

Shopping innovation special

Homegrown food, technology target global audience

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Showcasing the latest and the greatest in supermarket and food and beverage products, packaging, displays and fixtures, the 52nd Supermarket Trade Show 2018 (SMTS) will be held on Feb. 14, 15 and 16.

Looking to go global, as many as 2,000 manufacturers will introduce their products over 11 halls at the Makuhari Messe convention center in Chiba Prefecture.

More than 86,000 people, mainly buyers from retailers, visited the last edition of the SMTS. As it marks its 60th anniversary in 2018, the New Supermarket Association of Japan, which organizes the SMTS, is making a leap forward in globalizing the event.

"So far, the event has been regarded as a one-stop portal mostly for retailers and supermarkets from across the country, but we are aware that we have many things to offer the international market," said Tetsuichiro Tomihari, the exhibition section manager of the New Supermarket Association of Japan.

About 70 percent of the exhibitors are makers of domestically produced items such as fresh food, confectionery, drinks, daily com-

modities and processed foods.

This coming exhibition, for example, will have a section featuring 50 sake and craft beer breweries from all over Japan. Sake is not just a beverage product, but also a part of Japan's culture with a deep connection to the communities in which it is produced, the occasions in which it is appreciated and the local foods that go best with it.

The section will therefore be organized in a way that introduces not only the technologies and techniques used in making sake, but also the tradition and history of the sake culture. Additionally, there will be lectures by sake experts.

"Rather than just introducing products, we try to tell stories about them and suggest the ways they can be enjoyed such as in what kind of settings, with what kind of menus, and so on," Tomihari said.

Going global is key to success

To maximize the effect of their efforts by reaching out to international visitors, English interpreters and trade advisors will be made available for the first time.

It is not just the language barrier that is limiting the possible collaborations between

Japanese and foreign companies. "Each country has its own standards for food products and then there are also global standards. There are taxes we need to worry about, too. That is where trade advisors come in with their insights and experiences," Tomihari explained.

"We will also be using a translation application called UD Talk that can be used on smartphones on a trial basis," he said. It could prove to be enough for foreign visitors to get around in the venue until they need professional help in gathering detailed information or entering negotiations.

About 30 percent of the exhibitors are trading houses selling imported goods, or, what unexpectedly drew much attention from visitors from overseas in the last exhibition, manufacturers of showcases and other fixtures, as well as packaging.

"I heard many people say that the quality is fascinating in terms of both function and design," Tomihari said. Refrigerated displays, shelves and other equipment are made to appeal to discerning shoppers in Japan while maintaining high functionality and safety. Packaging is not just about wrapping products and making them look fancy. "Some of the foreign visitors in the past were impressed by the high performance of Japan-made packages because the packaging manufacturers' in-depth research on factors such as oxygen transmission rate and durability is important to improve shelf lives of foods," he explained.

Improving the quality of food packaging and extending shelf life is not only economical, but also ecological. It will also increase the possibility of imports and exports for many products.

"It was a pleasant surprise that many visitors from overseas showed particular interest in the exhibits other than food and beverages, and it's great that we can learn from each other through the event," he added.

There will be a number of manufacturers of equipment and materials at the upcoming exhibition such as Panasonic Commercial Equipment System Co., Ltd. that specializes

in supermarket showcases, refrigerators and freezers, and Ishida Co., Ltd., a manufacturer of food weighing and packaging machinery.

Popularity of prepared food

The SMTS is also resourceful when it comes to learning the changing lifestyles and consumption patterns in Japan. The Delicatessen Trade Show featured within the SMTS is an example that reflects the shifting needs of the double-income and aging society. People are cooking less at home and the demand for processed or prepared foods are rising.

For the past six years, the products that won the Bento and Prepared Meal Awards of the year have been displayed in the show and the sophistication and diversity of Japanese prepared dishes as represented by bento has garnered much attention from both domestic and international visitors.

Some of the awarded bento and prepared meals can be enjoyed at the show. "Although these items cannot easily be exported, we expect them to serve as inspirations for both foreign visitors and also Japanese companies that are keen to become global so that the Japanese food boom will not just be replaced by another boom, but will be refined further instead," Tomihari said.

The Future Store "Now," a project to discuss ideas and possibilities among retailers and suppliers through periodical seminars, will also set up booths to share its achievements and insights into the Japanese market and how to approach the international markets.

"This time, we are offering the Overseas Retailers Program for the first time. We will conduct press conferences and surveys in the Philippines and Thailand to promote the SMTS, and to learn about the needs and interests of retailers in those countries," Tomihari said.

The two countries have been chosen because of their rising interests in Japanese products, but the New Supermarket Association of Japan is eager to expand its promotional activities to many other countries in the coming years.



Top: About 70 percent of exhibitors offer domestically produced items and have been aiming to go global in recent years. Left: Fish and other fresh foods from Japan are on display along with other supermarket products. Right: Products that won the Bento and Prepared Meal Awards have been on display at the past six shows. NEW SUPERMARKET ASSOCIATION OF JAPAN

The findings from surveys and discussions will be incorporated in the planning of the upcoming event to make it more global. The country's decreasing population does not mean that businesses have to shrink, too. It gives Japan both an advantage and challenge.

As one of the first countries to experience a rapidly aging and shrinking population, Japanese manufacturers have significant motivation to come up with innovative ideas ahead of the world, as well as the challenge to explore the international market.



Supermarket Trade Show "Food Table in Japan 2017" was held in February at Makuhari Messe in Chiba Prefecture, attracting 86,000 people, mainly buyers from leading retailers.

NEW SUPERMARKET ASSOCIATION OF JAPAN

SMTS 2018[®]

SUPERMARKET TRADE SHOW

スーパーマーケット・トレードショー

Date

Feb. 14 (Wed.) – 16 (Fri.)
10:00am – 5:00pm (Close at 4:00pm on Feb.16)

Venue

Makuhari Messe, Japan

Organizer



一般社団法人
新日本スーパーマーケット協会

60th Anniversary

New Supermarket Association of Japan

Admission

¥5,000 *Only charged to visitors without invitation tickets or online pre-registration.
*Only industry participants and those over 18 years old are permitted.

What is the SUPERMARKET TRADE SHOW?

One of the biggest exhibitions in Japan

The SUPERMARKET TRADE SHOW offers the latest information on the food distribution industry focusing on supermarkets. Organized by the retail distribution industry association, It is one of the largest exhibitions in Japan. Increasing the number of exhibitors every year, the latest store facilities, materials and information services are displayed, as well as food and local products from Japan and overseas.

www.smts.jp/en/

