

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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### **The WASABI - Hot News from Japan Vol. 10 Issue 7**

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**Report Highlights:**

Japan's Just Wild About Our Nuts; An Urban Company Helps Revitalize Japan's Agriculture; Spiritual Heart of Japanese Furniture Making Relies on U.S. Hardwoods; Desperately Seeking GE in Hokkaido

**General Information:**

# The Wasabi

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**Japan’s Just Wild About Our Nuts:** On July 22, the Agricultural Trade Office (ATO) in Tokyo held its 3rd Annual Nuts Day event to showcase the high quality and health benefits of U.S. nuts. The event featured California walnuts, almonds, and pistachios as well as Georgia peanuts and dried fruits from across the United States. High-end confectionary retailers provided samples of a wide variety of products featuring U.S. nuts and dried fruits. While there were some old favorites like chocolate chip cookies and brownies with walnuts in them, Tokyo’s confectionary

artisans dazzled visitors with innovative recipes of petit gateau and macarons using nuts and different dried fruits. Students of local patissier school L’ecole Vantan displayed sweets using almond milk and fresh berries (above). The Nuts Day event was featured thousands of times on social networks and even in a TV Tokyo news segment discussing increased global demand, and resulting high prices, for nuts.

**An Urban Company Helps Revitalize Japan’s Agriculture:** On August 6, U.S. Embassy, Tokyo’s Senior Agricultural Attaché Elizabeth Autry and Agricultural Assistant Midori Iijima visited Urban Farm, farm operated by Pasona Group Inc. in its headquarters building located in the heart of Tokyo. Pasona Group a human resources company that started its first farm project, “Agriculture Internship Project,” in 2003. Pasona since increased the number of farm projects to help revitalize Japan’s farm sector, which is facing a number problems, such as an aging farm population and a decrease in the number of farmers. The Urban Farm is of the projects, which aims to create a healthy working environment and an eco-friendly office space. 200 kinds vegetables and fruits are grown with hydroponic technology inside the company’s headquarters in downtown Tokyo. The building’s exterior is covered rose bushes and pumpkins hang overhead from trellises in the lobby. (A corn crop is seen in the foreground above.) The company offers several farm training courses, including an Ag MBA course focusing on farm business and operations. Pasona owns two farms in Japan where farm trainees can learn farm skills and obtain practical experience.



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**Spiritual Heart of Japanese Furniture Making Relies on U.S. Hardwoods:**

On August 4-5, U.S. Embassy, Tokyo’s Office of Agricultural Affairs staff traveled with the Director of the

American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) Japan Office to assess current market demand for U.S. hardwoods.



Starting with Karimoku, Japan's largest furniture company, in Nagoya and then moving on to the rarified realm of Japanese high-end manufacturers Hida Sangyo and Nissin in Hidatakayama. The saw a range of production scales, philosophies and products that were all linked by a common element: large volumes of U.S. hardwoods. Japanese

demand for high-end wooden furniture has not been tempered by the April 2014 consumption tax increase, and the largest challenge facing Japan's end furniture manufacturers is securing adequate supplies of higher grade hardwoods as global hardwood demand continues to expand. Also linking these companies was a passion for U.S. walnut and white oak, both of which command the attention of Japanese buyers.



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**Desperately Seeking GE in Hokkaido:** On August 6-8, U.S. Embassy Tokyo Agricultural Specialists Suguru Sato and Nobuko Sugimoto traveled to Hokkaido to discuss prospects for genetically engineered crops in Japan's largest agricultural region. Drs. Sato and Sugimoto visited farmers and an agricultural corporation producing sugar beets, soybeans, wheat, tomatoes, and lettuce. In their discussions with full-time farmers, who are actively seeking new technologies to improve farm operations, they learned about

farmers' strong interest in adopting new cultivars, GE traits, and agricultural machinery among other efficiency enhancing opportunities.

The team also visited a local food business, Dokyu, operating restaurants and corporate cafeterias. Following its participation on an ATO Tokyo-organized reverse trade mission to Hawaii in 2013, Dokyu has imported transgenic Hawaiian 'Rainbow Papaya' several times in past 12 months. Dokyu has been serving the genetically engineered fruit in corporate cafeterias, where diners have given the fruit and its industry-saving story a warm reception.



Image courtesy of Hawaii Papaya Industry Association

The team wrapped up their northern excursion with a visit to the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, AIST. A local company has collaborated with AIST to produce, under controlled conditions, a genetically engineered variety of strawberry that produces interferon for canine periodontal disease. The company began commercial distribution of the canine pharmaceutical product in May 2014.

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