



# Hakubaku Noodles

World-famous Japanese noodles – from Australia

» By Sarah Wooldrage

**A**uthentic Japanese organic noodles are taking off in Australia, according to Hakubaku noodle company, Japan's number one dried noodle manufacturer.

The company – which has established a processing facility for high-end noodles in regional Ballarat (Vic) producing around 1200 tonnes a year - recently received accolades for securing Australia's largest export order for organic retail products (organic Somen noodles) to Korea.

But Hakubaku Sales Manager, Mr. Ryuji Nakamura, says the biggest market for their organic noodles will remain down-under, despite the company's original intentions to export back to Japan.

He says over the last decade, Australians have demonstrated an unexpected interest for the organic variety of

Japan's iconic food staple.

"Hakubaku, which was established in 1996, originally began making premium certified organic noodles in Australia in 1998 to export to Japanese markets," he says.

"We established operations in Victoria because we needed to be closer to our producers. We needed high quality wheat, and after testing a number of varieties we found that the Australian standard of wheat best matched our needs for producing authentic Japanese noodles.

"Now, around 70% of our organic business is outside of Japan, and the majority is in Australia. We now use Australian organic wheat for all of our organic noodle lines."

It is estimated that 80% of Japanese noodles manufactured in Japan are using Australian wheat.

"We could not ignore the sales opportunities in Australia; we discovered the market was lacking a high-end Japanese noodle.

Mr. Nakamura says before Hakubaku hit the shelves, words like 'Soba' were never heard of in Australia. It was not until early 2000 that we decided to introduce our authentic Japanese noodles to the shores of Australia. After that, our Soba noodles have become a staple item among Australians.

"We started off marketing to health conscious Australian consumers, and quickly discovered that we were actually appealing to the everyday Australian consumer. People were seeking authentic noodles, and a healthy alternative to other options (like hamburgers)!"

"It is now nine years later and our organic Japanese noodles are a common purchase for

Australian consumers!" he says.

He says their authentic organic noodle range, which includes Soba (Buckwheat), Udon (thick wheat), Somen (thin wheat), Ramen (Chinese style) and Cha Soba (Green Tea) noodles appeal to every-day Australian shoppers, who are health conscious.

"We mainly sell our noodles to large retail chains like Coles, Woolworths and

major organic grocery stores."

Mr. Nakamura says while strong demand for the noodle products looks set to continue, supply of Australian certified organic wheat could be a problem.

He says the future of Hakubaku's organic range runs parallel with the future of Australian producers.

"It's been difficult to source the right

organic wheat article over the last three years – we are optimistic about our product, but we are waiting to see what happens with the drought."

Managing Director of Australian Certified Organic (ACO), Ms. Akiko Nicholls, says Hakubaku's interest in Australian certified organic products is a credit to Australian organic producers.

"Not only has Hakubaku brought Japanese flavours to Australia – they have helped raise the profile of Australian certified organic products in Asian countries. This is another example of growing international recognition of the quality and innovation of organic ingredients produced in Australia." ◆◆



Staff at the Hakubaku factory, Wendouree in Ballarat, Vic.

## Tasmanian Tofu – a new organic order in Singapore?

Living in the southern town of Geeveston, on the edge of Tasmania's vast Southwest National Park, Christina Jones and her husband are keeping alive their dream of making organic tofu.

"I have always been a strict vegetarian who experimented frequently with making my own natural products like tahini and tofu.

"However, it wasn't until an opportunity arose to travel the world on a yacht which – while it did seem like a divine experience – made me a tad anxious about how I was going to survive, food-wise, and gave me further reason to experiment. Being a vegetarian, I needed to find a solution into making my own, easily accessible tofu. I spent time researching the possibilities and came across a traditional Japanese recipe that used seawater and soy milk to make tofu!" says Christina.

With this inspiration, Christina started her own business, The Earnst Bean Company, which sees her producing and selling plain and smoked tofu to markets in Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra.

"Even though the company has not been operating for long, we are already looking at new ranges of tofu and also the opportunity of

expanding our distribution overseas.

"I have been approached by a company in Singapore interested in importing our products. If we were able to secure a deal with Singapore it would be such a huge achievement – a two person team making tofu in a remote part of Tasmania and selling it to Asia – imagine that!" However, this whirlwind adventure has not always been such a breeze, with the process of actually making tofu being quite complicated and lengthy. "Making tofu is very much like making cheese – you have to extract milk from soy beans, then coagulate the soy milk, which is followed by pressing the resulting curds into blocks.

"The process of making tofu is extremely labour-intensive and as a husband and wife team, we have had to overcome a lot of obstacles.

"First, soy beans do not grow south of New South Wales, so we have to source our beans from a supplier in Queensland (which is ACO certified). Also, we have turned our lovely farm house into a commercial kitchen!"

Christina and her husband are trying to find ways to cleverly expand their company through utilising all the waste into re-sellable products.

Making tofu produces a lot of extra waste – the main one being a by-product called 'okar'; - which is a staple ingredient in a lot of Asian cooking. "We used to give away our okar to local Japanese restaurants, as we were not too sure what to do with it. However, now we have been experimenting with the okar and we are starting to make vegetarian products with it – burgers, sausages etc.

"We are starting out locally with these products to see if there is a demand for them – then hopefully we can start a higher distribution.

The Earnst Bean Company has always been ACO certified, as Christina and her husband were passionate towards maintaining organic certification. "We always made our tofu organically, however when the decision was made to start selling our products throughout Australia we wanted all of our labelling to be ACO certified. We have been with ACO since the start as we felt being certified organic was something our consumers would look for when purchasing our products."

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