

# ROBOTS CARRY SUSHI ARTISANSHIP TO THE FUTURE

*Compact robotic machines roll out rice balls in quick succession, made to perfection as if by the hands of skilled sushi chefs. These sushi robots have taken Japan's unrivaled sushi and rice culture onto the world stage.*

Japan's reputation as a culture of cuisine and of exquisite foods has been on the rise around the globe. Numerous Japanese dishes and foods are now becoming more popular in many parts of the world, especially in Europe and America, where people are more concerned about their health,

as well as in the rapidly growing economies of Asia and elsewhere. As a result of this growing popularity, Japan's exports of agricultural, forestry, and fishery products and food have been increasing year by year. Wherever people go in the world today, they can find a restaurant serving

sushi—a food synonymous with Japan. Behind sushi's meteoric rise to fame are the not-so-well-known stars of the show, the robots.

Made as if by the hand of a skilled sushi chef, balls of rice pop out from a small machine in quick succession. In fact, up to



Suzumo Machinery's robots can produce perfect sushi rolls in an instant, a tricky task (right). Becoming more popular in recent years, such rice-serving machines also dish out rice in pre-measured quantities, helping to save on food.

4,800 of these beautifully shaped parcels of rice can be rolled out in an hour. With the creation of a revolutionary sushi robot, anybody can enjoy high-quality, mouthwatering sushi at an affordable price without the need for a trained sushi chef. Indeed, Suzumo Machinery Co., Ltd., a manufacturer of food-processing machines based in Tokyo, has developed just such robots, which are already being used in more than 80 countries worldwide.

There was a time even in Japan when sushi was regarded as an expensive and extravagant food. Having seen the demand for rice decreasing almost half century ago, Suzumo Machinery believed that the popularization of sushi

would be the key to passing on the joy of rice, a staple at the very heart of Japan's food culture. Over the course of five years, the company set out to develop a robot that could automatically produce little parcels of sushi rice, eventually launching the world's very first sushi robot in 1981.

Suzumo Machinery wanted to create sushi in the exact same way as trained sushi chefs would do in any high-end sushi restaurant. After much trial and error following advice from sushi chefs, the company succeeded in producing the perfect little parcel of sushi rice, which does not crumble when held in the hand, but still softly melts on the tongue. "While I want people to know what sushi really is and how good it tastes," says President SUZUKI Minako of Suzumo Machinery, "I also enjoy seeing sushi being adapted and amalgamated into local cuisines across the world." To keep up with such localized demands, as well as working to improve the safety and operability of their machines, the company set out to develop new products specifically for overseas markets where local tastes dictate a preference for variations in the size and firmness of the rice parcel.

Takeout sushi has become more of a regular feature in supermarkets around the world in recent years. As a consequence,



Suzumo Machinery's automatic sushi machine. It is widely used—not just in sushi restaurants, but also in many types of restaurants and supermarkets—due to its ability to preselect the size and firmness of rice balls for local tastes.

Suzumo Machinery has been taking more orders for its machines. Indeed, it is just these types of robots that make sushi such a ubiquitous culinary delight. "We are not just a manufacturer of machines, but have a mission to pass on our culture of food—something that is very close to us all—through the work we do in research and development in the culinary field," she explains.

The Japanese government is also striving to further boost exports of agriculture, forestry, and fishery products and foods, and as a result, Japanese cuisine will become an even more integral part of people's lives around the world. As a proponent of Japanese food, Suzumo Machinery and its robots are paving the way for the prosperous future of rice, albeit from behind the scenes. ●



Sushi is a food seen in all corners of the world, and has been adapted to local tastes. The California Roll, dreamed up in America, is now a hugely popular type of sushi in Japan.



"I want to convey the fantastic flavors of Japan to the world," enthuses SUZUKI Minako, president of Suzumo Machinery. She continues to explore new possibilities of more diverse ways to enjoy rice, with pride and passion for Japanese food culture.