

September 8, 2021

## The Japanese Market for Meat-Substitute Prepared Foods

Here is the first of a planned series of reports on companies in the Japanese retail market for meat-substitute prepared foods. We offer these reports in the spirit of highlighting nascent investment opportunities.

This inaugural report consists mainly of an overview of high-profile market players and a sampling of representative products. To broaden the market vantage, we include a brief discussion of meat-substitute offerings in the fast-food industry. We precede that discussion with a summary of government moves to promote meat substitutes and cultured meat. Follow-up reports will carry features on individual companies, including interviews with company spokespersons, and quantitative data about market scale and growth rate.

### Contents

#### Government Support

- Meat Substitutes
- Cultured Meat

#### Fast Food

- Mos Burger
- Doutor Coffee
- Burger King
- Freshness Burger

#### Meat-Substitute Prepared Foods

- Next Meats
- Green Culture
- Itoham Foods
- Otsuka Foods
- Saniku Foods
- Kurakon Foods
- Via Organica

### Government Support

Evidencing the mounting Japanese interest in meat substitutes and cultured meat has been a series of government initiatives. Witness the government's latest five-year Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, adopted in March 2020. That plan calls for developing meat substitutes that employ soy and other vegetable protein with an eye to creating new markets.

A month after updating the basic plan, the government launched the Food Tech Study Group as a forum for interchange among government agencies and private-sector companies. That group's interim report of July 2020 characterized meat substitutes and cultured meat as "important sectors."

Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries established the Food Tech Public-Private Council in October 2020 to spearhead technological development for nurturing dietary sustainability through diversity. The council promptly positioned

cultured meat as a priority sector and sponsored a nationwide consumer survey in December to ascertain consumer awareness of that technology. Its survey covered 1,000 men and women aged 20 to 90 and found that 39.1% of the respondents were at least somewhat familiar with cultured meat.

Representatives of the agriculture ministry and the Japan Vegetarian Society met in May 2021 to discuss establishing vegan and vegetarian guidelines for food products. They set up a project team and agreed to try to work out labeling guidelines under the Japanese Agricultural Standards by March 2022.

Meat substitutes receive attention, meanwhile, in the government's Annual Report on the Environment, the Sound Material-Cycle Society and Biodiversity in Japan 2020, finalized in June 2021. The report cites meat substitutes as a means of achieving environmental sustainability in food and lauds the Japanese hamburger chain Mos Burger and coffee shop chain Dotour Coffee for offering soy-based burgers (detailed below under "Fast Food").

The support for cultured meat mentioned above marks a stunning change in the government's stance. Just seven months before the Food Tech Study Group designated cultured meat an "important sector," the government had rendered a very different judgment. On November 29, 2019, Kensuke Onishi, a lower-house parliamentarian from what is now the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, submitted the following query to the government.

I hereby request explication of the government's position on cultured meat. That product technology allows for securing meat through tissue culturing with cells removed from the edible portions of living animals rather than through slaughtering animals. It has progressed rapidly in recent years, and the marketing of cultured meat appears to be imminent. Please provide answers to the following questions in regard to the accelerating momentum toward the industrialization of cultured meat.

1. Cultured meat offers several advantages, such as eliminating the need to kill animals, facilitating rigorous hygiene, and reducing environmental impact in comparison with livestock raising. Global demand for meat is growing as the global population continues to expand, and cultured meat is the subject of great expectations as an alternative to traditional meat in serving that demand. What is the government's basic position on cultured meat?
2. Government agencies in the United States are moving to lay a foundation for commercializing cultured meat by establishing rules for production process inspection, for quality assurance, and for product labeling. Shouldn't the Japanese government also consider putting in place laws and mechanisms for the commercialization of cultured meat?
3. The US business consultancy AT Kearney projects that the global meat market in 2040 will total \$1.8 trillion, of which traditional meat will account for 40% and cultured meat 35%. What is the government's position on the effect of the growth in cultured meat on livestock growers?

On December 10, 2019, Onishi, who represents a district in Aichi Prefecture, received the following formal response from the government.

Regarding questions 1 and 2, the government does not share the view you cite that "the marketing of cultured meat appears to be imminent." As for

“putting in place laws and mechanisms for the commercialization of cultured meat,” the government perceives no need to address that question at this time.

Regarding question 3, that is a hypothetical question, and the government therefore declines to respond.

A new mindset apparently took hold in the government in the early months of 2020.

## Fast Food

Growing demand for meat substitutes is readily evident on the menus in Japan’s fast-food industry. **Mos Burger (Mos Food Services Inc.; Tokyo; TSE: 8153)**, Japan’s largest homegrown burger chain, has long offered a soy alternative for every beef burger on the menu. It operated 1,252 outlets at July 31, 2021, including 38 company-owned shops. In comparison, McDonald’s Holdings Company (Japan), Ltd., operated 2,932 outlets at that date (franchise/own store breakdown unavailable). Mos Burger has differentiated itself effectively from McDonald’s by preparing every item after receiving the order and by tailoring its menu to Japanese tastes.

**Doutor Coffee (Doutor Nichires Holdings Co., Ltd.; Tokyo; TSE: 3987)** augmented its menu in 2020 with soy burgers. It operated 1,288 coffee shops in Japan at July 31, including 361 company-owned outlets. In contrast, Starbucks Coffee Japan, Ltd., operated 1,655 shops in Japan at June 30, 2021 (franchise/own store breakdown unavailable).

Japanese fast-food diners also enjoy a soy option at the local incarnation of Burger King, the world’s second-largest burger chain. **Burger King, owned by Restaurant Brands International Inc. (Toronto; NYSE: QSR)**, is making its fourth effort to crack the Japanese market. The company formerly teamed unsuccessfully there with Seibu Railway Co., Ltd. (Seibu Holdings Inc.; Tokyo; TSE: 9024); with Japan Tobacco Inc.; Tokyo; TSE: 2914); and with the Republic of Korea’s Lotte Group Seoul; KRX: 004990). Hong Kong’s Affinity Equity Partners (S) Pte. Ltd. has expanded Burger King’s presence in the Republic of Korea as the master franchisee there and secured the master franchise for Japan in 2019. It added the Plant-Based Whopper to the menu in 2020 and operated 123 Burger King outlets in Japan at May 27, 2021.

**Freshness Burger (owned by the Yokohama-based restaurant group Colowide Co., Ltd.; TSE: 7616)** is, like Mos Burger, a homegrown entry in the realm of burger chains. And it, too, offers a meat substitute in its burger lineup. Freshness Burger operated 176 outlets at March 31, 2021, including 64 company-owned shops. It formerly offered two meat substitutes, a bean-based burger and a soy-based burger, but discontinued them for lack of demand. Freshness Burger resurrected its vegetable-based presence in 2020 with a line of soy meat offerings.

Mos Burger



Doutor Coffee



Burger King



Freshness Burger



## Meat-Substitute Prepared Foods

Two assumptions that underlie this report are . . .

One, that producers of meat-substitute products will attract growing investment and

Two, that Japanese companies will earn a noteworthy share of that investment.

We preface our discussion of the high-profile players in the Japanese market with a discussion of the most-prominent players globally.

Highlighting the growing investment in producers of meat-substitute prepared foods has been investors' interest in **Beyond Meat (El Segundo, California; NASDAQ: BYND)**. That company listed its shares on NASDAQ in May 2019, and its products are available at some 122,000 retail and food-service outlets in more than 80 nations.

Hot on Beyond Meat's heels worldwide in the retail sector and in the food-service sector are **Quorn Foods Ltd (Stokesley, North Yorkshire; owned by Monde Nissin Corporation; Santa Rosa, Philippines; PSE: MONDE)** and **Impossible Foods Inc. (Redwood City, California; unlisted)**. A smaller rival, **Eat Just, Inc. (San Francisco, unlisted)**, has attained fame with plant-based egg-substitute products and with the world's first cultured-meat product to win government approval for commercial sale. Eat Just's lab-grown chicken nuggets went on sale in Singapore in 2020.

Progress can be fitful, as has been the case for Beyond Meat in Japan. Mitsui and Co. took a small equity stake in that company in 2016, and the two announced at that time that they would work to introduce Beyond Meat products in Japan. Mitsui revealed in 2019, however, that it had shelved plans for Japanese marketing of Beyond Meat products. It did not offer a reason for that decision, and a spokeswoman for Mitsui insisted that going ahead with marketing was still a possibility.

### **Notes:**

#### **Prices**

The price cited for each product in the samplings presented below is from the company's online catalog or from Amazon or another online vendor. The real-meat benchmark price is a highly arbitrary average of the prices of roughly comparable products.

#### **Ingredients**

Several companies include "domestically produced" indications for some ingredients, such as soybeans. Those indications are ambiguous, however, as to whether they refer to where the crops were grown or simply to where the foodstuffs were processed. We have therefore omitted those indications in our listings of ingredients. Several companies also include the caution "might include trace amounts of" specified ingredients. We have omitted such cautions in the interest of brevity.

#### **Complexity**

Critics of meat-substitute prepared foods frequently cite the numerous ingredients as evidence of an alleged "unnaturalness." Ethan Brown, the founder and CEO of Beyond Meat rebutted that objection as follows in an interview that appeared in the New York Times on August 27, 2021:

"If you were to list out the chemical composition of organic Kobe beef it would be a superlong list of really long, complicated words that most of us couldn't pronounce. All the amino acids, all the different lactic acids, all of the components that go into having a piece of muscle stay together in an animal's body. We don't have the luxury of just saying 'plant-based beef.' So we have to list out our ingredients. But it's not like there's more ingredients in ours than there is in actual muscle if you break down the chemistry."

## Next Meats

Japan's first and thus far only company whose business centers on meat-substitute products and that has listed its shares publicly is [Next Meats Co., Ltd.](#) (Tokyo; OTCMKTS: NXMH; [nextmeats.co.jp/en/company](#), [vegconomist.com/trade/japan-alternative-meat-startup-next-meats-holdings-gets-listed-on-the-american-otc-market](#)). Established in Tokyo in June 2020, Next Meats produces and markets plant-based beef- and chicken-substitute prepared foods and has announced plans to begin marketing plant-based pork-, tuna-, and milk-substitute foods in October 2021.

The company has a business collaboration with Toyota Tsusho Corporation, the trading arm of the Toyota Group; a technological-development collaboration with the Taiwanese producer of textured vegetable protein Hung Yang Foods Co., Ltd.; and a product-development collaboration with Kameda Seika Co., Ltd., a leader in rice crackers and other Japanese snacks. It conducts production and R&D at a facility in Nagaoka, Niigata, and through outsourcing arrangements in Japan, China, and India. The company is building a plant in Nagaoka that is due to begin operation in spring 2022.

Next Meats secured its OTCMKTS listing through a SPAC arrangement and offers little in the way of financial disclosure. Management expresses a determination secure a NASDAQ listing “as soon as possible,” and we will apparently need to wait until then to view substantive information about the company’s fiscal performance and financial position. The company announced in June 2021 that it had raised about ¥1 billion in equity financing from “multiple companies that offer synergistic potential, including a large pharmaceuticals company, a manufacturer of food processing equipment, and a provider of global logistics solutions.”

### *A sampling of Next Meats product offerings*

#### **Burger 2.1**

¥1,287/320 g (80 g x 4) + sauce

Kilogram equivalent: ¥4,022

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,000

Processed soy protein bulk, flavorings (soy sauce, sugar, fermented rice, yeast extract, apples, distilled vinegar, garlic, salt, sesame seed oil, chile bean sauce, pepper), rapeseed oil



**Gyudon 1.2 (beef for eating atop a bowl of rice)**

¥2,250/600 g (120 g x 5)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥3,750

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥2,500

Processed soy protein bulk (defatted and salted soybeans), flavorings (soy sauce, sugar, fermented rice, yeast extract, kelp extract, salt, distilled vinegar, shiitake extract, ginger powder), onions, rapeseed oil, caramel colorant



**Kalbi 1.1 (thinly sliced beef rib meat)**

¥4,080/1 kg

Kilogram equivalent: ¥4,080

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥2,000

Processed soy protein bulk (defatted and salted soybeans), flavorings (soy sauce, sugar, fermented rice, yeast extract, apples, distilled vinegar, garlic, salt, sesame seed oil, chile bean sauce, pepper), rapeseed oil



**Harami 1.1 (beef skirt meat)**

¥4,080/1 kg

Kilogram equivalent: ¥4,080

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥2,500

Processed soy protein bulk (defatted and salted soybeans), flavorings (soy sauce, sugar, fermented rice, yeast extract, apples, distilled vinegar, garlic, salt, sesame seed oil, chile bean sauce, pepper), rapeseed oil



**Chicken 1.0**

¥2,331/540 g (180 g x 3)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥4,317

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,000

Processed soy protein bulk (condensed soy protein, vegetable oil, salt, spices), herbal seasonings, seasoned potato starch, amino-acid flavoring, calcium phosphate, silicon dioxide, guar gum thickening



**Impressions**

Next Meats has staked out a position in the Japanese vanguard of meat-substitute processed foods, and that positioning invites rigorous adjudication. Product names like “Chicken 1.0” and “Burger 2.1” remind us that these are works in progress. Our interim verdict, however, is harsh. Next Meats’ offerings are inferior to the competition in product categories, such as burger and chicken, where direct comparisons are possible. The company has done a good job of mimicking the texture of the meats emulated, but its flavorings are strident to the point of distraction. We find ourselves suspecting that Next Meats is seeking to hide something about the taste of the basic ingredients. Let us hope that it will overcome this problem in future product generations.

## Green Culture

The business model at [Green Culture, Inc. \(Tokyo, unlisted\)](#), is a combination of developing and producing original products and marketing those products and products of other producers through an online portal. Green Culture remains unlisted, but management refers to it as “a food tech venture,” and the company raised ¥250 million in June 2021 through a private placement of equity with three investors: Kameda Seika, the aforementioned producer of rice crackers and other Japanese snacks; Oisix Ra Daichi Inc., which delivers natural-food meals to homes on a subscription delivery basis; and the INCJ, Ltd., subsidiary Universal Materials Incubator Co., Ltd. (Tokyo).

We note with interest that the Oisix Ra Daichi director Kohei Matsumoto became a nonexecutive director at Green Culture in conjunction with his company’s investment. Matsumoto led the preparations for Oisix Ra Daichi’s IPO in 2013 and has since overseen investor relations at the company.

### *A sampling of Green Culture product offerings (three Chinese-food items)*

#### **Shaomai steamed dumplings**

¥1,501/600 g (20 x 30 g)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥2,502

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,500

Vegetable protein (soybeans, green peas), vegetables (bamboo sprouts, onions, ginger, garlic), flavorings (salt, vegetable extract, starch), enzyme extract, sugar, rice-bran oil, granulated soy protein, cornstarch, skin (wheat flour, konjak, salt, sugar, soy flour, wheat starch, methylcellulose thickener), monascus colorant



#### **Xiao long bao steamed dumplings**

¥1,501/500 g (20 x 25 g)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥3,002

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,500

Skin (wheat flour, salt, sugar, soy flour), vegetables (cabbage, onions, bamboo sprouts, ginger, garlic), vegetable protein (soybeans, green peas, rice, other), flavorings, enzyme extract colorants



#### **Potstickers**

¥3,736/1,360 g (17 g x 80)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥2,747

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,500

Cabbage, granulated soy protein, wheat flour, powdered soy protein, garlic, Chinese chives, ginger, vegetable oil, onions, apples, soy sauce, *miso* (fermented soybeans), salt, sugar, seasonings, sesame, processed starch



## *Impressions*

Chinese cuisine has a long tradition of crafting vegetable-based dishes that mimic meat and seafood dishes. Those dishes appear on the menu in several high-end restaurants in Japan. Green Culture’s inclusion of classic Chinese items in its offerings was an opportunity to compare its results with that competition. The results were a combination of “superb” and, well, “not so superb.” Green Culture’s *xiao long bao* steamed dumplings are excellent. Along with comparing favorably with the vegetable-based mimicry at high-end restaurants, they are indistinguishable from the meat version emulated. Also excellent are Green Culture’s potstickers, which yield satisfactory results with steaming or frying. Less delectable are the *shaomai* steamed dumplings. Their chief failing is the amorphous texture of the filling. Achieving a more-granular texture should be easy to do, and we hope that the company will tackle that task.

## **Itoham Foods**

Itoham Foods Inc. (Kobe, [www.itoham.co.jp/english](http://www.itoham.co.jp/english)) is a wholly owned subsidiary of Itoham Yonekyu Holdings Inc. (Tokyo; TSE: 2296; [www.itoham-yonekyu-holdings.com/english](http://www.itoham-yonekyu-holdings.com/english)). The parent is Japan’s second-largest meat producer, after NH (Nippon Ham) Foods Ltd. Itoham Yonekyu has been the most proactive of Japan’s meat packers in promoting meat-substitute products. It is acting in the same vein as traditional meat packers and food processors in North America and Europe. Several of those companies have been disinclined to leave the meat-substitute market sector to upstarts and have built or acquired their own operations in that sector.

Unilever PLC’s portfolio of food brands includes **The Vegetarian Butcher** ([www.thevegetarianbutcher.co.uk](http://www.thevegetarianbutcher.co.uk)). Tyson Foods, Inc., has developed a line of meat-substitute products. The Kraft Heinz Company markets the meat-substitute **Boca Burger** ([www.bocaburger.com](http://www.bocaburger.com)). Nestlé Ltd. acquired **Sweet Earth** ([www.goodnes.com/sweet-earth](http://www.goodnes.com/sweet-earth)), a producer of plant-based meat products, in 2017. And Kellogg Company, Conagra Brands, Inc., and Nomad Foods Limited have all unveiled plans for meat-substitute products. Hilton Food Group plc acquired a 50% stake in the Dutch producer of meat-substitute and other vegetarian products **Dalco Food B.V. (Oosterhout, [www.dalco.nl/en](http://www.dalco.nl/en))** in 2019 and announced in September 2021 that it will acquire the other 50%.

## *A sampling of Itoham Foods product offerings*

### **Nuggets**

¥280/160 g

Kilogram equivalent: ¥1,750

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,000

Wheat flour, vegetable oil, granulated vegetable protein, powdered vegetable protein, albumen, breadcrumbs, corn flour, spices, starch, salt, mushroom extract, sugar, dextrose, defatted powdered milk, processed starch, amino-acid flavoring, baking powder, carotin colorant, spice extracts, seasonings





### Soft cutlets

¥360/180 g (60 g x 3)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥2,000

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,500

Granulated vegetable protein, albumen, milk protein, vegetable oil, sugar, seasonings, mushroom extract, breadcrumbs, wheat flour, starch, powdered vegetable protein, albumen, dextrose, salt, processed starch, amino-acid flavoring, sodium phosphate, gardenia yellow colorant



### Meatballs in sweet-and-sour sauce

¥320/150 g

Kilogram equivalent: ¥2,133

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,000

Soy-based sweet sauce, onions, fibrous vegetable protein, granulated vegetable protein, albumen, vegetable oil, breadcrumbs, grain flour, sugar, ginger paste, powdered vegetable protein, onion extract, oyster sauce, salt, tomato paste, mushroom extract, soy sauce, seasonings, thickeners (processed starch, polysaccharides), amino-acid flavoring, caramel colorant



### Impressions

Itoham Foods was a happy surprise in our investigation of the meat-substitute processed foods available through retail channels in Japan. Its nuggets are comparable in flavor and in texture to the chicken nuggets sold at fast-food outlets and convenience stores. They are more delectable and more natural tasting than the chicken offering from Next Meats. Also impressive are Itoham's pork-like cutlets and its meatballs in sweet-and-sour sauce. The latter require only heating in a microwave or on the stove and combining with a vegetable dish and a serving of rice or noodles to yield a sumptuous meal.

### Otsuka Foods

The business portfolio at [Otsuka Holdings Co., Ltd. \(Tokyo; TSE: 4578; www.otsuka.com/en\)](https://www.otsuka.com/en) spans pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals at Otsuka Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., and foods and beverages at [Otsuka Foods Co., Ltd. \(Tokyo\)](https://www.otsukafoods.com/en). Otsuka Foods augments its product offerings with meat-substitute processed foods marketed under the Zero Meat brand. Like Itoham Foods, Otsuka Foods has built an extensive network of sales channels, including both brick-and-mortar retailers and online portals, and has tapped that network effectively for its Zero Meat marketing.

Otsuka Foods has a history of successful innovation in food processing. The company's Bon Curry, for example, was the world's first retort-pouch food product when it went on the market in 1968, and it remains Japan's best-known line of heat-and-serve curry products. Otsuka Foods, incidentally, has engaged sagaciously in cross-border acquisitions, as in its purchases of the California companies Crystal Geyser Water Company and Ridge Vineyards. That activity mirrors the vigorous approach to acquisitions at Otsuka Pharmaceutical.

## *A sampling of Otsuka Foods product offerings*

### **Hamburger patty in demiglace sauce**

¥284/140 g

Kilogram equivalent: ¥2,029

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,000

Processed soy bulk (defatted soybeans, whole-grain rice flour), onions, vegetable oil, granulated soy protein (defatted soybeans, starch, vegetable oil), breadcrumbs, sugar, starch, albumen, powdered soy protein, brown roux, apple paste, salt, tomato paste, seasonings, dextrin, yeast extract, Worcestershire sauce, red wine, spices, dietary fiber, vegetable bouillon, soy sauce, celery powder, caramel colorant, amino-acid flavoring, glycine, D-xylose, enzymes, sucrose, esters of fatty acids



### **Sausages**

¥438/120 g (20 g x 6)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥3,650

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥2,000

Vegetable oil, powdered soy protein, granulated soy protein (defatted soybeans, starch, vegetable oil), egg protein, sugar, salt, enzyme extract, seasonings, pH adjuster, glycine, gardenia yellow colorant, liquid smoke, tomato colorant



### **Minced ham**

¥268/60 g

Kilogram equivalent: ¥4,467

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥2,500

Vegetable oil, powdered soy protein, granulated soy protein (defatted soybeans, starch, vegetable oil), egg protein, salt, sugar, enzyme extract, seasonings, processed starch, pH adjuster, glycine, gardenia yellow colorant, tomato colorant



### **Impressions**

Common to all the Otsuka Foods products that we tasted is a welcome restraint in flavoring. The company appears to have emulated natural meat flavors largely through mixing and processing basic ingredients, rather than relying on flavorings. That has resulted in a line of products that diners can consumed repeatedly without becoming satiated.

## Saniku Foods

A Bible-study school established in Tokyo in 1896 by an American Seventh-day Adventist missionary was the beginning of [Saniku Foods Co., Ltd. \(Sodegaura, Chiba; unlisted\)](#). The students and teachers cooked and sold cookies to raise money for their school, and the food business grew steadily over the years. In 1970, the Seventh Day Adventist organization in Japan spun the food business off from the school as Saniku Foods. The name “Saniku” is a compound of *san*, for “three,” and *iku*, for “nourish.” It refers to the threefold nourishment of the physical, intellectual, and spiritual. The school, by the way, operates today in Otaki, Chiba, as a junior college and a four-year school of nursing.

### *A sampling of Saniku Foods product offerings*

#### **Bologna loaf**

¥1,026/400 g

Kilogram equivalent: ¥2,565

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,800

Fibrous soy protein, vegetable oil, powdered soy protein, vegetable bouillon, albumen, sugar, wheat protein, vegetable protein enzyme, starch, seasonings, monascus colorant

#### **Sausage links**

¥713/400 g

Kilogram equivalent: ¥1,783

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥2,000

Rapeseed oil, fibrous soy protein, powdered soy protein, albumen, vegetable bouillon, salt, sugar, vegetable protein enzymes, seasonings, monascus colorant, lecithin, spices



### *Impressions*

Saniku Foods’ bologna-like soy loaf has long been a vegetarian staple in Japan. Its fibrous texture is reassuring, its flavoring moderate. The loaf is ready right out of the refrigerator for slicing onto sandwiches or into salads. And it holds up well under even high oven temperatures in baked dishes. The canned sausage links are a fun and entirely satisfactory alternative, meanwhile, to Vienna sausage.

## Kurakon Foods

[Kurakon Foods Corporation \(Osaka, unlisted; \[www.kurakon.jp/vegans/en\]\(http://www.kurakon.jp/vegans/en\)\)](#) is Japan’s largest producer of seaweed products. Its work in seaweed-based foods led to business in vegetarian items based on other ingredients, such as beans and tofu. The company has cultivated that business under the brand Good for Vegans. Most of its offerings are dry mixes for reconstituting with hot water. Some, however, come in retort pouches as heat-and-serve dishes, such as the two introduced below.

### *A sampling of a Kurakon Foods product offerings*

#### **Chili con carne**

¥330/150 g

Kilogram equivalent: ¥2,200

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,500

Tomato paste, chickpeas, kidney beans, carrots, corn, distilled vinegar, yeast extract, vegetable extract, salt, flavorings, brown sugar



#### **Ground-meat substitute**

¥308/200 g

Kilogram equivalent: ¥1,540

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,000

Tofu protein, distilled vinegar



### *Impressions*

Kurakon Foods' heat-and-serve offerings in retort pouches are acceptable in regard to taste and texture. The chickpea- and kidney bean-based “carne” in the chili con carne is a welcome respite from the monotony of soy protein. Kurakon Foods' ground-meat substitute is more expensive, however, than fully comparable options from other producers.

## **Via Organica**

We wrap up our survey of suppliers of meat-substitute processed foods in the Japanese market with a Spanish company: [Via Organica, S.L. \(Valencia, unlisted; carlotaorganic.bio/we-are; Japanese importer: Nichifutsu Boeki Corporation, Tokyo\)](#). That company earned a place in our survey with the most-appealing items that we encountered in our research. Via Organica's Carlota-brand burger patties are head and shoulders above the competition in both taste and texture. They invite hopes for additions to the Carlota menu in Japan.

### *A sampling of Via Organica product offerings*

#### **Carlota-brand burger patties—mushroom**

¥970/160 g (80 g x2)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥6,063

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,000

Mushrooms, borage, oat flakes, wheat gluten, tofu, olive oil, onions, fried onions, soy sauce, salt, garlic, nutmeg, vegetable broth, white pepper, coagulant (for tofu)



### **Carlota-brand burger patties—quinoa**

¥970/160 g (80 g x2)

Kilogram equivalent: ¥6,063

Real-meat benchmark price per kilogram: ¥1,000

Wheat gluten, borage, boiled quinoa (salted), oat flakes, olive oil, onions, salt, garlic, oregano, thyme, rosemary

### ***Impressions***

The Carlota-brand burgers, like Kurakon Foods’ “carne,” are a welcome departure from the otherwise steady diet of soy-based meat substitutes. What is more, they offer further diversity with the choice of mushrooms or quinoa as the core ingredient. The flavoring is solid without being overbearing, and the texture accommodates any dishes where ground-beef patties would traditionally appear. Our only reservation is the price, which will preclude a large market presence for these patties as daily household fare.

