



21 varieties

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

