

Wakayama Prefectural Government

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AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES DEPARTMENT



Q: Please introduce yourself and tell us about the roles and activities of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Department.

My name is Yasuo Hara and I am an executive director of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Department of Wakayama Prefectural Government. We plan promotional strategies for the agriculture, forestry and fishery industries of Wakayama Prefecture and work on it every day. I myself was born as a son of a *mikan* (mandarin orange) farmer. My life has always been deeply connected with agriculture and this is my 2th year as an executive director. The role of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Department is to promote agriculture, forestry, and fishery industries. In order to pursue this role, international market development is an important issue for us in addition to the domestic market. We take up new strategies that cover all fields of agriculture, forestry, and fishery of Wakayama, including the designation of our *ume* (Japanese apricot) production region as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System, or widely announcing the great functions of Wakayama products using clear explanations.

The agriculture of Wakayama Prefecture is highly dependent on its fruit trees. Wakayama's production value of *mikan*, *ume*, and persimmon are number one in Japan. For this reason,

Wakayama is popularly known as the fruit kingdom. In addition, production value of green peas and *sumomo* (plum) is number two in Japan. Our businesses are mainly revolved around fruits and vegetables. As the “Sextiary Sector” strategy, fruit farms produce value-added products such as jams and juices from their fruits, which help increase their income.

We also focus on the functional ingredients of agricultural and fishery products. *Ume* especially contains nutrition that is good for your body. The same thing could be said for *mikan* and persimmons. There is a booklet with a list of functional ingredients that we widely distribute. As for international development, we want to put effort into our sales promotion in Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore in which we are already doing some local promotion. At Foodex, we engage in business matching with buyers. The export volume is steadily growing by promoting the high quality Wakayama products. From the hope to provide safe and delicious products to our customers, we promote our products using the phrase, “Delicious! Healthy Wakayama”. A wide variety of fruits are produced in Wakayama. As a prefecture well suited for agricultural production, we proudly present our peaches, *mikan*, *ume*, and persimmons as high quality products with great potential in the international market.



Q: We've heard that there are items from Wakayama that professional chefs from overseas are showing strong interest in.

Budo sansho (type of Japanese pepper) are popular. We're seeing signs of a new trend forming in Europe. Some of the top chefs in the world are beginning to use *sansho* in a way we have never imagined. Also, the products are being arranged to meet the local taste. For example, *ume* is used as *ume* paste. It is better accepted if it has health benefits. Fresh products are difficult to deliver due to the long distance. By processing it, the product can be delivered to other countries. Recipe development is also important. In Italy, we are doing a processed *ume* promotion and would like to give it a boost.

Q: What kind of sales and promotion activities are you engaged in?

We want to introduce high quality products to the international market and avoid price competition. By selling high quality products, the brand will get fixed in the market. We want to start with the best quality products and move down from there. Since Wakayama products have no issues with quality, we want to focus on the way of selling those products. Background stories are very important for processed products. In Hong Kong, we are currently teaching consumers how to make *ume* juice. By teaching ways of making *ume* wine and juice, or in other words teaching a processing technique, customers will purchase the *ume*. We are thinking of different approaches and ways of introducing products that meet the local culture and taste. Since taste, aesthetics, and ideas towards fruits are different in each country, we believe it is necessary to create a comprehensive structure that will allow the local customers to accept the product.

This is my personal opinion, but we should disregard any preconceptions since the degree of sweetness or sourness is different in each person. The most important part is the approach or procedure that would help the product become accepted by the local people. Lifestyle related diseases are a serious issue in Europe and the US. We are searching for an approach to tie health with eating habits.

Q: Wakayama Prefecture exhibits in Foodex every year. In the previous show, the newly established “Organic & Wellness” section was a great success. Do you consider exhibiting in this section?

Umeboshi (pickled *ume*) is a common way of eating *ume* in Japan, but from abroad, this is viewed as dried fruits in some cases. It is consumed as *karikari-ume* (crispy *ume*), or dried plums. The way of eating is different. By changing the way of eating, we can sell the *ume*. The number one consumption volume of ketchup in the world is the US, and in Japan is Wakayama. You can see similarities. By producing ketchup with *ume*, it will become an added-value product with antioxidant effects and rich in polyphenol. Looking for similarities in food culture is one idea. Adding plums in hamburgers will create a healthy meal. It is important to add cultural elements into our sales strategies. For example, the price competition with local products will become an issue if we sell juice. But change our perspective and sell healthy drinks that have a special element of the local culture, then that would be a different story. In that sense, “Organic & Wellness” section is interesting.

Q: Do you think that menu development, recipe development, and tasting activities are the shortcut to spreading new products?

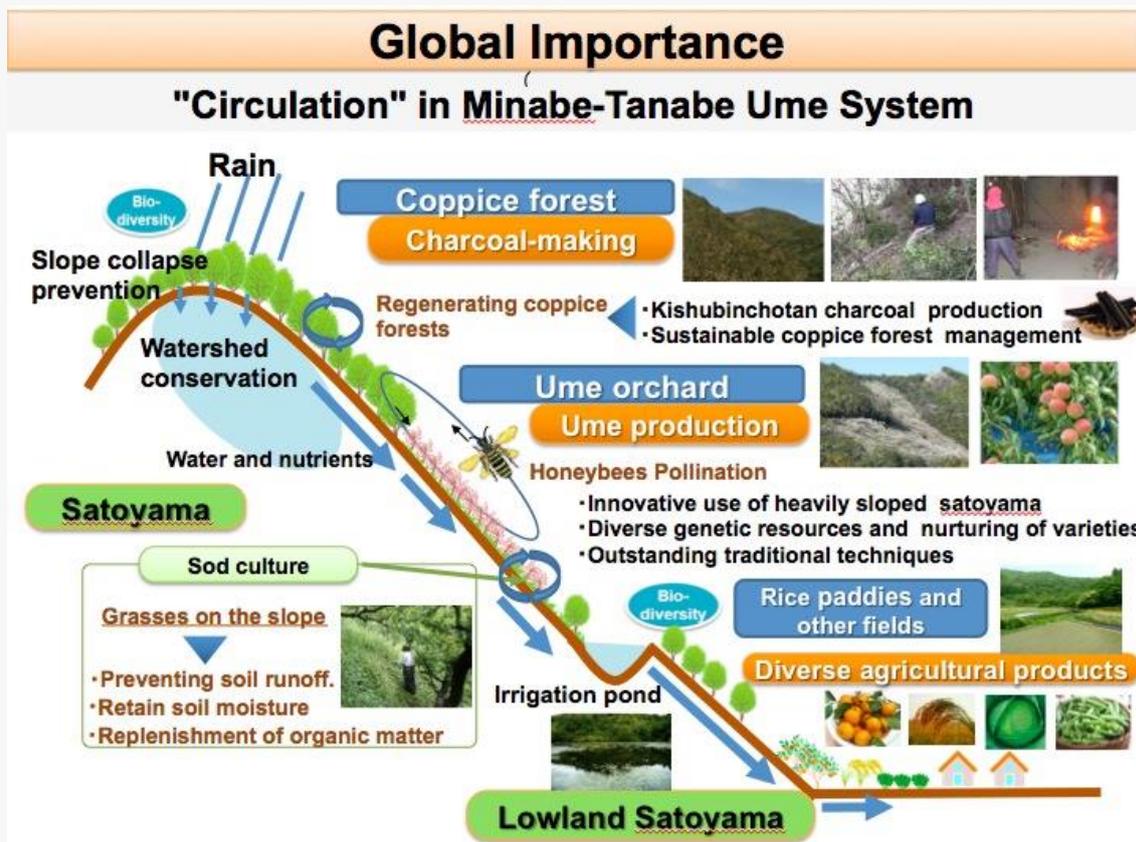
Famous chefs from Japan and abroad are working with us to develop new menus. What kind of menu using Wakayama products will be accepted locally? This is an important strategy for us. As stated earlier, the safety of Wakayama products are qualified from abroad so the way of selling will become the key.

Q: What are your impressions of Foodex?

We always think of exporting our products. The companies of Wakayama are starting to face outside of Japan. It will become a big step for Wakayama companies that are exhibiting in Foodex. As an exhibitor, companies learn and experience new things. It is also meaningful for companies working on Sextiary Sector*. By getting positive feedback from people outside of Japan, it will become an opportunity to consider expanding their business abroad.

Q; Please tell us about the Minabe-Tanabe Ume System that is designated as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System.

Minabe-Tanabe region of Wakayama has been pursuing productivity of agriculture in addition to aiming promotion of sustainable agriculture by living together with culture and nature for 400 years. Copse and fuel wood forests that produced coal are widely spread across this region and have been bread and butter of the local people. *Mikan* did not grow in this region, but wild *ume* trees grew in this region for a long time. From the hope to create a richer life by using these *ume*, the government planted *ume* trees to promote *ume* production. Preserving the fuel wood forests and trees of the mountain peak, they planted the *ume* trees in the bottom part of the mountains. Pollination of the *ume* was done by using Japanese honeybees that live in the fuel wood forests. It is remarkable that the forest, *ume* farm, and the eco system of honey bees were all conserved, and still are. There is a diverse range of cabbage farms that were created with the new water cycle. Sustainable agriculture is possible by creating a system that is not for a commercial purpose, but to preserve cultural tradition and to realize cohabitation of nature and humans. A brand called *Nanko-Ume* is produced in this way.



Q: Please tell us more about the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System.

This system was first developed in 2002 by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. It promotes conservation and sustainability of agriculture by certifying traditional and important agriculture, agricultural district culture, and agricultural landscapes that should be inherited to the next generation. As of today, 36 regions of 15 countries in the world including 8 regions in Japan have been designated.

Q: Tell us about your efforts to enter the international market.

Our main question when thinking of entering the global market is how are we going to introduce our asset of “ume system”? We want to accelerate sales promotion by emphasizing the background and story of the “ume system.” The following 5 criteria must be met to be designated as the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System.

1. Food and livelihood security
2. Biodiversity and ecosystem function
3. Knowledge systems and adapted technologies
4. Cultures, value systems and social organizations (Agri-Culture)
5. Remarkable landscapes and features of land and water resources management

This region is highly dependent on *ume* production. Even young people are earning their living through *ume*. Each farm is preserving their *ume* in salt so that they can sell it as *umeboshi* throughout the year. It is strong against natural crises. This has been inherited since the Edo period. We want to use this story of *ume* for international promotion of processed *ume* products.

***Sextiary Sector**

This is an attempt to add further values against the products from agriculture, forestry and fisheries (primary industry) by manufacturing them (secondary industry) and providing as a service (tertiary industry).