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Great American Barbeque Trade Showcase

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Report Highlights:

On September 26, ATO Tokyo conducted the first Great American Barbeque (BBQ) Trade Showcase aimed at Japanese buyers from both the HRI industry and national retailers. ATO Tokyo created a classic U.S. BBQ concept for the showcase with the co-sponsorship of a Japanese agent importing BBQ grills and outdoor cookware from the U.S. The "Enjoy BBQ!" concept was created by ATO to highlight the link between classic BBQ and U.S. agricultural products. The showcase took place at an open terrace restaurant of a prestigious city hotel located along side of Tokyo Bay, which allowed the use of charcoal BBQ's, adding to the festive atmosphere. ATO teamed up with a total of 20 cooperators and agents as exhibitors, and attracted more than 130 executive buyers in spite of windy conditions caused by a large typhoon that had just passed through Tokyo. Japanese buyers learned about classic U.S. BBQ and while enjoying U.S. craft beers, wines and other related U.S. food. The U.S. product exhibitors reported total expected sales of successful US\$151 thousand within the next 12 months.

General Information:

I. Market Constraints and Opportunities

Constraints:

- BBQ is popular activity in Japan but has no association with U.S. food and beverage
- Lack of U.S. product awareness by Japanese food buyers and regional retailers
- Lack of coordinated business communication between U.S. exporters & Japanese buyers

Opportunities:

- Enhancement and diversification of Japanese consumers' interest in craft beer and BBQ foods
- Increasing popularity of American style restaurants and imported food among the Japanese food industry and consumers
- Japan market's high receptivity for U.S. high value-added products
- Creation of new demand for a recovering economy

II. Expected Results and Outcomes

ATO Japan conducted the first Great American Barbeque (BBQ) Trade Showcase on September 26, 2013 at the Nikko Hotel in Tokyo. The BBQ showcase was a half-day long trade show which promoted business meetings between U.S. food suppliers and Japanese food buyers while demonstrating classic U.S. BBQ cooking and U.S. craft beers.

BBQ is a popular outdoor activity in Japan. However, Japanese consumers view BBQ cooking very differently from classic BBQ in the U.S. A typical BBQ in Japan is seen as more as a quick way to cook, and is more similar to what is known as yakiniku (or Korean style kalbi style) and consists of grilling thin sliced meats and vegetables, and using a soy based dip sauce to eat immediately after cooking. There is little knowledge of U.S. style slow cooking and grilling, and making BBQ into an occasion, including U.S. craft beer and wine. Unfortunately, American BBQ has a hamburger and hotdog image, like a meal at a quick service restaurant.

Meantime, many BBQ and Steak restaurants are opening in Tokyo. Most of them do not differentiate suitable meat cuts depend on cooking method. For instance, quality meat cuts such as tenderloin and sirloin that can be used for steak are used. However, classic BBQ is a good way to cook tough meats, like briskets and plank, and to enjoy the process of cooking to consume quality U.S. beverage and food. This is common in the U.S. but less so in Japan. U.S. meat can offer variety of cuts which are suitable for slow cook type BBQ. ATO Japan tried to show how to enjoy U.S. style BBQ, steak and outdoor cooking with U.S. agricultural products.

The Great American BBQ also leverages the growing popularity of beer festivals, such as Oktoberfest, in Japan, where young consumers enjoy German and Belgian craft beers with European style sausages at special event sites, usually built in large public parks. About dozen of Oktoberfests are held in major cities in Japan throughout a year, attracting and tens of thousands of Japanese consumers. ATO

research has shown that Japan imports an increasing variety of craft beers, premium wines and whiskies from the U.S. from two to three years ago, but these relatively new products still have less visibility in the market. ATO has discussed the market situation with U.S. craft beer importers, and found that Japanese consumers' interest in craft beer is very diverse. In the absence of a Brewers Association representative in the market (BA conducts one activity every two years), ATO created an opportunity to introduce a variety of U.S. craft beer with several U.S. beer importers. BBQ is well suited to introduce not only U.S. craft beer but also wine, distilled spirits and non alcoholic drinks to food professionals in Japan.

The Great American BBQ Trade show was held at the Hotel Nikko terrace restaurant where the use of barbeque kettles and cooking stoves was permitted. Due to fire defense law, there are few venues in Tokyo that have a space to conduct a barbeque cooking. ATO Tokyo found five hotels and restaurants that have a space for BBQ cooking, and investigated all of their sites. The terrace restaurant "Ablaze" of Hotel Nikko Tokyo was the only venue can have more than 100 guests and space for more than 20 exhibitors together. The restaurant is located along side of the Tokyo Bay and has a nice view to the bay side area. ATO Tokyo noted that the Hotel Nikko Tokyo would itself become a draw for invitees and the exhibitors.

Invitations to over 600 buyers and executives were sent to target industries. Two thirds of these potential invitees were selected from ATO's own research and were new to ATO. In Japan, it's difficult to convince quality food buyers to attend due to their busy schedules. In addition, there are many food trade showcases in Japan throughout the year that are organized by trade show coordinators, food wholesalers, food manufacturers and retailers/chain restaurants. Most of quality buyers visit many food trade showcases a new event needs a "hook" to attract attention. The U.S. style BBQ is one of most attractive concepts for this purpose and can cover all U.S. agricultural products.

III. Actual Results and Outcome

ATO Tokyo recruited 21 cooperators and importers as exhibitors and supporters, including four craft beer importers, four quality wine importers and three meat suppliers. The trade showcase was held between 3 to 7 p.m. and had over 130 Japanese buyers from HRI and retail sectors attend. More than a half of the visitors were new to the exhibitors. The exhibitors could meet with these executive buyers in the BBQ setting which provided an informal atmosphere and promoted friendly conversations.

The U.S. pavilion used the theme under the "Enjoy BBQ!" program to provide BBQ related menu ideas to Japanese buyers. Number of chain restaurants showed great interest in having an "Enjoy BBQ!" related American menu fair with variety of exhibited U.S. food products. U.S. classic BBQ cooking demonstrations were held with the event co-sponsor, M&F, which imports "Weber" brand BBQ grills, "Lodge" outdoor cookware and a variety of outdoor goods from the U.S. M&F despatched five staff who are skilled in outdoor cooking and used three BBQ kettles, three camp ovens and a dozen skillets in order to barbeque U.S. beef, pork ribs, whole game hens/chicken, and seafood. In addition, an executive chef of Nikko Hotel Tokyo also equipped two big charcoal grills for cooking U.S. beef steaks

and chops. He also cooked and served six different U.S. style BBQ sauces with his staff.

Prior to the Great American BBQ Trade Showcase, ATO Tokyo anticipated the development of the “Enjoy BBQ!” concept and the associated guidebook would generate greater attention and interest in the U.S. pavilion. (See additional details in GAIN Report # JA3517)

Popular products among buyers were craft beer, wine, Kansas whisky, rice, beef, pork, cheese cakes, frozen berries, Alaskan crab and fried potatoes. One wine importer reported to ATO about actual sales at the venue. According to after showcase questionnaires, the U.S. product exhibitors reported total expected sales of US\$ 151 thousand within the next 12 months.

List of Exhibitors

Organization/Company Name	Products	State
Hawaii Papaya Industry Association	Rainbow (GM) Papaya	HI
Alaska Seafood Marketing Institution	Alaskan seafood	AL
U.S. Rice Federation	U.S. Rice	CA
Molson Coors	Craft beer	CO
Yuwa: Kona Beer	Craft beer	HI
Mitsui Food: Primo, Anchor	Craft beer	CA, HI
Nippon Beer: Brooklyn, Sam. Adams	Craft beer	NY, MA, NI
Vinos Yamazaki	Wine	CA
Tomei	Wine	CA
Dept Planning	Wine	CA
Premium Beverages	Whiskey	KS
Japan Green Tea	Crazy salt, dry fruits	NJ, CA
Lamb Weston, ConAgra Foods	Fried potatoes, onion	WA
Tyson	Beef	NE
Sakai Food	Sausages	MA, WI
DFC	Cheese cakes, frozen berries	CA, NJ
M&F	Energy bar, BBQ grill and cookware	OR, IL, TN

List of Sample providers

Organization/Company Name	Products	State
Sunkist Pacific	Lemon	CA
Asahi Beer	Wine & Jack Daniels	CA, TN
Nippon Ham	Meat & chicken	Various
Tozai Sangyo	Meat products	Various

Snap shots:

		
Opening ceremony – remarks done by ATO Japan Director	Jam-packed showcase with executive buyers and the city view beyond Tokyo Bay	U.S. Rice Federation demonstrated Gumbo sauce cooking and offered tasting
		
An exhibitor, a craft beer importer, brought attractive neon signs	A wine importer had serious business meetings with Japanese buyers	A Kansas whisky importer offered tasting of its cocktails
		
Hotel chefs grilled steak and chop on charcoal grills and served for tasting	BBQ cooking seminar hosted by M&F staff	Outdoor cooking demonstration using U.S. made cookware
		
An exhibitor, Crazy Salt and dry fruits snack importer, increased popularity	Hawaiian GM papaya offered menu promotion with beautiful Hawaiian decoration and the papaya tasting	An exhibitor, a major fried potato supplier, had number of business meetings with executive buyers

IV. Follow-up Evaluation

According to feedback we received from the exhibitors, all they were satisfied with the participation in the Great American Barbeque Trade Showcase because of quality of buyers, the unique Enjoy BBQ concept and reasonable cost of the event. All of them enjoyed the event and could have serious business conversations with buyers that totaled over 140 meetings during the 4-hour trade show. Most of the exhibitors were impressed by the high rank of the buyers whom the exhibitors have never met before. Asked if you like to participate in a same type of trade show, 100 percent said yes.

As weather forecast predicted, ATO expected moderate sky for the day of the event. However, it was raining until noon (just 2 hours before the event start) and was very windy due to a recent typhoon. Because of unstable weather, the showcase had fewer visitors than expected. ATO could only carry out the BBQ showcase only in September this year which is the peak typhoon season. ATO plans to hold next BBQ showcase in July or before summer for next year if the budget allows.

V. Cost/Revenue

The total cost to ATO Tokyo for the event was about \$9,900, which was paid out of the Post's CSSF budget. This included the fees for the hotel space and service, hiring an agent to prepare and manage the BBQ Trade Showcase and the participants, a set of display for signboards and printing handouts - exhibitors list/exhibited products list for the visitors.

The Hotel Nikko Tokyo also contributed a considerable amount in discounts for use of the space and services. Additional U.S. food materials cooked and served for the tradeshow which the hotel purchased through their own distribution system were contributed by the company.