

# For Goodness Sakes

TAKARA SAKE USA **BRIDGES**  
**CULTURAL DIVIDE BY**  
BECOMING OU KOSHER

*Anytime you take on the task of persuading one culture that has its own treasured traditions to embrace the tradition of another distinctly different culture, you had better buckle in for the ride, as it is bound to be a long and bumpy road. The people at Takara Sake USA know this in a way that only first-hand experience can teach, as it is exactly what they have been doing since their main brand of sake, Sho Chiku Bai, was introduced into the American market.*



>> “We wanted to offer a good product that consumers would know was of high quality at a glance, even before taking the first sip. The Orthodox Union was the natural choice for us, since some of **our food manufacturing clients already swore by OU certified ingredients.**”

Established in 1982 in Berkeley, California, Takara Sake USA is now the top selling producer of sake (Japanese “rice wine”) in the United States. The superior water obtained from pure Sierra Nevada Mountains snow melt and premium rice grown in the fertile Sacramento Valley combine perfectly with the San Francisco Bay Area’s moderate climate to create ideal conditions for sake production. It is a recipe for successful sake-making that leaves no wonder as to why Takara Sake USA has captured the heart, and discerning palate, of America.

But the story did not end with the happy “East meets West” marriage between the acclaimed sake manufacturer and the United States. The plot only thickened when Takara Sake USA made the then-unusual decision to go kosher.

“Sake was of course a tiny niche item at the time, and we knew the only way to expand was to adapt to the lifestyles of the United States,” explains Sake Master Seizaburo Kawano. “At the same time, we wanted to stay true to authentic Japanese sake. For us, the decision to become certified kosher was not so we could charge more for our product or be the first major sake producer to offer kosher products in the U.S. It was about adjusting to the demands of the

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## AT TAKARA, THE TRADITIONAL AND THE MODERN COMBINE TO PRODUCE HIGH QUALITY SAKE

BY RABBI GAVRIEL PRICE

Although the production facility at Takara Sake is modern, the process for making sake is traditional. Sake is rice wine, and to develop the delicate flavor profile that reflects high quality sake, considerable care must be given to maintaining the long-perfected methods that Takara Sake brought over from Japan.

The process starts out with steamed rice, which is fermented using a Japanese method that induces the rice grains to yield desired flavor notes. Traditional sake does not have any additional flavors other than those native to rice. The finished product is crisp, clean, and powerful. Takara Sake has added to its traditional sake product line apple, lychee, and other flavors.

It is often evident that the care and commitment a company gives to its kosher program is an indicator of the overall quality of a production program. The seriousness, dedication, and respect that Takara Sake has given to the OU reflect the reverence they have, in general, for principled manufacturing practices.

Rabbi Noach Vogel, a veteran OU representative from San Jose, CA, has been visiting Takara Sake on behalf of the OU for nearly ten years. “The staff is always very cooperative” he says. “They are dedicated to making sure that our requirements are met, and are prompt to show me whatever I need to see.”

The conference room is unlike any conference room a person is likely to find in the United States. It is a Japanese tea and sake drinking room, and it is light, airy and conducive to agreement and creativity. It overlooks the unrelenting activity of the bottling area. To get to the conference room, one must pass through the Sake Museum, which is probably the only one of its kind in the United States — indeed, we recommend visiting this public museum should any BTUS readers happen to find themselves vacationing or otherwise visiting sunny Berkeley, CA.

Anthony Johnson has done a remarkable job as a translator, go-between, and overall coordinator of the program. During one discussion with the production staff, we picked up an important Japanese word. As Mr. Johnson translated what I had been saying, he kept saying “oh-yu.” The expression was peppering his translation with the staff. I was puzzled, because I had not, in my presentation, mentioned the OU so many times; I had only been talking about kosherization. Finally, I asked him: Why do you keep saying “OU”? He thought for a moment, trying to figure out what I was talking about. “Oh,” he said, “‘oh-yu’ means ‘hot water.’ I didn’t mean OU.”

RABBI GAVRIEL PRICE

SERVES AS ORTHODOX UNION RABBINIC COORDINATOR FOR TAKARA SAKE, AS WELL AS FOR THE VINEGAR AND TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRIES. HE SPECIALIZES IN INGREDIENT RESEARCH.

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Adds Anthony Johnson, Kosher Coordinator & Export Manager, “Quality has always been of utmost importance to

Takara Sake, and is part and parcel of the success of our sake-making tradition. The amazing thing about going kosher is that we often find that compliance with OU regulations is to a large extent in line with our own commitment to providing products of excellent quality. Acquiring OU kosher certification was in essence a matter of adding another level of product integrity that our customers can see and trust whenever they purchase our certified sake and mirin (sweet cooking sake) products.”

According to Senior Sales Manager Robert Craig, “Takara Sake USA also participates in an organic certification program. I think that kosher and organic are two themes that to a degree are associated in the minds of

many consumers. Although being kosher certified does not mean organic nor does it alone satisfy requirements for organic certification, health-minded consumers regardless of their religion value both kosher and organic products for similar reasons: health and quality. With the ever-increasing market for organic products, I believe that many customers also feel comfortable with kosher certified products. This is reflected in the way that some mainstream grocery stores have incorporated into their lineup not only organic goods, but kosher certified items as well,” he said.

“The Jewish population represents a loyal customer base for us,” declared Vice President Yasuhisa Tanaka. “With the clientele at kosher Japanese restaurants steadily increasing, and many non-Jewish consumers recognizing the mark as a sign that the products are safe and reputable, the OU symbol has proven indispensable.”

It is important to note, adds Anthony Johnson, Kosher Coordinator & Export Manager, that not all sake sold around the world is kosher. “This may sound like an obvious fact to most readers, but there are many people, including some who are Jewish, who assume that to be the case.”

“Several years ago, I was at Kosherfest in New York representing

## ANTHONY JOHNSON

Anthony Johnson joined the Takara family in the middle of 1999. After spending years studying abroad and working in Japan and Taiwan, the diverse environment at Takara Sake USA provided the perfect atmosphere for keeping up his hard-earned language skills and cross-cultural interests. Not to mention, it was located in his hometown, Berkeley, California. Initially in charge of the order desk, after about a year Mr. Johnson became Export Manager, Legal Manager and was put in charge of both kosher and organic programs. “I’m in the town where I grew up. I get to practice Japanese and Chinese with co-workers. On top of that, I have unlimited access to delicious sake! I feel very lucky,” Mr. Johnson said.

>>“Fortunately, especially for those Jewish lovers of sake, Takara Sake USA offers a wide range of officially certified kosher sake and mirin products and our list is growing.”



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Takara Sake USA,” Mr. Johnson explained. “While there, I was approached by a number of Jewish attendees who had been under the impression that sake is automatically kosher. Of course this is an incorrect assumption, as I have learned from our visiting rabbis. It is true that the

main materials — rice and water — generally are not restricted by kosher laws. However, sake production involves much more than that, including various processing aids: lactic acid, refining agents, and depending on the product, flavor essences, and so on.

“In addition, when a manufacturer produces both kosher and non-kosher items, a very common situation, cleaning and operation procedures must be carried out in compliance with kosher laws. Fortunately, especially for those Jewish lovers of sake, Takara Sake USA offers a wide range of officially certified kosher sake and mirin products and our list is growing.”

Whether you’re looking for the moderately sized Nigori Crème de Sake, which at 300 ML gives you just enough to serve at a romantic dinner for two, or you need the 18L sized Sho Chiku Bai Classic for your restaurant, Takara Sake USA boasts a wide range of kosher products that satisfy the taste buds and an insistence on quality. Next time you’re in the Bay Area, be sure to stop by our tasting room and sake museum where you can sample these exquisite sake products and their rich history.



**RABBI GAVRIEL PRICE**  
SERVES AS ORTHODOX UNION  
RABBINIC COORDINATOR FOR  
TAKARA SAKE USA.



POPULAR OU CERTIFIED ITEMS

- Sho Chiku Bai Sake
- Ginjo Sake
- Nigori Sake Silky Mild
- Nigori Crème de Sake
- Hana Flavored Sake:  
Lychee, Fuji Apple,  
Raspberry.
- Organic Nama Sake
- Takara Mirin
- and many others.

