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A Variety of Sake Qualities Based on Sake-brewing Rice Characteristics

Fukunohana, Shinriki, Hakutsuru Nishiki...

Sake-brewing rice production in Hyogo Prefecture accounts for 30% of total Japanese production. It has the top share, with, besides Yamada Nishiki, 20 varieties being included within that number. Some varieties have appeared and others disappeared not only for the reason of the grower concerned, for example disease tolerance, but also due to the current trends, for example the brewing techniques used and sake qualities currently in favor.

Fukunohana, a variety of sake-brewing rice, is only produced in Izushi Town, Toyooka City. This variety has survived thanks to the passion of the Fukumitsuya Sake Brewery (Kanazawa City), which has been recognized as a brewery that specializes in producing Junmai.



Rice growers of Fukunohana standing by the board indicating that the village is the sole production area of Fukunohana in Japan (Hakaza, Izushi Town, Toyooka City)

Around 1980 Fukunohana was being grown in Hyogo and Fukushima Prefectures and was ranked fourth in terms of acreage in Japan. However, brewers did not overly favor it because its grains were too soft to handle appropriately in the brewing process, thus leading to decreased production. Growers in Izushi Town, too, considered switching production to another variety but Fukumitsuya made the strong request for them to continue the producing the variety. They then contracted to continue producing it in 1988. "I consider sake from

Fukunohana to have a unique blend of umami, which cannot be obtained from Yamada Nishiki. Fukunohana is essential to our Koji mold cultivation process," said Keizo Matsui (aged 54), the Managing Director.

In the response to requests from the brewer, growers have endeavored to reduce or eliminate the use of agricultural chemicals, which is a rare case with sake-brewing rice cultivation. The rice variety is currently being used to make Junmai "Konotori no Okurimono (gift from white storks)."

On the 15th May the village will hold a Taue (rice seedling transplantation) tour, in which about 20 Fukumitsuya fans from Kanto Region will take part. "We cultivate Fukunohana with the utmost TLC (Tender Loving Care). It is used in not only sake but also cosmetics," Junichi Yoshida (aged 67), one of the growers, proudly stated.

Breweries in Hyogo seem to constantly discover new merits of the rice variety. Ota Sake Brewing Co., Ltd. (Shiga Prefecture), which sells sake brands that include Dokan, has used Fukunohana at its Nadachiyoda-kura (brewery) (Higashinada Ward, Kobe) for about eight years now. For the first six years it explored the optimal way of immersing the rice in water or creating the sake yeast through the trial and error process before finally realizing stable production of the sake. Fukunohana, along with Yamada Nishiki, is now one of key varieties in the sake they produce.

"Sake made from Fukunohana apparently tastes rather good while still extremely immature. The taste can also change depending on the time of preparation for brewing it, something that I find particularly fascinating. I think the variety has a lot of promise." Plant Manager Tatsutoshi Kitao (aged 37) is one brewer who has fallen in love with Fukunohana.

There are several prominent movements to revive old sake-brewing rice varieties that used to be cultivated during the period of the Meiji era through to the early Showa-era. "Shinriki," for example, which is cultivated in Nakashima, Mitsu Town, Tatsuno City, is a variety that was revived through the passion of Honda Shoten Co., Ltd. (Himeji City).

"Nakashima has the two major assets of Shinriki and the achievements of Jujiro Maruo, who was a pioneer in Japan's agricultural scene. I felt the need to study them," said Shinichiro Honda (aged 64), the

President, looking back over the past.

Mr. Maruo started improving the cultivar using just three ears of rice that he had discovered in his paddy fields in 1877, and successfully developed a variety that ensured both large grain sizes and high yields. The variety was planted in a number of areas throughout Japan but was gradually replaced by new varieties. After studying the achievements of Mr. Maruo, President Honda devoted himself to searching for seeds of the variety before eventually restarting cultivation in Nakashima in 1996. He was then able to reproduce the “phantom sake” two years later.

“Acidity is one of the elements that determine the taste of sake and, with respect to sake made from Shinriki, the form of that acidity can differ. Even if the same yeast is used, sake made using Yamada Nishiki has a very soft gentle taste whereas that made using Shinriki has a strong sharp taste,” President Honda described the taste of the Shinriki-based sake.

New varieties keep on emerging even now. Hakutsuru Nishiki, a sibling variety of Yamada Nishiki, was cultivated by Hakutsuru Sake Brewing Co., Ltd., the top brewing company (Higashinada Ward, Kobe), in 2007.



An employee of Hakutsuru Farm plowing a rice paddy in preparation for transplanting sake-brewing rice seedlings (Sasayama City).

With the aim of creating a new sake-brewing rice variety that would be appropriate for producing ideal sake, Hakutsuru successfully completed its development in 1995 by crossing “Yamada-bo” with “Wataribune,” the former being the female parent and the latter the male parent of Yamada Nishiki. It is grown in Hyogo Prefecture under contract, with Hakutsuru Farm (Sasayama City), a Hakutsuru agriculture sector subsidiary, having planted it on 9.3 hectares this year.

Kenji Kano (aged 44), the President, enthusiastically stated: “Now that we are challenged by the ageing agricultural population issue we will also have to take responsibility for and directly engage in producing good sake-brewing rice in order to be capable of making much better quality sake.”

(Kazuyoshi Tsujimoto)

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全園トップシエアの3割を占める酒米産地の兵庫県は、山崎以外にも勿論種が栽培されている。耐病など産地の理由だけでなく、酒技術や質など時代の流れの中で、さまざまな種が

21品種

生まれ、そして酒のみが生産される福光屋(桑名市)の熱意。豊岡出石町が唯一の産地であるフクノハナは、純米酒のさ、1880年

は面積で国内4位の品を進め、純米酒「コト種」だったが、米が素、ノリの贈り物。なか、醸造時の扱いに「15日」が同町で開か、減少した。出石町でも「フクノハナ」が、福光屋が継続を要する約20人が防れず、望。88年から契約栽培。定。一。手をかけて

です。北尾醸造場。長(9)はほれ込み。最大手の白鶴酒造(神戸)から昭和初期の戸市東灘区が200酒米を復活させ、7年に誕生させた山田も自立。たつ御錦の兄弟品だ。津町中島で栽培される。目指す酒師により

兵庫に乾杯 日本酒と酒米の聖地

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多様な酒質生む個性

究、全園各地に栽培が広がったが、新種に取って代わられた。功績を知った本田社長は、96年に中島での栽培が再開。2年後に幻の酒を復活させた。味がしっかりと出る。「酒の味、要素は仕込み時によつて味、酸の形が違ふ。同じが異なるのも面白い」と、酵母を使っても山田錦ころ、稗性のある米は、はわつと柔らかく、神力は「しっかりと」として「本田社長は表現する。

「山田錦」育てたフクノハナは、他品種に優りかけた。関東の福屋ファが、福光屋が継続を要する約20人が防れず、望。88年から契約栽培。定。一。手をかけて

フクノハナ、神力、白鶴錦...

丸尾は1877年、明中、酒米に責任を持つ。10年、自分の水田。つて直造開闢、より見つけた水田を、よい酒造りに生かした。基に改良して大粒で、いと意気込む。(日本一好)