

Outline of the Annual Japan Sake Awards 2015

May 20, 2015

National Research Institute of Brewing
Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association

The Annual Japan Sake Awards 2015 were held under the joint auspices of the National Research Institute of Brewing (NRIB) and the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association (JSS). This year marks the 103rd 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* making license and are members of JSS.

(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 2014 (from July 2014 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, 852

(2) Schedule of blind tasting

Preliminary judging; 3 days, from April 21 to 23, 2015

Final judging; 2 days; May 12 and 13, 2015

(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, 415 entries

Gold prize winners (those recognized as the very best among the prize winners), 222 entries

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

(6) Tasting event for *sake* manufacturers etc.

Time; Wed. May 27, 2015, 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 2015 held twice of blind tasting, preliminary judging (April 21 to 23) and final judging (May 12 & 13), and published the results on May 20. Entries of this year numbered 852, which were 7 more than the prior year. Furthermore, the number of *Junmai-shu*, which is made without addition of alcohol, continued to increase, reaching 121 this year, 14 more than the last year.

This year was a difficult season for *sake* manufacturers for the following reasons: 1) The sake rice used in this *sake* making season (winter) was affected by low temperature during the ripening period of rice (Autumn to September) in many areas. The starch of rice tended to be hydrolyzed more easily than last 2 years during fermentation. 2) In some regions, there were extreme temperature fluctuations during the *sake* making season. In such year, higher manufacturing skills are required to process sake rice and control fermentation appropriately. NRIB and JSS provided the result of joint research as "Prediction of *sake* making properties of sake rice used in the brewing year 2014" (October, 2014) in advance of the sake-making season, and we have heard it was helpful for sake making.

Judging from the quality of entries, many manufacturers dealt well with these difficulties. 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 slightly higher than that of the last year, even though there was no significant change. The average *Nihonshu-do* (sake meter value)* was lower than the 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 through establishing technique to use high-flavor producing yeast. On the other hand, there

were a few entries with excess sweetness due to the character of rice or thin flavor due to excess water addition to cope with high hydrolysis of starch. Also, there were some entries with a slight off flavors, yeasty smell for example. 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.