

A History of Passion and Success Specialty Tomatoes from Sakata

The specialty tomato industry faces a huge challenge: maintain high yield and superior shelf life without sacrificing flavor and overall quality. Unfortunately, when a variety excels in one area, it typically falls short in the other. With decades of knowledge and experience in the specialty tomato industry, Sakata is all too familiar with the struggle for the 'perfect tomato.' So familiar, in fact, that it has become a main focus, as well as an area of true passion for Sakata. Sakata's specialty tomatoes provide the buyer with a complete eating experience - desirable aroma, excellent texture and impeccable 'umami' flavor - making them ideal as snack items, as well as delicious additions to salads and cooking recipes. Behind every good product is a great team. Service, quality and reliability are imperative for success, and are qualities that Sakata is proud to bring to the industry, because we truly care about our products and our customers.

It All Began in Japan

Decades ago, a dedicated and spirited team, known as the Kimitsu Tomato Team, set out to reshape Sakata Japan's tomato strategy. One highly-skilled breeder and team member, Mr. Shinya Enomoto, noticed a dire need in the current tomato market. With passion and perseverance, he became the team leader, and after many painstaking years, created a program that successfully reshaped the Japanese market to value vastly-improved tomato varieties that appeal to both the grower and the consumer. During this time, another vital leader, and former Vice President of Sakata Seed America, Mr. Hideo Takahashi, returned to Japan to become President of Sakata Seed Japan. He quickly took notice of the strides being made in Sakata Japan's specialty tomato market, and knew that the North American market faced similar challenges and could benefit from their advances.

Success in North America

After Mr. Takahashi's retirement from Sakata Seed Japan, he was eager to return to America and focus his attention on bringing high-quality, flavorful tomatoes to the North American market. He shared his passion, insight and, most importantly, Japanese-bred genetics, and inspired



(L) Mr. Hideo Takahashi

the formulation of a team dedicated to specialty tomatoes for the North American market. "At this time, The U.S. tomato market was primarily gas and plastic tomatoes, which lacked flavor and consumer satisfaction; consumers were looking for a long-lasting, good-tasting tomato. Our mission was clear - create tomatoes with exceptional umami flavor without sacrificing traditional grower benefits, such as yield, disease resistance and shelf life." The team tapped into genetics developed by Japanese breeders, and applied them to varieties suited to the North American market, with the goal of introducing tomatoes of all colors, shapes and sizes - with quality, consistency and flavor as their main features.

Sweet Hearts, a red grape tomato, was the first introduction in North America. Since, Sakata has introduced an array of specialty red tomatoes to the market, including favorites like Amai, Bellastar, Oribustar, Sweet Elite, Sweet Mojo and Sweet Zen. Over the years, a colorful spectrum of products were developed to compliment the red types and meet consumer demand, such as yellow grape varieties, Solid Gold and Sweet Canary, orange cherry, Oranjestar and pink cherry, Sweet Treats.

Passion Makes Perfect

Sakata's diverse line of specialty tomatoes includes rounds, grapes and cherries in a variety of sizes and colors, and is a true testament to the dedication, passion and collaboration of the Sakata Corporation. The historical culmination of the devoted research program in Japan, the advances and adaptations from Sakata Seed America and the focused vision of Sakata leaders are all indications of an innovative and lasting effort to improve the specialty tomato market. The priority to create viable solutions for both growers and consumers remains the central focus of the specialty tomato program at Sakata. The Sakata team is steadfast in their efforts to keep the vision alive, and create genetics



Various Members of the Sakata Specialty Tomato Program

that will challenge and shape the future of the industry. Sakata continues to focus heavily on the specialty tomato program, and is passionate about continuing the tradition of bringing innovative and quality genetics to the North American market and beyond. In the words of Mr. Takahashi, "The specialty tomato market will continue to grow dynamically; however, consumer taste recognition will continue to be at the forefront of the market, so the market will continue to grow and shift into different directions based on consumer preferences. When we created the specialty tomato program, we created a mission statement that promised to continuously develop and introduce the highest flavor tomatoes of all colors, shapes and sizes to North America. I know Sakata will honor this tradition, and continue to prove their passion and commitment to the specialty tomato industry."

What is Umami?

Umami /u:'mɑ:mi/, a savory taste, is one of the five basic tastes (together with sweet, sour, bitter and salty).

The term, 'umami,' was first coined in Japan by Professor Kikunae Ikeda in 1908, and has since become a prevalent reference, and coveted flavor profile, in Japanese culture. Derived from the Japanese (うま味), the rough translation is 'pleasant, savory taste,' or 'delicious taste.'

Umami flavor has created a widespread debate amongst scientists since its inception as to whether or not it should be considered one of the basic tastes. Umami flavor cannot be categorized as sweet, sour, bitter or salty, and therefore, is in a class of its own.

Commonly described as pleasantly 'brothy' or 'meaty,' umami embodies a unique and savory mixture of multiple tastes. Examples of food with umami flavor are fish, shellfish, cured meats, cheeses, shrimp pastes, soy sauce, mushrooms and vegetables, such as tomatoes, spinach and celery. Its long-lasting and mouthwatering characteristics create a distinct flavor profile that complements a range of dishes.

The umami flavor has become so popular, in fact, that the term is now widely used amongst top food manufacturers such as Nestlé, Campbell's and Frito-Lay. A popular present-day paradigm of umami flavor is ketchup.

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