

Meats

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DEMAND FOR PLANT PROTEIN PRODUCTS IS EXPANDING WITH RISING INTEREST IN VEGETARIANISM AND VEGANISM

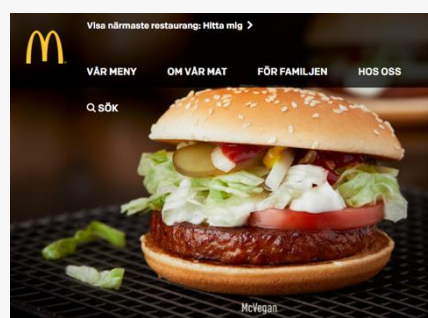
The travel magazine “Travel Journal” has estimated that of the 28.7 million foreigners who visited Japan in 2017, around 1.34 million were vegetarians. That’s nearly 5% of all inbound foreigners. Compared to demand for halal meat, which is attracting attention in the inbound market, that surpasses the roughly 790,000 Muslims (440,000 Malaysians and 350,000 Indonesians) who visited Japan.

If we assume an average stay of a week, eating three meals a day at JPY1,500 per meal, that comes to dining expenditure of JPY42.2 billion in Japan by visiting vegetarians and vegans. It appears that the hotel and restaurant industries will absolutely need to make a commensurate response in future.

Looking around the world, fast food giant McDonald's started selling its “McVegan” vegan burger in Finland and Sweden in December 2017. Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) is working on developing menu items using chicken substitute ingredients. KFC in Britain is working to reduce calories per meal by 20% per meal by 2025, and it is developing menu items using meat substitutes as part of that effort.



Photo from McDonald website



McVegan

<Meat substitute moves>

In Japan, food supermarkets are setting up sections for low-sugar and gluten-free foods, expanding the available shelf space, and foods using soybean protein are expanding their presence. “Soy meat”, which can be used as a meat substitute, looks just like meat from

the outside when cooked as hamburger or fried in batter. Around 1,000 recipes using “soy meat” had been posted to the major recipe site Cookpad by mid June. Other than the usual hamburgers, there is a diverse range of recipe ideas, such as ginger stir fry, sweet and sour pork, and double-cooked pork.

Other than the reasons of being healthful and low-calorie, there is also growth in the numbers of products that are close to the real thing in flavor and texture. That trend began when the talked-about “mystery meat” in Cup Noodle Products by Nissin Food Products was announced to be a mince made by blending pork with soybean meat, vegetables, other ingredients, and flavorings. Nissin is now researching technology for raising the proportion of soybean meat in the blend. Maybe one day, there will be Cup Noodles with “mystery meat” that doesn’t use meat at all.

Plant protein products are broadening beyond meat substitutes into milk substitutes. In April this year, the soybean processed food manufacturer Sagamiya Foods launched “Beyond Tofu”, which attracted attention as “tofu with a mouth feel just like cheese”. This tofu, 100% vegetable in origin, was developed on the concept of “tofu that goes beyond tofu”. It uses low-fat soy milk and absolutely no dairy products, to produce a mouth feel and texture that are hard to believe come from tofu.



Beyond Tofu

<“Veggie Lunch” in the Cabinet Office staff canteen>

Let’s take a look at a unique effort by the Cabinet Office to keep up with food diversification. Since March 2017, the staff canteen has been offering a “Veggie Lunch”

every Friday. It is actually a vegan lunch, using absolutely no ingredients of animal origin.

The Veggie Lunch on the day this reporter visited (June 8, 2018) was

Chilled buckwheat noodles with wild vegetables and grated radish

Vegetable tempura

Soimusu



Veggie Lunch JPY700
 Chilled buckwheat noodles with wild vegetables and grated *radish*, vegetable tempura, *soimusu*



The photo shows *soimusu* at the front and vegetable tempura behind

The dipping sauce for the buckwheat noodles uses stock made from kombu kelp and shiitake mushrooms. The tempura consists of squash, eggplant, and lotus root as individual items, and a mixed fry of broad beans, onion, bitter melon, and sweetcorn. The soimusu, made with soy meat, was making its first appearance as an official menu item after being commercially developed.

The Cabinet Office staff canteen offers around 10 varieties of lunch menu, with most priced at around JPY400-500, but the Veggie Lunch costs JPY700. The canteen opens at 11:30, and the Veggie Lunch usually sells out by around 12:40 every week. This time, it sold out in record time, by 12:10. This high level of demand indicates that many people are picking the Veggie Lunch out of concern for their health.

The introduction of this Veggie Lunch was prompted by calls from vegetarian staff worried about response to food diversification in the run-up to 2020, and from staff concerned about health. The canteen operation company manager was skeptical at first but, on seeing the high level of demand for vegetarian and vegan meals, said “It’s fun to devise Veggie Lunch menus now. I have decided to use this experience to introduce a vegetarian menu, using no animal ingredients, at the buckwheat noodle restaurant company in our corporate group”.

The Japanese government has set a target of JPY8 trillion, double the 2016 level, for the value of consumption by visitors to Japan in 2020, the year of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. Taking action to meet the ever-growing diversification of food needs is expected to be a great opportunity for food manufacturers, and the hotel and restaurant industries.

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