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Rijk Zwaan lettuce is rapidly gaining ground in Japan

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Partnership between Sun Globe Food and Rijk Zwaan

Sun Globe Food is a family-run business founded in 1978. Since then, Chairman Yoshikuni Anzai has constantly sought better ways of meeting demand. The fresh food company processes 15 tonnes of lettuce a day for business customers such as popular fast-food outlets and the up-and-coming salad restaurant chain called Margo.

Sun Globe Food was aware of Rijk Zwaan's innovations for business customers, and the demo field in Fijnaart made a strong impression on Mr Anzai when he visited in 2018. "It was truly interesting, with over 400 colourful leafy varieties," Anzai says. "I was surprised that 70 employees were dedicated to the development of Knox lettuce alone." The Knox trait delays pinkening in fresh-cut lettuce. To explore the benefits in practice, Sun Globe Food formed a partnership with Rijk Zwaan in 2018.

Knox solves persistent problems with shelf life

"We have been developing fresh-cut vegetables, especially iceberg lettuce, for our business customers over the past 40 years, but certain issues have persisted," Anzai explains. In particular, shelf life after harvesting and pinkening after cutting are constant challenges. "The development of addressing these issues inside a lettuce seed is groundbreaking for us."

Ryoji Anzai, president of Sun Globe Food and the son of the chairman, comments: "In the Japanese market, 'normal' lettuce has a shelf life of three days after arrival, but Knox lettuce has an expected shelf life around one week."



Changing how Japanese consumers eat

Down the line to business customers, the partnership is working to bring a fresh new outlook on eating in Japan. Initially, the focus has been on Rijk Zwaan Knox Cos variety Tuccadona RZ. “Compared with other varieties, Tuccadona RZ has a good sense of freshness, crispness and flavour,” mr. Anzai notes. Since May 2019, Sun Globe Food has been supplying this variety to Margo, Japan’s first-ever specialty salad chain. Its stylish urban stores feature something unusual in Japan: big, healthy salads. Needless to say, lettuce plays a central role.

“Thanks to strong support from Sun Globe Food, we now have five stores in Tokyo, and we can see signs that salad foods are spreading in Japan, which has traditionally been carbohydrate heaven,” states Masayuki Tokoi, CEO of Margo. He is impressed by the reduced pinking along the cut edges of the Knox-lettuce, as well as the longer shelf life. He says this gives him a surplus and that Margo’s “customers appreciate its appearance and taste”. In Japan, where the aesthetic appeal of food is valued perhaps more than in any other country in the world, this is high praise indeed.



Win-win-win relationship with a strong future

Building on the success with Knox, the cooperation is now expanding into Crunchy lettuce and Snack lettuce. Both father and son are optimistic. “I am convinced Rijk Zwaan will be a partner that develops products together with us,” comments Ryoji Anzai. His father echoes that sentiment, saying that he hopes the companies can share information and work together on new solutions that satisfy business needs. Meanwhile, Tokoi, as the end customer, appreciates the strong supply chain. “Rijk Zwaan is the world leader in developing lettuce varieties, the lifeblood of our products, so that’s very reassuring,” he concludes. Leafy vegetables appear to have a bright future in Japan.

Visit Rijk Zwaan at Asia Fruit Logistica

To stimulate retailers, traders and other chain partners in Asia to add more colour in the fresh produce category, Rijk Zwaan will showcase its colourful palette of bright, healthy and inspiring vegetables at Asia Fruit Logistica from 2-4 November in Bangkok. Come and meet us at stand F-17!