

Outline of the Annual Japan Sake Awards 2012

May 23, 2012

National Research Institute of Brewing
Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association

1. Awards

The Annual Japan Sake Awards 2012 were held under the auspices of the National Research Institute of Brewing (NRIB) and the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association. This year marks the 100th Annual Japan Sake Awards, which were first held in 1911.

For these awards, a nationwide investigation of manufactured *sake* was conducted with the aim of clarifying the current manufacturing technology and trends in order to contribute to the improvement of *sake* quality and enhance public awareness of *sake*. As these are the only national awards, we believe we have enough influence to contribute to improvements in manufacturing technology and quality.

2. Exhibit

(1) Qualification for entry

Manufacturers who hold a *sake* brewing license and are members of the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association

(2) Applicable standard for entry

Entries must be unprocessed *Ginjo-shu* brewed at the manufacturer's own licensed production sites during the brewing year 2011, as stipulated in the "labeling standard for the manufacturing process and quality of sake" of the National Tax Agency. Each entry must have a degree of acidity greater than 1.0 and contain no added aroma.

(3) Number of entries

Limited to one entry per manufacturer.

(4) Entry fee

The entry fee is 15,750 yen (including consumption tax) per item.

3. Overview of examination

(1) Number of entries: 876

(2) Examination schedule

Preliminary examination: 3 days, from April 24 to 26 (Tue. - Thu.)

Final examination: 2 days, May 8 & 9 (Tue. & Wed.)

(3) Jury: Persons appointed by the president of the NRIB, including:

Sake manufacturers recommended by the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association

Staff of local public brewing related organizations

Technical officers of the National Tax Agency

Staff of NRIB

(4) Method of examination

a) During the preliminary examination, a sensory profile of each entry was created by examining the "aroma", "taste" and "total evaluation" (5-point scale). In the final examination, an overall sensory evaluation was given (3-point scale). Both the preliminary and final examinations were conducted by

grouping examinations based on the aroma constituent, which was analyzed in advance. According to this method, the jury could carefully evaluate the flavor, aroma, and balance of each entry without being influenced by the diverse range of aromas among *Ginjo-shu*, as was the case in previous evaluations.

b) Evaluations of the characteristics of the aroma and taste obtained from the sensory profile were presented to manufacturers as feedback, and should be utilized for the improvement of *Ginjo-shu* manufacturing technology and shipping management technology in the future, and should also be considered as information regarding the quality of the individual manufacturer's products.

(5) Examination results

Prize winners: 428 awards

Gold prize winners (those recognized as the very best among the prize winning *sake*): 247 awards

Testimonials are presented to the manufacturers jointly by the presidents of the NRIB and the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association. The list of gold prize winning *sake* is shown on a separate sheet.

(6) Manufacturing technology workshop

Time: May 23 (Wed.) 10:00 – 15:30

Place: Higashi Hiroshima Sports Park, Gymnasium

67-1, Taguchi, Saijo-cho, Higashi-hiroshima, Hiroshima

(7) Public Tasting

Time: June 15 (Fri.), Part 1 10:00 – 13:00, Part 2 16:00 – 20:00

Place: Sunshine city, Bunka Kaikan 4F exhibition hall B

3-1-3, Higashi-ikebukuro, Toshima, Tokyo

4. Comments

First held in 1911, the Annual Japan Sake Awards are now in their 100th year thanks to the participation of manufacturers who exhibit their *sake* with the aim of attaining higher product quality and improved production techniques.

Reflecting on the brewing season for the brewing year 2011, the cold weather conditions experienced across Japan and the lower yield of starchy rice compared to the previous year made this year ideally suited to *sake* brewing. However, some rice growing regions were met with above-average snowfall and cool temperatures and these, together with regional and varietal differences in rice starch content and decomposition characteristics, caused some manufacturers to struggle with raw material processing and controlling the fermenting mash.

There were 876 entries this year, an increase of 1 entry compared to the previous year, thereby halting the decreasing trend we have experienced since the brewing year 2001. In addition, the number of entries made from rice varieties other than *Yamada-nishiki*, which is the main rice used for the exhibited *sake*, increased by 13 entries to 143 compared to the previous year, while the number of *Junmai Ginjo-shu* entries decreased by 5 entries to 82.

There were a wide variety of *sake* profiles, including fragrances ranging from delicate to bold and those characterized by their retronasal aromas; however, ethyl caproate constituted a primary component in many entries. This year, although many entries were characterized by their sweet flavor, there were also entries marked by their acidity, demonstrating a different trend to the previous year. Overall, many entries displayed a well-balanced flavor and aroma. However, some items received comments regarding bitterness and astringency, suggesting that certain production sites were affected by problems with

controlling the fermenting mash, which determines the progress of rice decomposition and fermentation.

Many of the *sake* awarded gold prizes had well-balanced, light, refreshing flavors and bold fragrances. Furthermore, many of the judges commented on the uniformly high quality and decreased disparity among this year's entries, indicating achievement of a certain level of production techniques by manufacturers.

However, while we came across many *sake* of desirable quality, manufacturers of items judged to be off-flavor or possessing other quality defects should use the judging results in improving the *sake* quality.

This year was the second year following the elimination of the judging category based on the proportion of *Yamada-nishiki* used and we were interested to observe trends in entries using rice other than *Yamada-nishiki* as their main constituent. Ultimately, the number of such entries reached 143, exceeding last year by 13 entries and indicating that a tendency toward using a greater diversity of rice varieties has been established. Such diversification of rice varieties is linked to a positive diversification of *sake* characteristics.

The *Ginjo-shu* exhibited this year was of top quality, demonstrating the careful attention given to the entire process from initial rice selection to raw materials processing, making the *koji*, controlling the fermenting mash and final production. Moving forward, we hope that correct storage and distribution can be achieved to ensure that this outstanding *sake* safely reaches the consumer.