

3 Market Environment

Working Women Eating Out More

In 1990, women make up almost 40 per cent of the workforce. A chronic labour shortage, flexible working schedules and greater job opportunities have encouraged many younger women to work. As a consequence, fewer meals are consumed at home and more are eaten in restaurants. This has led to a decrease in demand for fresh mushrooms, but an increase in demand for prepared/processed mushrooms used in the fast food and restaurant industries.

Growth of the Fast Food/Restaurant Industry

The rapid growth of the fast food and restaurant industries has had a major impact on the mushroom industry. In particular, demand has increased for shiitake used in Japanese-style cafeterias, in Chinese food, with noodles, and in company, hospital and school cafeterias.

Of particular interest is the development of the family restaurant business. Initially, as these restaurants served mainly Western-style food, shiitake was not often used. However, as competition increased, family restaurants began to diversify menus and to include original, high-quality Japanese food. Mushrooms symbolize health and are seen to add quality to dishes. They are being used in soups, vegetable stir fries, box lunches and even in sushi, in addition to their widespread use in Chinese dishes.

Ageing Society

The ageing society is a major concern in Japan. For the mushroom industry, however, it may be an advantage, since the elderly are known to consume mushrooms. As an example, consumption of dried shiitake by age is shown in Table 15.

Health Consciousness

While the elderly in Japan are traditionally health conscious, such awareness is a relatively new phenomenon among younger people. Foods perceived as healthy are now becoming popular at both ends of the age spectrum. Growth in purchases of dried shiitake by age group from 1983 to 1988 is shown in Table 16.

TABLE 15

Dried Shiitake Purchases by Age Group – 1989

Age	Grams
Under 24	34
25-29	88
30-34	129
35-39	157
40-44	199
45-49	210
50-54	210
55-59	227
60-64	273
Over 65	227

Source: The Management and Co-ordinations Agency.

TABLE 16

Growth in Dried Shiitake Purchases by Age Group – 1983 to 1988

Age	Grams
25-29	25
30-34	-33
35-39	-2
40-44	-10
45-49	-7
50-54	1
55-59	-14
60-64	22
Over 65	22

Source: The Management and Co-ordinations Agency.

Affluence

As the Japanese become more affluent, they are willing to spend more money on luxuries. Eating in restaurants, for example, is becoming more popular and the better quality restaurants are prospering.