

Outline of the Annual Japan Sake Awards 2014

May 27, 2014

National Research Institute of Brewing
Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association

The Annual Japan Sake Awards 2014 were held under the joint auspices of the National Research Institute of Brewing (NRIB) and the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association. This year marks the 102nd Annual Japan Sake Awards, which were first held in 1911.

For this contest, 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 to enhance public awareness of *sake*. This is the only one national contest of *sake*, and we believe that these awards contribute to improvements in manufacturing technology and quality of *sake*.

1. Application process

(1) Applicant requirement

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

(2) Standard for entry

Sake applied to this contest must be unprocessed *Ginjo-shu* brewed at the manufacturer's own licensed production sites during the brewing year 2013 (from July 2013 until the application deadline of the contest), as stipulated in the "labeling standard for the manufacturing process and quality of *sake*" of the National Tax Agency. Applied *sake* must have a degree of acidity* higher than 1.0 and contain no added aroma compounds.

(3) Number of entries

Limited to one entry per manufacturer.

(4) Entry fee

The entry fee is 16,200 yen (including consumption tax) per item.

*Degree of acidity is volume (mL) of 0.1 N NaOH solution to neutralize 10 mL of *sake* to pH 7.2.

Acidity 1.0 is equal to 0.090 g of lactic acid /100 mL or 0.075 g of tartaric acid/100 mL.

2. Overview of the awards

(1) Number of entries, 845

(2) Schedule of blind tasting

Preliminary judging; 3 days, from April 22 to 24, 2014

Final judging: 2 days; May 8 and 9, 2014

(3) Judging panels

Experts on sensory evaluation of *sake* and appointed by the president of the NRIB from:

Sake manufacturers

Sake specialists from prefectural research centers

Technical officers of the National Tax Agency

Staff of NRIB

(4) Methods of blind tasting

- a) During the preliminary judging, a sensory profile of each *sake* was created by characterizing “aroma” and “taste” and evaluating “total quality” (5-point scale). In the final judging, an overall sensory evaluation was given (3-point scale). For both the preliminary and final judging, entries were grouped based on the concentration of aroma compounds, which was analyzed in advance.
- b) Results of the sensory profile and overall evaluation will be sent to the applicants in the hope that the results might be used to improve *Ginjo-shu* manufacturing technology and storage management in the future.

(5) Results

Prize winners, 442 entries

Gold prize winners (those recognized as the very best among the prize winners), 233 entries

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) Tasting event for *sake* manufacturers etc.

Time; Wed. May 28, 2014, 10:00 – 15:30

Place; Higashi Hiroshima Sports Park, Gymnasium

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

(7) Public Tasting will be held by the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association.

<http://www.japansake.or.jp/>

3. Comments on the quality of entries this year

The Annual Japan Sake Awards 2014 held twice of blind tasting, preliminary judging (April 22 to 24) and final judging (May 8 & 9), and published the results on May 20. Entries of this year numbered 845, which were 19 less than the prior year. Nonetheless, the number of *Junmai Ginjo-shu*, which is made without addition of alcohol, continued to increase, reaching 106 this year, 9 more than last year.

This *sake* brewing season (winter) experienced steady cold weather, and the prevailing weather conditions were well suited for sake brewing. However, there were some regions that experienced too cold weather and others with temperature fluctuations. Along the coast of the Japan Sea, there was little snow and the temperature fluctuated widely.

Some cultivars of early ripening rice were affected by heat wave in August last year. However, most of the sake rice cultivars, including *Yamadanishiki*, experienced normal temperature conditions and had good quality harvests. The sake rice used in the previous season was affected by high temperature during the ripening period, which made the rice grains hard and difficult to be saccharified during fermentation. Therefore, sake rice used in this season was more suitable for making sake than that of last season. With respect to the quantity of sake rice, some brewers had difficulty in getting hold of sake rice, such as *Yamadanishiki* grown in Hyogo prefecture.

With respect to the quality of entries, there were a variety of types of *sake*, from those with mild aroma to those with highly fruity aromas. Like the previous years, most of the entries gave apple-like aroma from ethyl caproate. The average concentration of ethyl caproate of this year was higher than that of last year. The average Nihonshu-do (sake meter value)* was lower than last year, due to the character of rice used in this season as mentioned above. These entries have a sweeter taste from their higher glucose concentration. The judges commented that there were many good entries with a fine

harmony of flavors, and that the difference in the quality of *sake* was less than it used to be by establishing technique to use high-flavor producing yeast.

Many *Ginjo-shu* with excellent qualities were presented to the awards. However, there were some entries with off flavors, yeasty smell for example. On the other hand, the number of entries with moldy odors (cork taint) and that with *namahineka* (a smell of deteriorated unpasteurized sake) decreased year by year. And there were a few entries with excess sweetness. When these off-flavors or unpleasant tastes were pointed out, we hope the applicants to examine their possible causes and take measures to improve the quality of their *sake*.

Overall, the entries of this year were of superb quality. This result showed that the applicants have given their full attention to the selection and processing of sake rice, *koji* preparation, control of fermentation, filtration, and so on. We hope all breweries and related parties to pay attention to the storage and distribution of *sake*, which enable consumers to fully enjoy the excellent *sake*.

*Nihonshu-do, a kind of specific gravity of sake. Lower value means sweeter taste when alcohol and acid concentrations are same among sake samples.