everything: Production, product development, marketing, technical support — the full set of functions of the company. Food is very local, and the specifics of each market in terms of customer requirements and the legislation are unique, so this approach works very well."

Bernardino notes that sustainability is of paramount importance to Puratos, from responsible sourcing of raw materials to water treatment and carbon neutrality initiatives (CO2 neutral by 2025). He is particularly proud of the company's signature sustainability initiative, Cacao-Trace, which partners with farmers in the countries that produce the cacao for Puratos, empowering them to produce the best possible product and redefining standards for chocolate.

The initiative started in Vietnam and has now spread to Cote d'Ivoire, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Uganda and Mexico.

"The principle is that we buy the cacao directly from the farmers, with post-harvest centers close to the production site where we can master the fermentation. This results in the best-quality cacao and the best-tasting

chocolate," he explained. "Moreover, we also pay a fair price to the farmers — usually above market price — and offer them the security of knowing we will buy a certain volume each year. Farmers also receive a bonus for every kilo of Cacao-Trace chocolate that is sold."

At the same time, agricultural training is offered to support the farmers in caring for their cacao trees, teaching techniques for fertilizing, pest control and pruning. "We give them the knowledge to produce better cacao, and this produces better-tasting products, so it's a win-win situation," Bernardino said.

The commitment to the cacao farmers extends to their families and neighbors through the Next Generation Cacao Foundation, which contributes to economic and social development. For example, the foundation offers educational scholarships for farmers' children and builds schools and other resources that benefit the local community.

A separate initiative with similar goals is the Bakery School Foundation, which was established in 2014 to provide quality education in developing countries for young people aspiring to be bakers or pastry chefs. There are currently Puratos supported bakery schools in India, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and Romania, and already hundreds of students have graduated and secured employment in their chosen fields.

Bernardino and his management team are committed to rolling out the Cacao-Trace initiative in Japan for around 80% of the volume by 2023. While noting that this is much higher than in most other markets, he feels it is very important to raise aware-



HIROMICHI MATONO

Personal motto: 'Never give up'

Jean-Pierre Bernardino was born and raised in Lisbon, Portugal. He graduated from the HEC Paris School of Business in France in 1989. Having spent a year at Tokyo's Hitotsubashi University as a student, he sought a position that would allow him to make the most of his Japanese-language skills, subsequently working for L'Oréal both in France and Japan. He went on to hold positions with Danone Japan and Red Bull Japan before joining Puratos in 2008. He currently wears two hats as the president and representative director and as the area general manager for Northeast Asia. Bernardino has also served as director of the Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Japan since 2009. In his spare time he enjoys cooking and gardening, and he cites "never give up" as the personal motto that has guided him in his career to date.

its past.' Bread used to taste fantastic, then it became rather impersonal with mass production, but sourdough brings back that good taste, and now more and more interesting types of breads are being seen here in Japan," Bernardino explained.

With a commitment to health and well-being, Puratos is continually seeking ways to incorporate products with less fat and sugar and more grain and fruit into its lineup. Another initiative is Plant Forward, which aims to offer solutions for the growing number of customers who want plant-based alternatives for their sweets and baking products.

As might be expected, Bernardino enjoys sweets and names "simple and old-fashioned fruit tarts" as one of his favorites. He also loves to cook, and prepares dinner nearly every night for his family. "One special thing I like to prepare is a Portuguese fish dish, where you mix octopus and squid with tomato, paprika and onion, and stew them in a sauce with coriander. It is very tasty!" he said with a smile.

ness of sustainability issues in Japan and to demonstrate the company's commitment.

"When people are informed about the issues that exist in the fairness of the distribution of value, they are supportive," he said. "We want to make Japan an early adoption pioneer. We believe it can enhance our image as a company which is making a difference and bringing a new

dimension to the world of food."

Puratos is also bringing its expertise in bread-making to Japan through the rich taste of its sourdough. Bernardino points out that Japan has become the biggest Asian market for bread in terms of consumption, and that people are continually seeking unique flavors and textures.

"We say that 'the future of bread lies in

Nihonryori Yukimoto

Kaiseki cuisine with confidence from the mountain and river



ROBBIE SWINNERTON
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Takayuki Hagiwara opened his new restaurant right across the road from where his father made his name as a chef, he was determined to stick with tradition. Rather than changing to the increasingly popular kappo format, with counter seating and an open kitchen, he kept with the layout that he feels works best: serving guests in individual private rooms.

That didn't mean he was looking to the past. Quite the opposite: Inside and out, the now 5-year-old Nihonryori Yukimoto in Iida (southern Nagano Prefecture) displays a marriage of traditional aesthetics with contemporary architecture, perfectly reflecting Hagiwara's style of kaiseki cuisine.

Besides learning under his father, Hagiwara trained at the renowned Shofukuro, both in Shiga Prefecture and at its branch in central Tokyo. He says those three years taught him plenty, not just about cooking but the importance of having close contact with produce suppliers, something he felt was lacking in the metropolis.

He also gained confidence from realizing that guests will come, regardless of how out of the way the location (whether



Shiga or Iida), if they know they will eat well. At Nihonryori Yukimoto, Hagiwara's cuisine is excellent, intricate and assured.

One of his calling cards is his use of mushrooms, sansai (wild plants) and game meat that are foraged and hunted in the nearby mountains. His nabe hotpot of bear meat and wild herbs has become a

SHUICHI ABE
 NAGANO GOV.



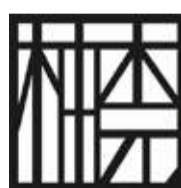
Nagano Prefecture is one of the world's top regions in terms of health and longevity. It is said that one of the secrets to this is a diet rich in agricultural and livestock products.

We have heard that Takayuki Hagiwara of Yukimoto places great importance on local ingredients, and we rejoice to see various Nagano regional ingredients linked to good health and longevity being so employed.

We hope you will enjoy the cuisine that has been refined by Mr. Hagiwara's skills and sensibilities while preserving the tradition of kaiseki cuisine.



Address
 Nihonryori Yukimoto
 2-43 Towata-cho, Iida,
 Nagano Pref. 395-0086,
 Japan
<https://yukimoto-hanare.com/>



signature dish, but guests can also expect fish such as ayu (sweetfish) and iwana (char) from the Tenryu River, which runs through the city.

Although the rooms at Nihonryori Yukimoto have traditional tatami mats, for comfort all are fitted with tables and chairs.

TAKESHI SATO
 IIDA MAYOR



We sincerely congratulate the Japanese restaurant Yukimoto for being selected for the "Japanese restaurant list for people from around the world, chosen by Japanese people." The restaurant has been actively involved in the Regional Production for Regional Consumption food education program, which connects people with local resources, including local ingredients. We hope that you will visit Iida, in the Minami Shinshu region, and experience the four seasons of Japan with its seasonal tastes, traditional techniques and rich food culture.

A starry rice is born: How Tottori created the unique Hoshizoramai

ESG/SDGs

MAIKO MURAOKA
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Tottori Prefecture in the Chugoku region is known as the least populous prefecture in Japan, blessed with a wealth of nature. Thanks to its clean air, the Milky Way can be observed from any city, town or village. This is why a new brand of rice produced in Tottori was named Hoshizoramai, meaning "starry sky dance," with the "mai" playing on one pronunciation for the kanji meaning "rice."

Hoshizoramai is shiny and sweet, with a firmer texture than other kinds of rice, so you taste each grain separately rather than as a sticky mass. When cooked, it holds a lot of water, which means it is less likely to turn dry and hard when cold. From a farmer's point of view, its high tolerance for summer heat is a big advantage.

For consumers, having a new rice option is welcome, but it is not easy for Tottori producers to develop and sell a new brand of rice in Japan when there are already a number of brands from prefectures that are better known for rice. The Japan Times Satoyama Consortium interviewed Mikimaro Takagi and Hiroki Nakamura from the Division of Crop Science at Tottori Agricultural Experiment Station online on Sept. 10 to find out why and how the rice was developed.

The research and development started more than three decades ago when Shunji Hashimoto, the former director of the division, decided to make a new kind of rice that is strong and delicious, drawing on his own experience of having

been born in a farming family and seen the struggles of rice producers. Takagi explained that excessive heat may discolor rice, and strong winds like typhoons may knock down rice plants. The fungal disease blast is also a big enemy for rice growers.

Development of a new brand of rice starts from interbreeding existing kinds. There was already Yumesorara, a brand that had been produced in Tottori for more than a decade. Nakamura explained that the purpose of making Yumesorara was to improve Koshihikari, one of the most well-known brands of rice produced across Japan, to improve the lodging resistance by making the plants shorter. But Yumesorara was weak against heat and blast.

To overcome this, they cross-bred Yumesorara with yet another kind of rice, Sasanishiki BL1, not just once but five times to achieve a stable and satisfying quality. "What we did exactly is that we cross-bred Yumesorara and Sasanishiki, and we crossed Yumesorara again to the result of the first cross-breeding, and on like that for five times altogether," Nakamura explained.

However, the process of making a new brand of rice does not end there — there is the final and most important phase of actually planting the new rice and making sure its qualities are stable. "To do this final research and testing, we have to plant each rice plant separately by hand to make it possible to recognize and inspect each one. Rice-planting machines cannot do this. They plant several seedlings in a bundle, so we cannot distinguish one seedling from another," Nakamura explained.



To develop a new stable and heat-resistant kind of rice, Yumesorara and Sasanishiki were cross-bred multiple times, leading to the creation of Hoshizoramai.
 TOTTORI AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION



A field of Hoshizoramai in Tottori Prefecture
 TOTTORI AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

The cultivation of Hoshizoramai, the result of 30 years of effort, started four years ago on just 5 hectares of land. Now it is being produced on 1,254 hectares at 1,988 farms. So far, farmers have evaluated it highly.

Takagi explained that the harvesting time for Hoshizoramai is slightly different from those of other kinds of rice produced in the area, which is helpful for farmers who do not have enough manpower to harvest all their fields at once. "Many farmers grow multiple kinds of rice for this reason, as well as to spread out the risk of diseases such as blast," Takagi said. Growing Hoshizoramai is beneficial for farms because its ability to maintain stable quality without suffering much impact from summer heat ensures stable prices.

In the last few years, an association to promote branded rice was established, and study groups focusing on rice production were formed in the prefecture's three agricultural cooperatives to encourage farmers to exchange ideas and experiences. The launch of Hoshizoramai has helped stimulate the whole rice-farming industry in Tottori, and its market is expanding outside the prefecture starting with Japan's major cities, including Tokyo, Osaka and Fukuoka.

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Destination Restaurants 2021 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

