

ENTERTAINING

E

RETAIL/GLOBAL

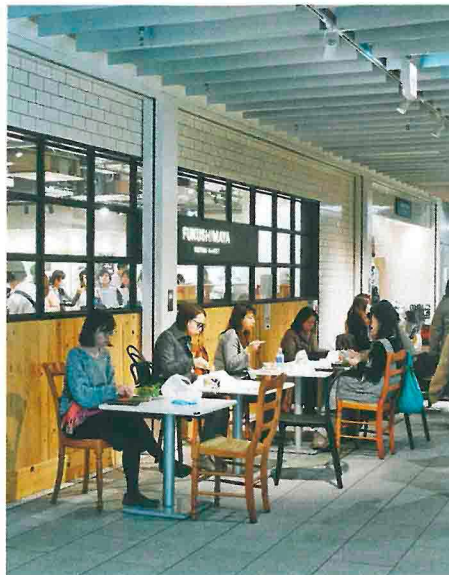
# Shelf life

Ditch self-checkouts, find ever better products and be nice – here’s how two players are rethinking the supermarket.

Photography Taro Terasawa & Jens Schwarz



1



2

## FUKUSHIMAYA TASTING MARKET



3

### Fukushimaya, Tokyo

Using small producers to win big sales

You can learn a lot about grocery-shop operator Fukushima's chairman, Toru Fukushima, from his employees. They'll tell you the story about a tonne of organic ginger that he bought to help a farmer who had no idea how to sell so much raw produce. Or the one about the unpasteurised soy sauce that nobody had heard of but that Fukushima insisted on selling even though it was triple the price of mass-market brands. Or the rice crackers made without monosodium glutamate that he asked a small factory to produce because he couldn't find delicious ones that weren't loaded with MSG.

Fukushima inherited his father's shop in Hamura, on Tokyo's western fringe,



4

more than four decades ago. Since then he has built Fukushima into a ¥5.3bn-a-year (€45m) mini empire of six grocery shops, two restaurants, a bakery and a budding floristry business.

At his shops, customers can load up on packaged food with no additives or preservatives and farm produce harvested with few or no pesticides. But Fukushima doesn't think of himself as a purveyor of natural food or preach publicly about social and environmental ethics. "We evolved into this only because we were looking for better-tasting food," says Fukushima, when MONOCLE meets him at Fukushima Tasting Market, one of his three new shops in Tokyo.

The space, designed by Tokyo firm Landscape Products, has wooden floors and shelves and signs with short profiles

Previous page: (1) Carefully selected produce  
(2) Grub's up (3) Fukushimaaya outlet in Roppongi, Tokyo (4) Chairman Toru Fukushima

This page: (1) Bento boxes (2) Customers come for the organic food (3) Selection of rice (4) Outlet in Akihabara, Tokyo (5) Happy shopper



barrels. "We have so many great products but they are in danger of disappearing," he says. As he talks he flicks through photos on his phone of a lettuce farm he visited in Miyazaki prefecture, northeast of Tokyo, a week earlier. "These will go into our deli salads," he says.

Consumers almost never try a new product right away so each shop's kitchen staff has to think of creative ways to avoid throwing anything away. Soy sauce goes into deep-fried *kara-age* chicken at lunchtime and milk is made into a flan or ice cream. Later those recipes are shared with customers who attend the shops' cooking classes. "If we think a product is good but it doesn't sell we don't give up on it. We stock it in small amounts because it will sell eventually," says Fukushima. But how long is he willing to wait? "It might

"If we think a product is good but it doesn't sell we don't give up on it. We stock it in small amounts because it will sell eventually"



take two years," he says. "We can do that because we're small. If we were much larger we would have to worry more about shifting stock."

Fukushima is still responsible for sourcing new products but six years ago he appointed his 40-year-old son, Yuichi, to run Fukushimaaya's day-to-day operations. Big companies have approached him about partnerships and other ideas and he is open to talks – but cautious. "If they have an economics-first policy it's not for us." — KH

