

# Traditional Japanese Health Food—Natto

## 日本の伝統的健康食—納豆

### An Interview Regarding “MegumiNATTO™” Newly on Sale ~Part 1~

#### “MegumiNATTO™” 新発売インタビュー 第1回

Japan Traditional Foods, Inc. (www.meguminatto.com) has newly begun to sell “MegumiNATTO™” [fermented soybeans] using American produced organic soybeans grown locally. This is a follow-up product to its “TezukuriNATTO™” which has already been on sale at Japanese supermarkets, but this product is principally

targeted towards Americans and the US food product market. A special feature of the product is large size, plump, quality soybeans. At the same time, the company is expanding its California factory. Now, in commemoration of the initiation of

sale of the product, this publication talked to President Minami Satoh of Japan Traditional Foods regarding the circumstances surrounding the development of the organic natto produced in the US, and strategies for the traditional Japanese food business in America.

#### The Circumstances Surrounding the Production and Sale of Natto Within the US From Start to Finish

#### “My Dream is Expand Promotion of Healthy Traditional Japanese Food in America”

**Japanese Restaurant News (hereafter, J):** Mr. Satoh, after you earned your MBA in America, for a short while you managed a company in Japan, didn't you? In 2006, you again came to the US, and would you please tell us your experiences in starting in the food business?

**President Satoh (hereafter S):** After I graduated from the Thunderbird School of Global Management in Arizona, I had the dream of sometime getting into business

in America. But in order to manage my family's iron and steel wholesaling business, for a short while after that I acted as the president of the company in Japan. However, I aimed at “a business that I myself want to pursue,” so for that purpose I broke up the company and sold a portion, at the same time



resigning as president, and waited for new opportunities. Later, I decided to enter the food business, and although the management of the iron and steel business might be considered completely unrelated, truly strange circumstances led to my joining the present business.

#### “I Thought That Locally Produced Natto Was a Business Opportunity”

**J:** Natto is a food product that is eaten as an everyday health food in many Japanese homes, and is greatly popular with both young people and old people.



Japan Traditional Foods, Inc. (www.meguminatto.com) は、アメリカ産オーガニック大豆を使った現地生産の納豆「Megumi Natto」を新発売した。同商品は、すでに日系スーパーマーケットで販売している「手作り納豆」に続く商品で、主にアメリカ人向け、米系食品市場ターゲットとしており、大粒でふっくらした品質が特徴の商品である。同時にカリフォルニア工場も拡大した。今回弊紙では、新発売を記念して、Japan Traditional Foods 社長、佐藤南氏に、米国産オーガニック納豆を開発するまでの経緯とアメリカでの日本伝統食ビジネス戦略を伺った。

#### 米国内製造の納豆を製造販売までの経緯

#### 「日本の健康な伝統食をアメリカに広めるのが夢でした」

**Japanese Restaurant News (以下、J):** 佐藤さんはア

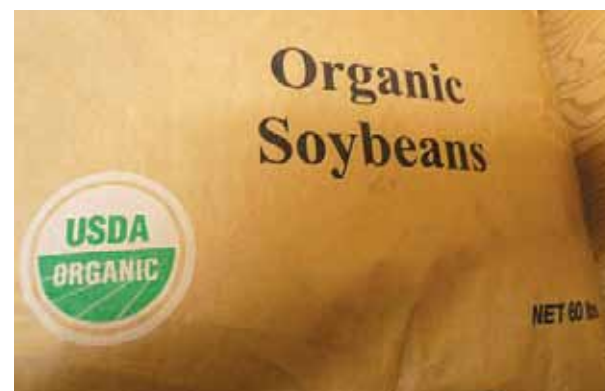
メリカで MBA を取得後はしばらく日本で会社を運営していらっしゃったのですよね？ 2006 年に再び米国でフードビジネスを始めた経緯を教えてくださいませんか？

**佐藤氏 (以下、佐):** 私はアリゾナの Thunderbird School of Global Management を卒業してから、いつかアメリカでビジネ

The first Natto factory in America!  
Not imported and frozen, but fresh and tasty!

アメリカに初めての納豆工場が進出！  
冷凍輸入でないから新鮮な納豆の味わい！

スをするのを夢見てきました。実家が鉄鋼製品問屋を営んでいる為、その後しばらくは日本で社長業をしていました。しかしながら自分の本心に「やりたいビジネス」に向き合う為、会社を分社一部売却、同時に社長業も辞し、新しいチャンスを待っていました。後に決意したフードビジネスへの参入ですが、全く無関係と思われた鉄鋼ビジネスの経



However, it has a distinctive taste and sensation on the palate, and that might be thought to be a business challenge in America, with the differences in culture. What was the motive force that made you enter the *natto* business?

**S:** Certainly, it is a great challenge, and an adventure. Just at the time that I left the iron and steel business, I was concerned about the future of Japanese agriculture, and as a result, I was presented with various questions in regards to changes in food lifestyle concerning self-sufficiency rates and additives. And then, upon the recommendation of a friend of mine at the time (now Vice President Takahashi of Japan Traditional Foods), I took over management of Yaguchi Foods Co. Ltd. (the former Yaguchi Natto Production Facility: [www.1megumi.com](http://www.1megumi.com)) when the president of this *natto* maker passed away suddenly. That company only produced its mainstay of *natto* in the Saitama region, so we delivered directly to our customers, and besides that we used food ingredients without additives and dealt with delicious ingredients in the production at facilities in each of the regions. In that setting, it was not a mass production, mass consumption model. Delicious *natto* that was just produced in those regions could take root and be enjoyed. Therefore, I began thinking about producing and selling *natto* in America. The high nutritional content of soybeans in America has a high reputation, and starting with soy sauce, *miso* and *tofu*, soy milk and *edamame* in the pod have all won repute among the population. However, practically all of the *natto* on sale in the U.S. is made by way of large scale production, importing in frozen. Because of that, there is a loss of flavor, so one feels that it is to be avoided. Freshly made *natto* has the lingering taste of the soybeans to savor, without any unpleasant odors. Even for Japanese people, it gives a completely different impression.

**“I Thought That California Was the Most Suitable Region”**

**J:** Please tell us the reason why you chose California to open your new factory in the United States.

**S:** As I explained in the previous answer, in order to get started in the food business in America I conducted various kinds of research. By chance, an acquaintance I knew from my days in the iron and steel business introduced me to Malcolm Clarke, founder of the California Gourmet Mushroom Company ([www.mycopiacom](http://www.mycopiacom)) (and who is the great great grandson of Professor William Smith Clarke, the first principal of the Sapporo Farm College, forerunner of the present Hokkaido University). In 1977, he started the *shiitake* mushroom cultivation industry, the first person to succeed in doing so in Europe and the US, and he recommended this region to me. When I visited Sebastopol (CA) personally, I was surprised that being close to Napa, it had many wineries and organic farms. With the great environment for raising vegetables and fruits, as well as the large population of foodies, I thought that it was the perfect place. At that time, *shiitake* mushrooms were also a new food ingredient to people in the US, and it seems that it took a tremendous amount of effort to popularize it, but it received an enormous boost of support from the research that showed how *shiitake* mushroom presence in people promoted the power of the immune system.

(Note) Presently, Malcolm Clarke has retired, and his business partner, David Rowe, jointly runs the operation with Satoh, producing and selling organic mushrooms such as Trumpet Royale™, Brown and Alba Clamshell™, Forest Nameko™, Velvet Pioppini™ and maitake.



営も、実は不思議な出会いで今のビジネスに結びついています。

**「現地生産の納豆はビジネスチャンスだと思いました」**

**J:** 納豆という食品は、日本では多くの家庭で日常健康食として若い人からお年寄りまで大人気ですが、その独特な味と食感で、文化の違うアメリカでのビジネスはチャレンジだと思うのですが、納豆ビジネスを始めた動機は何かですか？

**佐:** 確かに大きなチャレンジですし、アドベンチャーです。丁度鉄鋼ビジネスから離れる時に日本の農業の行く末、自給率や添加物の問題、食生活の変化から様々な問題が問いただされていきました。そしてその時に友人（現在 Japan Traditional Foods 副社長である高橋氏）の勤めていた、やぐちフーズ（株）（旧矢口納豆製造所：[www.1megumi.com](http://www.1megumi.com)）という納豆メーカーの社長が急死され、その会社の経営を担当する事になりました。

同社では、製造した納豆を拠点である埼玉地区のみ、お客様に直接配達し、その他無添加の食材や各地域の地場で生産されている美味しい食材を扱っていました。その中でも大量生産大量消費型でない、地域に根差した出来たての旨い納豆に魅かれ、アメリカでの納豆製造、販売を考えるようになりました。アメリカでの大豆の栄養価に対する評価は高く、醤油・味噌・豆腐を初め、豆乳・枝豆が市民権を得ていました。しかし販売されている納豆はほとんどが大量生産された冷凍輸入品なので、それ故に味が損なわれ、敬遠されていると感じたのです。新鮮な納豆は、香りに嫌味がなく豆の味わいを残し、日本人にもまた違った印象を与えます。

**「カリフォルニアが一番適した土地だと思いました」**

**J:** 米国に新工場をオープンするのにカリフォルニアを選ばれた理由を聞かせてください。

**佐:** 前文でも述べたように、アメリカで食ビジネスをスタートさせるにあたり色々な調査をしていたところ、たまたま鉄鋼ビジネスをしていた時代に知り合った友人から、カリフォルニアのグルメマッシュルーム社 ([www.mycopiacom](http://www.mycopiacom)) の創業者、マルカム・クラーク氏（札幌農学校、現北海道大学の前身、の初代教頭、ウイリアム・スミス・クラーク博士の玄孫にあたる）を紹介されました。彼は 1977 年から椎茸の商業栽培を、欧米で初めて成功させた方で、その人からこの土地を勧められました。私自信もセバストポール(CA)を訪れた時、ナパに近く、ワイナリーやオーガニックファームの多さに驚きました。その野菜や果物が育つ環境の良さや、フーディー人口が多いのにも理想的な土地だと思いました。椎茸も当時は米国人には目新しい食材で、普及に大変苦労をしたそうですが、椎茸の持つ人体の免疫力の向上効果という研究結果が大きな飛躍をサポートしてくれたそうです。



(注) 現在マルカム・クラーク氏は引退し、そのビジネスパートナーであったデビット・ロー氏と佐藤氏とが共同経営者となり、オーガニックのエリンギ、シメジ、ナメコ、ヤナギマツタケ、舞茸などを製造販売している。

**Minami Sato Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae**

- 1981 Graduated Keio University, Faculty of Law
- 1983 Graduated Thunderbird School of Global Management  
Entered E.I. DuPont Far East Japan Branch (now DuPont Incorporated)
- 1989 Entered Sato Kokan Incorporated (Urayasu City); in 1991 assumed position of director
- 2003 Started SKH Co., Ltd. Food Division (Minato ward, Tokyo)
- 2006 Sold the part of Satoh Steel Pipe Co., Ltd. and resigned the president  
Acquired Yaguchi Natto Production (presently Yaguchi Foods, Saitama City)  
Set up Japan Traditional Foods, Inc. in the U.S.
- 2008 Came to the US in June; in November began production of "TezukuriNATTO™"

**佐藤 南 略歴**

- 1981年 慶応義塾大学 法学部法律学科卒
- 1983年 Thunderbird School of Global Management 卒  
E.I. DuPont ファーイート日本支社（現デュボン株式会社）入社
- 1989年 佐藤鋼管株式会社（浦安市）入社 91年 代表取締役就任
- 2004年 株式会社エスケーエイチ フード事業部（東京都港区）スタート
- 2006年 佐藤鋼管株式会社を分社し一部売却、同時に社長を辞任  
矢口納豆製造所（現やぐちフーズ さいたま市）買収  
Japan Traditional Foods を米国に設立
- 2008年 6月渡米 11月「手づくり納豆」生産開始