

## “Cheese Basket” of Japan

Hokkaido is home to nearly half of all of the dairy cattle in Japan and is responsible for roughly half of national raw milk production. In addition to approximately 70% of the national total area of pastureland maintained by Hokkaido's pristine water, the prefecture also boasts cooler weather and lower levels of humidity relative to other parts of Japan. These natural conditions provide an ideal environment for dairy cattle to graze and live comfortably. In 2008, there were over 8000 dairy farms and about 8.2 million dairy cattle in Hokkaido.

Not only have dairy milk production and consumption become customary in Japan but so have the production and consumption of other dairy products such as cheese. This is true mostly in Hokkaido where over 90% of cheese for direct consumption is produced. In this and other ways, Hokkaido has made a significant contribution to the diversity of Japanese food culture over the past 140 years and is poised to continue to do so.

Not only does the natural environment allow the cheese industry to thrive in Hokkaido, there have also been generations of hardworking pioneers. One was a man named Ota Chozo who was one of the first Japanese people to make authentic cheese. He was taught by an American named Edwin Dun who had arrived in Hokkaido and opened Makomanai Cattle Ranch in 1875 in Sapporo. The establishment of Sapporo Agricultural School (present-day Hokkaido University) together with Dun's ongoing teachings at Makomanai Cattle Ranch led to an increasing number of graduates both interested in and capable of managing dairy farm operations. In 1877, cheese made at Makomanai Cattle Ranch garnered wide acclaim at an 'excellence in industry' competition in Tokyo.

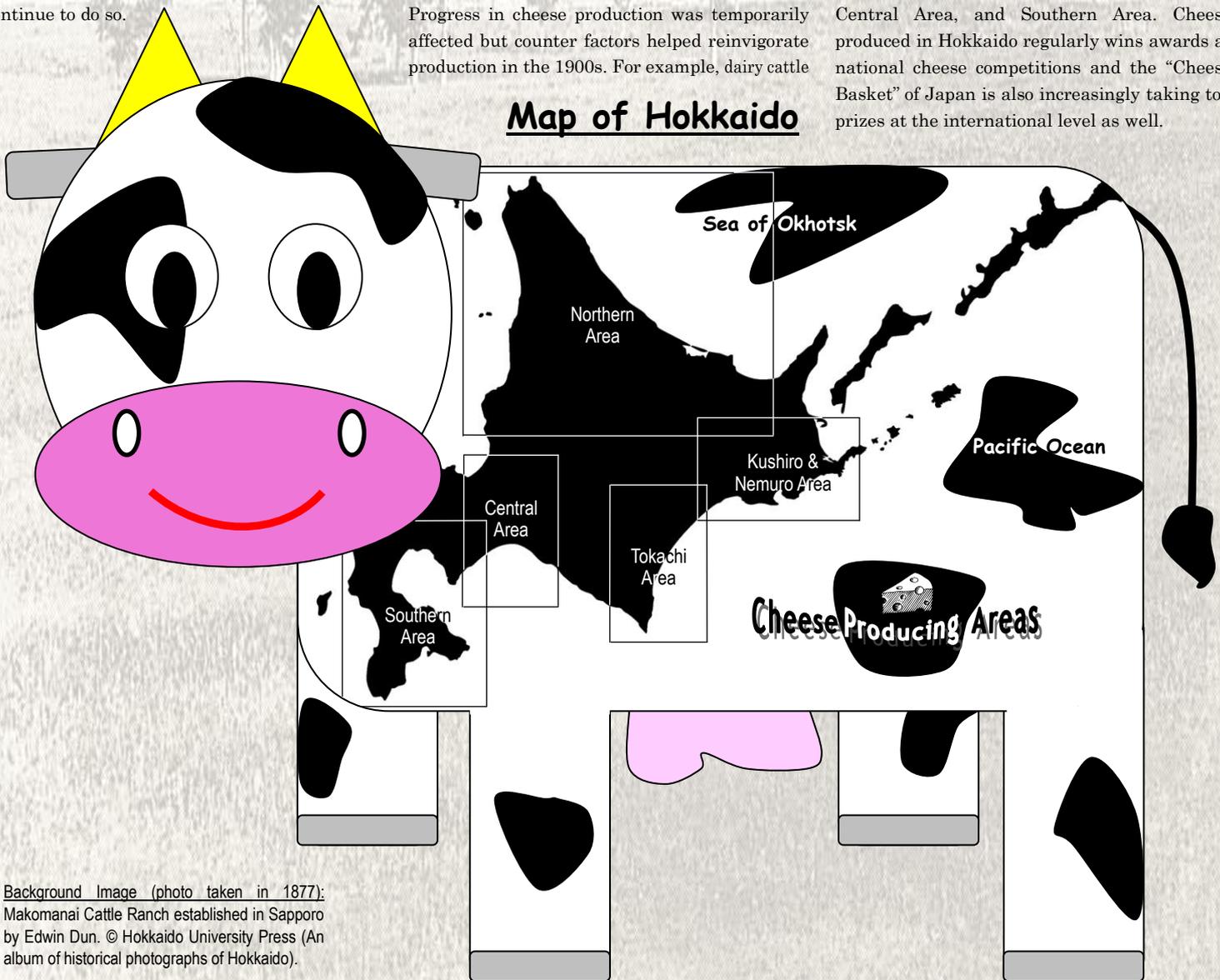
At this time, customers of cheese were primarily foreign residents in major Japanese trading port cities such as Yokohama and Kobe. Moreover, rice cultivation had become the focus of agricultural development according to the nationally decreed Hokkaido settlement policy. Progress in cheese production was temporarily affected but counter factors helped reinvigorate production in the 1900s. For example, dairy cattle

cattle from the Netherlands were brought into the present-day southern port city of Hakodate by a Trappist monastery which produced dairy products such as cheese independently.

Although advancements in cheese production were halted again during the war years, the post-war period was characterized by increasing western influence which led to very quick developments. Since 1987, cheese promotion events have been held regularly across Hokkaido beginning with a milk and cheese fair in Sapporo. Hokkaido has also been hosting international cheese conferences since 1988 when a veteran cheese producer named Nozomi Miyajima began to invite specialists from France. In 2005, the prestigious French Comité Plénier Fromages was held for the first time outside of Europe in none other than Hokkaido!

Presently, there are over 110 cheese farms and factories found in Hokkaido. At least 10 of these are found in each of Hokkaido's 5 main cheese producing areas called Northern Area, Kushiro and Nemuro Area, Tokachi Area, Central Area, and Southern Area. Cheese produced in Hokkaido regularly wins awards at national cheese competitions and the “Cheese Basket” of Japan is also increasingly taking top prizes at the international level as well.

## Map of Hokkaido



Background Image (photo taken in 1877):  
Makomanai Cattle Ranch established in Sapporo  
by Edwin Dun. © Hokkaido University Press (An  
album of historical photographs of Hokkaido).

## A City Close to Home – Iwamizawa (amalgamated with Kurisawa and Kita since 2006)

Although there are nearly 90,000 people currently living in Iwamizawa, settlement began only 130 years ago when roughly 1500 migrants came from over ten different southern Japanese prefectures. Between 1889 and 1892, Iwamizawa was connected by several roads and railways to many major cities. The original Iwamizawa Station was also moved to its present location and Iwamizawa became one of Hokkaido's most critical inland transportation hubs.

In 1897, the Hokkaido Government established the Sorachi subprefectural office in Iwamizawa and the population surpassed 12,000. Thanks to a waterworks and other major infrastructure projects, accelerated coal mining and active resource development, as well as improved access to an abundance of marine resources in the northern coastline region of Ishikari River (longest in Hokkaido and third longest in Japan), Iwamizawa quickly began to play an increasingly important role in the region's political, industrial and cultural spheres.

Following the depletion of coal, Iwamizawa quickly advanced developments in many other industries such as agriculture. Iwamizawa has since been known for a wide range of high quality crops and flowers but is most famous for rice cultivation since it currently produces the greatest quantity of rice in Japan.



Expertise of rice cultivation also served as an important means to deepening relations with China beginning with a famous Iwamizawa resident named Shoichi Hara, who made significant contributions to the progress of rice cultivation in Heilongjiang (twinned with Hokkaido) and other regions across China. The Iwamizawa China-Japan Friendship Association has also been very active since 1963.

Iwamizawa's eagerness to interact with the international community is also demonstrated by its longstanding ties shared with two American cities: Pocatello, Idaho and Canby, Oregon. In July, there will be a delegation led by *Pocatello/Iwamizawa Sister Cities* coming from Pocatello to Iwamizawa for two weeks. Over 700 inhabitants from Pocatello and Iwamizawa have participated in such delegation visits since their sister city relationship was established in 1985. Iwamizawa's keen interest in international grassroots exchange is demon-

strated by its program which gives delegates from Pocatello the opportunity to interact not only with Iwamizawa's host families and schools but also its local residents during special culture classes and local events.

In 2006, Iwamizawa was amalgamated with the village of Kita and town of Kurisawa. In doing so, Iwamizawa inherited the strong sister city relationship originally established between Kurisawa and Canby in 1989. One of the major annual activities which continues between Iwamizawa and Canby is a 10-day exchange program for junior high school students. Since 1990, nearly 150 Japanese students have gone during the summer holidays to Canby where they have interacted with host families and experienced daily life there.

Below Left: The world's heaviest pestle (200kg) pounding 60kg of rice in the world's largest mortar (4t, 2.1m diameter) to make rice cakes at Iwamizawa's famous *Furusato Hyappai Festival* in September.



© Iwamizawa City.

Right: Iwamizawa's Rose Garden is aiming to become 'Hokkaido's Rose Garden' by consisting of roses able to withstand the cold. It is inside the 183ha Iwamizawa Park together with a campground, an amusement park, a mini golf course and other facilities.



© Iwamizawa Park.

Brits

in

Hokkaido

**Mio Jevons was born and raised in the English countryside of Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, near the city of Birmingham where she later studied English literature and education at**

the University of Birmingham. Although her mother originally came from Tokyo and introduced Mio to Japan early on, Mio did not know much about Hokkaido before arriving here in 2009 as an assistant language teacher through the Japan and Exchange Teaching (JET) Programme. She also did not know about the centrally located town of Biei where she would live and work for two years, or the more southern city of Iwamizawa where she currently resides. Gorgeous flowers, original dishes, and local residents who have welcomed her with arms wide open are all more than she had expected.

Mio told me specifically about her love for one of Hokkaido's signature dishes called *soup curry*, which she had never heard of before coming to Hokkaido. This curry-flavoured soup is served hot and full of various cooked or deep-fried meats or vegetables according to one's preferences. Mio suggested that soup curry reminded her of home where Indian cuisine has long had a strong

Mio (right) at Biei flower fields.



© Mio Jevons.

culinary influence as demonstrated by the popular dish called *tikka masala*.

Such reminders of home have been welcomed by Mio mostly due to Hokkaido's long winter. It has been difficult for her to adapt to the drop in temperature which can freeze water pipes and the thick white blanket of snow which wipes out the bright colours of flowers she loves. However, she has adapted to her new lifestyle and even given snow boarding a try while participating in a variety of winter festivals since coming to Hokkaido. At one of them, she was particularly pleased to have the chance to make a miniature snow sculpture by herself.

Mio's creativity and passion for the arts became very clear when she told me about her efforts to introduce the English custom of Christmas concerts to the people of Biei. With the cooperation of colleagues and Biei townspeople, Mio was able to organize a concert which saw over 20 performances including a family quintet, a local orchestra, and a medley sung by Mio together with her English students (expected since she had already performed a highly praised rendition of a Pink Lady's hit with a colleague at the town's junior high school culture festival earlier in the year). Mio and her English students also made gingerbread cookies and mince pies which were served after the concert.

In 2011, Mio moved from Biei to Iwamizawa when she became a coordinator for international relations with the city of Iwamizawa. While the teaching position in Biei befitted Mio's educational background, Mio had also long yearned to develop interpretation skills since her work experience at a Japanese manufacturing plant as a high school student in England. Beginning her new job in Iwamizawa last summer, Mio has already done some interpretation work involving local residents and looks forward to working with a delegation coming this July from sister city Pocatello, Idaho (USA).

In spite of her preference for warmer climates, Mio has continued to find **Hokkaido charm** in many places from big cities like Sapporo and Asahikawa to medium cities like Iwamizawa and small towns like Biei. In addition to the very open-minded people she has met, Mio has also become very interested in the Hokkaido dialect, one which is less well known than others in Japan but is nonetheless a treat for language learners. Not a winter person yet increasingly fond of living here, Mio proves Hokkaido has much to offer in addition to winter activities.



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Above: Mio (in red cape) performing at Biei's Christmas Concert.

