

MEASURING ACCORDING TO HIS TASTE

Top wagyu should not only be defined by marbling scores, says Wataru Tomiyama. The senior vice president of Toriyama farm, who was at Huber's Butchery to demonstrate *sukiyaki* and *shabu-shabu* cooking with his wagyu, has developed a grading based on umami levels.



Tell us a bit about Toriyama farm in Gunma Prefecture.

We breed the cows ourselves (as opposed to others who might buy calves elsewhere). This is how we control the bloodline and ensure that we produce beef with the highest umami levels.

Why did Toriyama decide to find a New Umami Standard (NUS) for wagyu?

In Japan, the grade of wagyu and its price are explained by the level of meat quality and Beef Marbling Score (BMS) such as A4 and A5. The more marbling fat there is, the higher the price. However, we noticed that some wagyu with an A4 or A5 rating are not so delicious. In other words, the level of marbling doesn't guarantee the taste. Because we farm the beef ourselves, we wanted our customers to be able to have



really tasty wagyu. So that's how we started researching into coming up with the umami standard.

What does the New Umami Standard (NUS) comprise?

We worked with Ryuichi Suzuki (also known as Dr Umami), chief executive officer of taste analysis business AISSY supported by Keio University, to develop a method to analyse a meat's flavour using the five tastes: sweet, sour, bitter, salty, umami. This includes measuring the meat's level of oleic acid in the fat (which contributes to the juiciness) and amino acid (which gives flavour to the wagyu).

We also wanted to measure the umami level in lean meat as there was no technique focusing on such cuts before Toriyama started collaborating with Suzuki. Based on all this research, we applied Suzuki's methodology to find the strongest umami level in wagyu meat and identify cattle genetics that can produce the high umami scores. Initially, it was very hard to quantify umami levels with numbers. We devised a set of metrics for umami scores from 0-5: the average general beef's score is 2.7 while the average Toriyama wagyu score is 3.5.

But taste is subjective. Does a high umami score equate to a very tasty meat?

Yes, taste is subjective. That is why we don't say if the beef is tasty or not. Someone may like wagyu with a lower umami score, or a chef might want to use a low or high umami beef to match his sauce and cooking techniques.