

Startup Yunomi.life provides Japanese tea farms and other producers with global launchpad.

Offering consumers "a life steeped in tea", Yunomi is globalizing the Japanese tea industry by providing a small-scale producers with global launchpad platform.

ODAWARA, KANAGAWA, JAPAN, November 13, 2016 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Established in 2013, Japan-based startup Yunomi (store: www.Yunomi.life, blog: www.Yunomi.us) offers tea enthusiasts in 72 countries a wide variety of the best Japanese teas and accessories available from the Japanese market. Winning Tokyo-based accelerator Open Network Lab's 9th batch Demo Day pitch event, Yunomi's effort to provide global buyers with unprecedented choice from the Japanese tea market is simultaneously providing hope for the future for over 100 small-scale producers.

Japanese tea: An industry in decline

In 1985, the Japanese census conducted every 5 years counted 202,673 tea farms in Japan. 30 years later, the census counts 20,144, a stunning 90% decline. Over the last 3 decades production efficiency has increased tremendously--consolidation of processing facilities, cultivation on a larger scale with machinery allowing for fewer workers, and on a smaller scale tea farmers taking over cultivation for their colleagues who have given up the work.

But the industry also faces a domestic market that is increasing diversifying in its beverage choices. Annual household spending on [green tea](#) is down 37%

since 2001, consumption of green tea is down 28%, and average price of domestically produced tea is down 25%. In the face of such decline and considering the laborious work involved in the



Ilan Chun with the Kinezuka family, Japanese tea farmers



Yunomi promotes a lifestyle that is steeped in tea



With over 100 vendors providing tea and tea ware from throughout Japan, Yunomi offers the largest variety of Japanese-made tea online.



By introducing the producers behind our teas, we not only help to connect producers & consumers, but we also provide the industry with hope for the future.

Ian Chun

production of tea, each succeeding generation of tea producers has seen a consistent decrease in new workers. In combination with macro trends--Japan's urbanizing and aging population--the future of the tea production industry in Japan seems bleak.

Japanese tea: Growing popularity in the west vs inability to capitalize on demand

In the last decade, exports of Japanese green tea have grown some 377%, and [matcha](#), a form of high grade powdered tea,

has become one of the hottest new food trends globally. While this situation presents an unprecedented opportunity for the Japanese tea industry, the 4127 tons of tea exported still represents only 5% of the country's declining production. The primarily domestic tea industry faces a lack of people with the necessary language, business, marketing, and logistics skills necessary to truly take advantage of the newfound global demand.

Yunomi to the rescue

When Yunomi founder, Ian Chun (originally from Hawaii, USA), first got involved in the tea industry helping a small Kyoto-based tea farm with their overseas expansion, he was stunned at the situation facing the industry. Despite the growing interest in Japanese tea, why was the industry unable to capitalize? He discovered that the industry, with the exception of a few larger companies, was primarily dominated by small-scale operations, often family-based businesses. While the bigger players such as Ito En had the resources to expand overseas on their own, a solution was needed for small-scale operations.

Yunomi was the solution Ian came up with--an umbrella brand and platform introducing small-scale producers and global buyers to each other. The name Yunomi is the Japanese word for "drinking tea" as well as "tea cup", and the sound is a play on the English "you know me". In many ways Yunomi operates as a standard tea business, buying great teas from producers and selling them directly to consumers and small-scale tea businesses worldwide. However, dedicated to creating a global launchpad for artisanal farms and factories, Yunomi sacrifices operational efficiencies associated with consolidating suppliers, and takes a marketplace mindset toward establishing its supply network. With over 110 suppliers in its network, Yunomi becomes a launchpad allowing companies to gain more name recognition in the global marketplace.

Many of its supply partners have taken advantage of the jumpstart Yunomi provides to launch their own efforts to reach customers overseas. Kyoto Obubu Tea Farms, for example (founder Ian's mentor in the tea industry), has a growing export business and internship program for tea enthusiasts to experience life on the farm. For many partners though, the lack of language skill, international business experience, and knowledge of international shipping logistics and regulations is daunting. They rely on Yunomi to handle everything from customer inquiries to shipping.

"By introducing the producers behind our teas, we not only help to connect producers & consumers, but we also provide the industry with hope for the future," says founder Ian Chun. "And personally, I feel our society relies too much on systems of mass production that remove the important roles played by real people. I want our customers to have the opportunity to know the people who produce the products they consume. And I want to offer producers an opportunity to get to know their customers."

While still underutilized, Yunomi also offers a social networking function -- where customers can follow and interact with each other, and where Ian one day hopes to get farmers to show communicate with tea enthusiasts through photos if the language barrier is a problem.

"We've already seen how technology can eliminate the physical distance between people. We just need to apply it to the seller-buyer relationship as well," Ian says with hope.

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