



Bio c' Bon Japon

Ranging from Novelty to Nostalgia

Q. What is the background to the foundation of Bio c' Bon Japon?

Aeon Group has been involved with organic food since before the JAS organic certification system was enacted in 2000. We were interested in starting specialist organic shops, and the name of Bio c' Bon from France came up as we were looking around for partners, with the emphasis on brands. Bio c' Bon opened its first branch in 2008, then grew rapidly, reaching about 140 stores by now. All things organic are booming in Europe, and Bio c' Bon changed the conventional image that organic food was old-fashioned, and only eaten by old people or rich people. The Bio c' Bon concept was to create stores with a casual atmosphere that young people liked, and that approach resonated with us.

Q. What is the target segment for Bio c' Bon Japon?

The younger generation. When I say “younger”, I don't mean teenagers, but rather career people in their 30s and 40s. In Japan, the younger generation of families raising children is central among people who partially adopt organic foods, but older people are more common among those who use organic products every day. We think it's important to make these products more easily and affordably accessible. We want to create shops that make it easy to enjoy organic products in a casual way.

Q. What kinds of products does Bio c' Bon Japon offer?

All the products we have in Japan are certified organic or are in conversion except in the rare cases where such certification is not possible. We aim to offer products that please people with freshness and flavor, interest them with unusual things, and make them curious to check new things and find they're organic. Building on the strength of Bio c' Bon in France, and notably its rich products portfolio including private brands, we have a lineup of products that are not available elsewhere in Japan. Bio c' Bon's approach is to offer to customers specialty products from manufacturers who care about raw materials and manufacturing methods. The vast majority of the products that Bio c' Bon Japon imports directly are not available elsewhere in Japan.

Q. Within your product range, what are the strategic products you focus on?

Direct imports are strengths of ours, so we focus on wine, cheese, and groceries. Our bulk corner with dry fruits and nuts sold by weight is another strength. We also use many of the foods and ingredients we handle in our stores to make deli items for our customers. We want to go on working with farmers and agricultural cooperatives nationwide to expand our volume of fruits and vegetables.

Q. What is the biggest problem or challenge when handling organic products?

There are a few, but the first is labeling and correctly conveying ingredient information. Many customers are particular about ingredients, for example clients with allergies, or vegan, so we can't make mistakes. Freshness is also very important for vegetables. The number of producers and production volumes are low in Japan, so we can't always get the volume we want at the time we want. Finally some local products are still costly to make (like butter, eggs for example) so in some instance we cannot make a certain product because the raw materials are too expensive as of now. This will improve with economies of scale.

Q. What impact have you had since your first branch opened in December 2016?

At the opening of the store, a lot of people came to the store mostly out of curiosity for a new concept. They bought a few items and went home, and did not necessarily come back. Since then, we have been able to build a loyal customers' base which is steadily expanding. At the same time, the number of items purchased per customer is growing. Growth is particularly strong for vegetables. I think the number of people buying on a daily basis is rising. We also have repeater customers who regularly come in from further away.

Q. What are your goals and aspirations for the future?

With only one store, quantities and prices for imports vary a lot, so we want to grow quickly to 20 branches. We want to be able to trade at stable, affordable prices. If we increase the quantities of fruits and vegetables, that would lead more support for farmers, so we also want to increase volume.



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