

Pavilion Organizer – Uruguay

AN INTERVIEW WITH H.E. MR. CÉSAR FERRER, AMBASSADOR OF URUGUAY



Q: Which countries were you assigned before assuming the Uruguayan Ambassador to Japan?

I had been Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary at the Uruguayan Embassy in Egypt, China, and India. I was appointed as Ambassador to Japan in September 2017 and became the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador to Japan in November of the same year. In fact, I've always wanted to come to Japan for the past 40 years. Japan has an interesting culture and history. I believe that Japan plays an important role in Uruguay's foreign policy to build a stronger relationship with Asia.

Q: Please tell us about economic relation between Uruguay and Japan.

The main products exported from Uruguay to Japan are:

- Beverage concentrate (75.7%)
- Wool (9.6%)
- Prepared or preserved meat offal and extract of meat (2.9%)
- Cigars and tobacco (2.6%)
- Wool grease (1.8%)
- Fish and other marine products (1.3%)

There are about 15 Japanese companies established in Uruguay whose operations include: production and processing (wire harness, analytical and measuring instruments and medical systems, heat shrinkable films, fresh meat etc.), logistic/sales center.

Acquisition of BPU by NH Foods in 2017 was one of the biggest news in economic relations between Uruguay-Japan. BPU is one of the leading meat processing plants in Uruguay and one of the most modern globally which exports Uruguayan beef to the U.S. and European Union markets, among others.

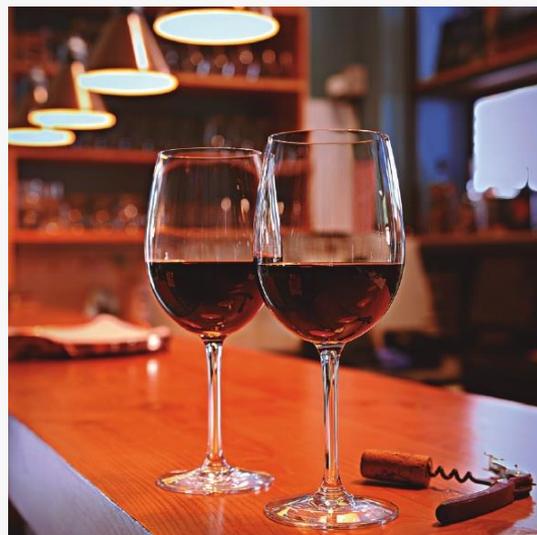
It should be highlighted that Uruguay and Japan have signed in 2017 a bilateral Agreement for the Liberalization, Promotion and Protection of Investment, which gives more assurances for Japanese investors in Uruguay.

I hope in the future, there would be more agreements like Preventing the Double Taxation (which negotiation will be started soon). The deepening of the relations between Japan and Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) will be very important to promote trade, investments and cooperation in both ways.

Q: What do you mainly export to Japan in the food and beverage sector?

We export olive oil, wine, propolis (honey in promotion) and caviar to Japan, and hopefully in near future, I hope that we can export our beef to Japan again. The process of lifting ban on the export of Uruguayan beef to Japan is now in its' final stage, after years of evaluations and studies done by technical experts of both countries in a cooperative way.

Uruguay also produce quality dairy products and I hope in the coming Foodex, there will be promotion of dairy products, especially cheese. Japan is one of the biggest importer of cheese and Uruguay is a quality cheese exporter, so I hope we can export them in near future.



Q: Are they growing? Then, why is it so?

Even though they are still small quantities, there are more Uruguayan products exported to Japan now. For example, last year, one of the wine maker who has won various awards internationally started exports and they have gained very positive comments among Japanese consumers. Although, in recent years, total export from Uruguay to Japan has decreased, when Japanese market for Uruguayan beef is opened, there will be more food producers would want to export their products to this market, so I am sure that the exports of food and beverage sector in Japan will grow.

Q: How is Japanese market regarded in your country?

For people of my country, Japanese market is a world leader for its high quality requirements and competitive environment, so to be able to sell products in the Japanese market is a source of pride.

Q: What do you see as chances and difficulties of Japan market?

Even though in Europe and in U.S. Uruguay is known as quality food producer, here in Japan, people still know less about my country as food producer. However, Japanese consumers are very curious and always looking for something new and they are very careful for what they buy, especially for what they eat.

They want to buy foods that are safe, natural, healthy and high quality. Our products meet all those conditions as we are known for traceability of our agro-products, so I think there are many chances to improve our presence in this highly competitive market.

Uruguay will participate in the Rugby World Cup 2019 and it will be a great opportunity to promote our products. Some prefectures where Uruguay's national rugby team will play have already contacted us to organize events to introduce our culture, especially gastronomy.

Q: What are your plans or strategies in order for your products to take further root into Japanese market?

As I mentioned before, Uruguay is still not widely known in Japan as quality food producer. So, first of all, we need to work hard on promoting our country. Before selling our products, we need Japanese people to know more about our country, what we produce and how we produce. I am sure that once they know more about Uruguay, Japanese consumers will highly value our food products.

Q: How do you evaluate Foodex Japan? Please share with us some of the voices or feedback from your participated companies in the Foodex.

We recognize Foodex as an essential and the most important trade fair to introduce and promote food and beverage products in Japan. Among Uruguayan producers, they share the same opinion. Each year, there are more companies that show their interests in participating. In Foodex 2018, Uruguay participated with two stands; Uruguay XXI (Export and Investment Promotion Agency) and INAC (The National Meat Institute). In Uruguay XXI's stands, 7 companies including wine, caviar, olive oil, in INAC's stand 4 meat packers and wholesaler. They all commented positively about their experience. I'm sure that there will be more participation in next Foodex.

Foodex is well organized international trade fair and offers great opportunity to present our products to Japanese buyers. Besides exhibiting our products in the stands, in Foodex 2018, the organization offered us an opportunity to organize a seminar on our country titled "Why Uruguay?" We are very happy to have that chance and it was very important to receive an interested and professional audience.



Q: Are there any restaurants in Tokyo where we can enjoy food and wine from Uruguay?

Unfortunately, at the moment, there are no restaurants in Tokyo that serves Uruguayan food, but we know that there are a couple of them in which serves wines from our country. Besides Tokyo, in Okinawa, two hotels have just included wines from one of the wineries from Uruguay to their wine list and I personally participated to the event to celebrate its launch. I hope in near future, there will be more restaurants that serves products of our country and as Ambassador, I will do everything I can to help to promote our products. I want Japanese consumers to enjoy food and beverage that are safe, natural and healthy and taste delicious.

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