

Pavilion Organizer – Denmark

AN INTERVIEW WITH H.E. MR. FREDDY SVANE, AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK



Q: The diplomatic relations between Denmark and Japan started way back in 1867, and 150th anniversary was celebrated last year. What are your expectations about future relations between the two countries?

Denmark was among the first countries to start exporting pork and dairy to Japan and we value the friendly partnership that we have developed over the years. The Danish brand is well established in Japan because we are based on a tight and long-standing partnership. “A future gateway” – the catch line for the 150th anniversary explains well that food and agriculture will be one of the main components of a stronger and closer relationship in the future.

Japan has a low self-sufficiency rate of less than 40% and we are keen to assist the Japanese farmers to increase their sufficiency. We have had a lot of exchanges for many years with Japanese farmers of JA and ZEN-NOH where they have inspection visits to see Denmark's globally competitive farming sector.

In Denmark, farmers are not only producers of the primary sector, but also owners of cooperatives that process pork meat or make milk into cheese. Whether they are big or small, they are controlling the process of the products coming from the primary sector. On top of that, we have a strong advisory service owned by the farmers, which is one of the backbones for achieving global competitiveness as a farming nation. That's something the Japanese farmers can incorporate. We would like to see Japanese food, products and produce from Japanese farmers being exported to Denmark. Whether it is cheese, beef, or pork, you have a potential here and we would like to support Japan to make that happen.



Q. How do you look at 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics?

We will always refer back to the Olympics in 1964 that shifted Japan towards maturity and infrastructure development. 2020 will definitely be a game changer for the Japanese society, but we must look beyond 2020 because the Olympics is just held for 3 weeks.

If you look into the requirements for the Olympics, few Japanese farms are in compliance with the GAP rules. Japan can utilize the Olympics and Paralympics as a platform to help revitalize the Japanese farming industry. Another part that we take interest in is to secure food sustainability surrounding the Olympics. When I go to Japanese supermarkets, the variety of meat products and vegetables is stunning, but I always think, “what’s happening to the ones that the date has expired?” How to secure 40 million tourists plus athletes coming here while avoiding food waste is one of the challenges that Japan faces.

It is important for Japan to modernize, but I have one strong wish that Japan should not be too diversified. Of course, Japan is known for the variety of food it offers – the Michelin starred restaurants and all the dishes available here. But Japanese food culture is so outstanding there is unique food culture in Japan that I want you to keep.

Q. What are the main food and beverage items exported from Denmark to Japan?

Frozen pork meat has been and will continue to be our most valuable and important export product to Japan. Frozen meat is often used by the food service industry for making tonkatsu (deep-fried pork) or shabushabu (thin-sliced meat cooked in hotpot). Although the amount of frozen pork has gone down due to the aging population of Japan, we have maintained a share of 25%. We have a very strong system when it comes to safety. If there's any disease, we instantly inform the Japanese authority such as MAFF. It requires a fair amount of investment and devotion to become a trustworthy partner and have long term relationship with Japan, but I think we have the best collaboration with Japan than any other nation when it comes to food safety.



Our meat companies in Denmark are targeting Japanese market with special cuts. If we are requested a special part of the pig, we will make specialized production lines for the Japanese food industry. The good thing is that the price is higher in Japan compared to many other places. We see better opportunities in the future. We are very pleased that volume has gone up since 2008 and food export has grown almost by 25%. We consider Japan as one of our most loyal and stable markets and this will continue in the future.

Q. How is the Japan market regarded in your country? Are there any differences with approaches to other countries such as China, Singapore etc.?

If you can sell your product in Japan, you can sell it everywhere. The demands by the Japanese consumers and authorities are second to none in the world. If you can get into the Japanese market and build up a long-term partnership, then you have a very strong persistence here. If you can meet the high requirements of food safety and health in Japan, this is a standard that can be valued globally.

Q. What do you see as difficulties of the Japanese market?

One is the issue of aging and shrinking population. Around 30% is above 65 years of age. It goes without saying that when people are older, they eat less, and would look for more convenient products. It is challenging but meeting the demands of the aging population will create more opportunities. It's a big chance for the Danish farmers.

The competition is also getting stronger. The Australian free trade agreement changed a lot of trends in the market. Australian beef, cheese, and wine came in. Despite the fact that American beef is much closer to the Japanese preference for taste and texture, the price is playing a major role here.

Q. What are your plans for Danish food to take further root into Japanese market?

To do whatever I can to optimize my outcome and opportunities of free trade, and to optimize the opportunities for the Danish companies in Japan. Securing sales and helping Danish companies achieve their goals are the biggest challenges. Free trade agreement will offer fantastic opportunities. That's why we are putting all of our efforts into it.

Q. What are your impressions of FOODEX Japan?

What I saw at the latest FOODEX is something we have been seeing in Denmark – the trend of organic food. Denmark is one of the biggest exporting countries of organic products such as milk, butter, cheese, meat, and fishery. You often get higher prices, but consumers are ready to pay that. However, it may take a few more years to see the real organic farming in Japan hitting the same level as Denmark.

One Danish company developed a special energy drink and we see a high potential for that market in Japan because of all the vending machines you have in Japan. Ingredients is included in the EPA and Japan has to follow international standards. Up until now, Japan has adopted only Japanese standards. If the Japanese industry wants to expand to outside of Japan, then you have to comply to international standards.

In the future, we see a big upside for the Japanese companies if they follow global standards. Of course if Japan follows global standards, then it's easier for our companies to export their ingredients to Japan.

It's an important trend.

Q. What do you like about Japanese food?

I like everything. Japanese food is tasty, diversified, and has history and special meanings. It's not just about ordering and eating. The presentation of the food on the plate is art. We all are looking for experience. The way in which you serve food is outstanding and it is part of Japanese culture.

Q. Do you have any additional comments?

Japan has strong focus on new global food trends. It's about packaging, utilizing interactive IT, and using computerized methods. I think it will help Japan a lot because when I go to convenience stores like Family Mart or Lawson, I see innovative ways of presenting food. If you want to see new trends in a global context, Japan is a right place to visit. What I would like to see is a stronger focus on innovative food specialized and customized for the elderly. I know Japan has a strong platform to achieve this.

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