

# Traditional Japanese Health Food—Natto

## 日本の伝統的健康食—納豆

### “Perhaps Natto Can Ride the Wave of Organic, Gourmet and Healthy Living

Interview with Dana Lewis, President of the Japan Society of Northern California

「オーガニック、グルメ、ヘルシーの波に納豆は乗るかもしれないですね」

**JRN:** It seems that you had the experience of living in Japan as a journalist for 17 years. Did you develop an interest in Japanese home cooking during that time?

**Lewis:** During the time that I was a *homestay* boarder in Kumamoto Prefecture, my host family went all-out to treat the foreigner(me) with local delicacies and to that end they were considerate enough to introduce me to all sorts of traditional Japanese dishes. Unfortunately, at that time I couldn't stand *uni* sea urchin and *natto* fermented soybeans. (Laughs)

**JRN:** And even after you returned to America, did the influence of Japanese food affect you? Do you enjoy things like favorite foods?

**Lewis:** Even today, once or twice a month I prepare Japanese food myself. I cook homemade meals using *dashi* broth I make from dried bonito flakes. My favorite foods are curry and pork cutlets. In San Francisco, recently there has been a boom in this kind of Japanese “Western food,” so I am lucky. There are

long lines that form at restaurants, and the guests who make up those lines are practically all Americans.

**JRN:** Since last year, the company called Japan Traditional Foods has been making natto in California, and it offers to Americans various recipes for *natto* to prepare in American ways. For example, *natto* pizza, *natto* salad and the like. What do you think of the way of eating things that is agreeable to Americans?

**Lewis:** Taking myself as an example, for a long time I hated such sticky foods as okra. But my American boss was proud of the fact that he liked *natto*, and one time when we were eating “*natto* gyoza potstickers” together at a restaurant in the Ginza section of Tokyo, they did not have the “stickiness” that I hated, instead being absolutely easy to eat. I also discovered the flavor was delicious. I came to understand in real terms how a recipe and presentation can be changed so that the same food ingredient can be a quite different thing. Since there are many Americans who hate food

**JRN:** Danaさんは日本にジャーナリストとして17年住んだ経験があるそうですが、その間日本の家庭料理には興味がありましたか？

**Lewis氏(以下、L):** 熊本にホームステイをしていた際、ホストファミリーがまるで「外人(私)」を試すように、様々な日本の伝統料理を出してくれました。その時には雲丹と納豆がダメでした(笑)。

**JRN:** アメリカに戻ってきても日本食の影響は受けていますか？好物などありますか？

**L:** 今でも月に1、2回は日本食を自分で作ります。鰹節で出汁を取ったり家庭的な食事も作ります。好物はカレーやポークカツです。サンフランシスコにはこのような日本の「洋食」が最近ブームになってきていますので、ラッキーです。長い列が出来るレストランで、行列を作っているお客さんはほとんどアメリカ人です。

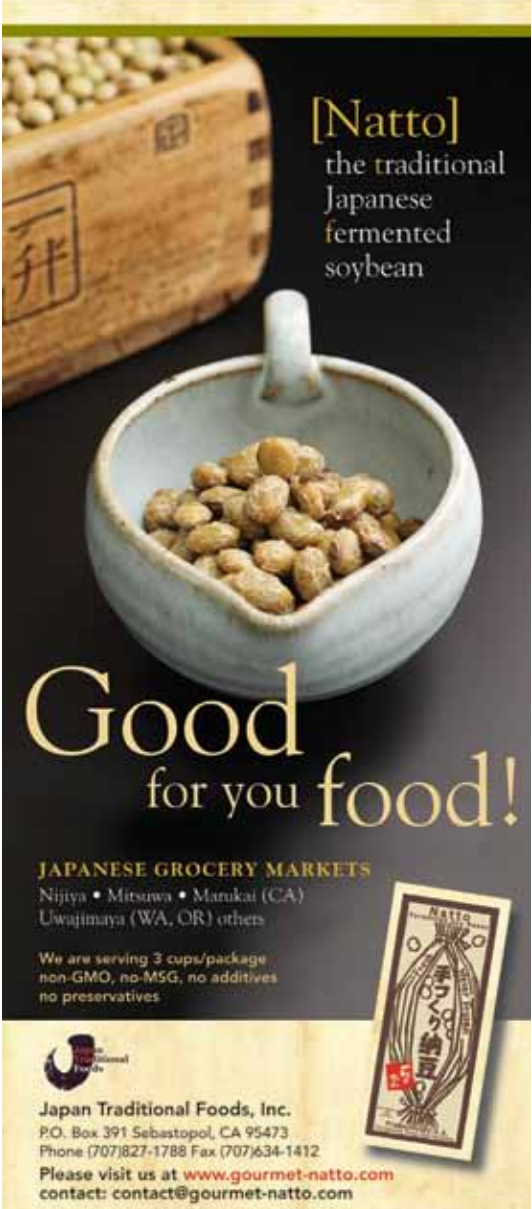
**JRN:** 昨年より、Japan Traditional Foods という会社が

カリフォルニアで納豆を作っていて、アメリカでの様々な納豆のレシピをアメリカ人に提案をしています。例えば納豆ピザ、シザーサラダ等です。アメリカ人に受け入れられる食べ方はどのようなものだと思いますか？

**L:** 私の例を挙げますと、オクラや納豆などがずっと嫌いだったのですが、あるきっかけで納豆が好きになったんです。私のアメリカ人のボスが納豆好きを自慢していて、銀座のレストランでいっしょに「納豆餃子」を食べた時、苦手だった「ネバネバ」が無く、とても食べやすく、味も美味いと感じました。レシピやプレゼンテーションが変わると同じ食材でも随分違うものだと実感しました。アメリカ人は比較的ネバネバ系の食品が苦手な人が多いので、バラエティ豊富なレシピを提供するのは良いアイデアだと思います。カリフォルニア産という

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のも貴重ですね。日本の生産地から、分厚く包装され何日もかけて届いた商品と比べますと、地元の畑で収穫された大豆で冷凍されない入手経路が魅力的です。

**JRN:** カリフォルニア産、オーガニック納豆の『Megumi NATTO<sub>TM</sub>』も最近発売されました。オーガニックや発酵食品に関してアメリカ人の反応をどのようにお考えでしょうか？

**L:** 味噌などはもうスーパーに出回っていますね。アメリカ人は日本の伝統食品に大変興味を持っています。健康志向の人達が増えている中、納豆はここでは「グルメ食品」「健康食品」のカテゴリーに入ると思うのです。今ニューヨークやサンフランシスコなどの都市部で“フーディー”たちが納豆を含む発酵食品に着目してきているので、近いうちブームになる可能性があります。その為には消費者の知識が必要で、フードラ



products that are comparatively sticky nature, I think that it is a good idea to offer them an extensive variety of recipes. It is also important that it is a product of California, you know. Compared with a product that is produced in Japan, wrapped up thickly and takes any number of days to reach here, there is an attraction about soybeans harvested in local fields and come to you without being frozen.

**JRN:** "Megumi NATTO<sub>TM</sub>" is an organic *natto* produced in California that has recently come on the market. What are your thoughts about Americans' reactions in relation to organic and fermented food products?

**Lewis:** Things like miso have already come out in regular supermarkets, you know. Americans have a tremendous amount of interest in traditional Japanese food products. As the number of people in the healthy food trend increases, I think that *natto* has entered the category of a "gourmet food product" or a "health food product" here. Today, in metropolitan areas like New York and San Francisco, many of the so-called "foodie" people focus their attention on fermented food products that contain *natto*, so there is a possibility that in the near future it could become a boom. In order for that to happen it is necessary for consumers to become knowledgeable about it. Food writers should write restaurant reviews explaining that it is really "delicious, healthy and a tradition of Japan," so that fans of *natto* increase based on those key words.

**JRN:** The Japan Society plans and supports a number of food events. What kind of changes do you see in the trends of recent events?

**Lewis:** In Japanese food events in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, often there is a mixture of the traditional and modern to create urban style food. The attendees are also knowledgeable about Japan, and seek the real thing. Along with that, the interest in food ingredients has also changed. Since there are more and more large-scale sake events held by other sponsors, the Japan Society has taken the opposite tack, with many small food events based on a standard of uniqueness. For example, beer pairings, sake pairings, sushi preparation workshops and the like, where attendees can enjoy a hands-on experience.

**JRN:** What are the plans, aspirations and

other things that the Japan Society has in store for events in the future?

**Lewis:** We want to put more effort into emphasis on individual, intimate events, you know. I think that introducing more traditional Japanese food and home cooking in ways that we talked about before would be good. For example, events where "bento boxed lunches," "breakfasts" and "traditional food ingredients" were used in cooking demonstrations would probably be interesting, you see. Through those means, the traditional food ingredients that Americans hate (for example, *natto*, okra and the like) will perhaps have an opportunity to find their way on America's kitchen tables.

イター達がレストランの批評で「美味しい、健康的、日本の伝統」などの記事を書き、そのキーワードを元に納豆ファンが増えていくでしょう。

**JRN:** ジャパンソサエティーは数々のフードイベントを企画、サポートをされていますが、最近のイベント傾向ではどのような変化が見られますか？

**L:** ニューヨーク、ロサンゼルス、サンフランシスコでは和食イベントでも伝統とモダンをミクスさせたようなアーバンスタイルのフードが多くなっています。参加者も日本食の知識があり、より本物を求めていますし、それに伴い食材の興味も変わってきています。お酒が絡んだ大きなイベントが他の主催で増えているので、逆にジャパンソサエティーではユニークで小さなフードイベント規格が多いです。例えば、

レストランでのビールテイस्टینگ、酒ペアリング、寿司メイキングワークショップなど、参加者が実践し楽しめる内容です。

**JRN:** ジャパンソサエティーのこれからのイベント企画や希望などはありますか？

**L:** 比較的プライベートな企画に力を入れたいですね。先ほどの話にもあった日本の伝統食や家庭料理をもっと紹介できたら良いと思っています。例えば「お弁当」「朝食」「伝統食材」を使ったクッキングデモンストレーションを入れたイベントも面白いかもしれませんね。それを通じてアメリカ人が苦手とされていた伝統食材（例えば納豆やオクラ等）がそれをきっかけにアメリカの食卓にも並ぶかもしれません。

**Dana Lewis**  
**President of Japan Society of Northern California**

Dana Lewis has spent most of her professional life at the interface between Japan and the world. She has worked for the Asahi Evening News, Kyodo News Service, Newsweek, and most recently with Newsweek Japan magazine, writing on Japanese politics, society and culture, U.S.-Japan relations. A 17-year resident of Tokyo, she has also translated thousands of pages of manga, from the award winning "Blade of the Immortal" to "Oh My Goddess."

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**Tuna, Natto Pepper Roll**

**Ingredients**

- Tuna
- Serrano Pepper to taste
- Natto
- Sesame oil
- Soy Sauce
- Sushi rice (see below)
- Yaki-nori (Seaweed for sushi)
- Vinegar
- Sugar & Salt
- Make 2 cups Sushi rice (vinegared rice)

**For rice:**

- 1 cup short-grain raw rice
- 1 and 2 tablespoons cold water
- For the vinegar mixture:
- 1/4 cup rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt



**Preparation**

1. Make sushi rice. (See California Roll recipe for the detail direction)
2. Cut nori into 4 pieces.
3. Chop Natto finely.
4. Cut serrano pepper into very thin slices. (It's better to put rubber gloves on when you handle serrano pepper.)
5. Cut tuna into thin strips of easy-roll-size (like 2 or 3 inch-long sticks).
6. In a bowl, mix equal parts of soy sauce and sesame oil and sliced serrano pepper (the amount of the pepper depends on your preference). Put tuna into the mixture and let it marinated for a second.
7. Dry your hands thoroughly.
8. Place the seaweed at the corner upward and put the vinegared rice in the center.
9. Lay a stick of tuna diagonally, down on the middle of the rice. Pour a little bit of the marinade mixture over the tuna.
10. Stir Natto and put some of them over the tuna, diagonally as well. (Don't over stuff it.)

\*Be careful not to place too large a quantity of rice and tuna on a nori, otherwise rolling will be very difficult.