

Kikkoman soy sauce flows Down Under!

By Akiko Nicholls



Who does not know the name "Kikkoman"? You may not know what Kikkoman is or what they do, but I bet you have heard the name at least once in your life, especially if you are fond of Asian food.

Kikkoman's history of making soy sauce spans over 300 years. Now, Kikkoman Corporation is the best known soy sauce company in the world. It has a 413.9 billion yen annual turnover (as at March 2008). The company is based in Noda City, not far from Tokyo, considered the best location for its close proximity to sources of high-quality soybeans, wheat, and salt, and for easy access to Tokyo along the Edo River shipping lanes.

If you ask Japanese people about Noda city, most would say 'Ah, the *sho-yu* (soy sauce) city.' Well, there is no exaggeration here. Noda city IS the soy sauce city. Kikkoman's main office building, a number of factories and a laboratory are located in Noda, a city of 160,000 people.

Of the factories, three have been certified organic with Australian Certified Organic. Factory number 1 produces raw soy sauce, Factory 2 further processes the sauce, then Factory 3 (Heisei-factory) bottles the sauce before the products are despatched all over the world. The most interesting part about the process here is the transportation. Between Factories 1 and 2, the soy sauce is transferred through pipes which are located



Kikkoman museum cafe.



The big soy sauce bottle at Kikkoman museum.

beneath the city. Yes, underneath the city where houses, train stations and train lines are! Of course, there is an appropriate security system in place for protecting the pipe line from severe earthquakes.

A major part of Kikkoman's history (and indeed future plans), involves expansion from its home in Noda, across the world. The first international subsidiary was established in San Francisco, California, in the US, in 1957, and there are a number of subsidiaries and affiliates all over the world, including Australia.

Kikkoman has also associated itself with major brands such as Del Monte and Manns Wine to produce a wide range of products such as tomato sauce, vegetable juice, tomato paste, and wine.

At the Kikkoman museum in the Noda factory, you can see first-hand the processing of soy sauce, observe each step of the transformation from solid raw materials to liquid soy sauce and taste various soy sauce-flavoured foods including soy sauce ice cream (trust me, it's really good!!).

Kikkoman started producing organic soy sauce in 1998. In 2002, they became certified for JAS (Japanese Agricultural Standard) Organic and USDA NOP (National Organic Program). In 2007, Kikkoman successfully achieved ACO (Australian Certified Organic) certification.

"Kikkoman soy sauce is naturally brewed like fine wine. Despite advances in



Employees at a Kikkoman factory.

technology, such as a unique product takes several months to achieve for the distinctive flavours, aroma and colour of soy sauce to develop. Therefore, the greatest challenge we came across, in the process of achieving organic certification, was setting up documents following the Organic Control Points," says Mr. Masahiko Tsuda, Manager of the Foreign Sales Department.

Cleaning is one of the most important aspects of organic certification. Since the same pipeline is used to transfer both organic and non-organic soy sauce, prior to transportation of the organic soy sauce, the pipeline needs to be washed down with organic soy sauce (purging). In addition, receiving tanks, equipment and anything else that is used for both non-organic and organic soy sauce needs to be washed out with either salted water or organic soy sauce. As you can imagine, a huge amount of the organic soy sauce is used in the purging process. This soy sauce is then, of course, sold as conventional.

"Fortunately, we were working on ISO9001 around the same time as starting organic certification; hence it was not too much additional work for us to keep such records. Our challenge now is to decrease the loss of organic soy sauce." Mr. Tsuda comments.

There are 6 factories outside of Japan producing Kikkoman soy sauce. Most of the Kikkoman soy sauce for export to Australia is produced in Singapore. Organic soy sauce, however, is currently produced only in the Noda plant.

Mr. Tsuda comments that Kikkoman's future challenge in using the ACO logo is "Firstly, we would like our 250ml ACO organic soy sauce to be available at more stores in Australia. We also would like to introduce various sizes of the soy sauce." He concludes, "we always endeavour to provide a top quality product to our customers."

ACO certified organic Kikkoman soy sauce is currently available at Coles supermarkets.



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