

The soy of cooking...up great environmental ideas

PARTNERSHIP WITH KIKKOMAN IS PART OF THE OFFICE OF BUSINESS SUPPORT AND SUSTAINABILITY'S EFFORT TO REACH OUT TO BUSINESSES.

Andrew Savagian

Imagine you're a proud, family-owned Japanese company. You're built on tradition that dates back more than 300 years and you offer a unique taste and natural complement to Asian food via your world-renowned soy sauce.

You deliver your product to the four corners of the planet. With that success, you're looking to expand your operations to North America. As a successful business model, you have your pick of any spot on the continent, so you choose to make your mark...in tiny little Walworth, Wis.?

On the surface, it would appear an odd match. The Kikkoman Corporation, a company born out of 17th century samurai battles, lost family and ancient creeds, seeking to spread its footprint among the cows, corn and Scandinavian farmers of rural southern Wisconsin.

Yet there they were, company officials smiling broadly with then-Governor Patrick Lucey as they cut the ribbon on the company's new plant in Walworth in 1973.

Forty-some years later, upon closer look, you'll see that planting the Kikkoman flag in the heart of Cheeseland not only made good business sense, but was an equally good environmental decision — one that has paid dividends many times over for Kikkoman, the business community and Wisconsin's natural resources.

THOMAS J. SENATOR



SUBMITTED BY KIKKOMAN

Kikkoman employee Tabitha Bishop at the company's Wisconsin operation in Walworth.

Naturally brewed environmental protection

Despite the broad array of tasty products offered and the different lines of business you'll see if you peruse Kikkoman's website, the company's naturally brewed soy sauce is truly its bread and butter — or wheat and soy, in this case.

Using a family brewing process passed down through generations — beginning with, as the story is told, the family matriarch, after she fled Shogun warriors and settled in the farming community of Noda, Japan — Kikkoman has carved out a strong

niche in the food industry. But strict adherence to environmental protection and community stewardship is the credo that sets this business apart.

Or creeds, to be exact. Sixteen ancient Japanese creeds, which include such commitments as "Strive to prosper together with the public," "Virtue is the cause, fortune the effect," and "Approach all beings with love," are epitomized by the company's slogan: "Make Haste Slowly" (in Japanese: Isogaba maware) — or to advance and grow with tremendous thought and care.

Those tenets are manifested in the reuse of practically all the company's wastes, including soy cake and soy byproducts used in animal feed and to control intestinal bugs in cattle; a 40-1 reuse/recycle ratio for their waste stream (40 pounds reused/recycled for every pound of waste); and a promising new way to reuse the company's brine

waste as an anti-icing agent and de-icing additive on area roads, helping limit the use of salt during the winter months.

Dan Miller, Kikkoman's vice president, oversees administration functions and environmental initiatives, and believes the company does "walk the walk."

"There are a lot of companies that put a plaque on a wall that says what they believe in," Miller explains. "You can tell what a company truly values by where they make their investments, where they spend their time and where they apply their limited resources."

Wisconsin's home field advantage — clean water

Adding to the fact that Wisconsin is centrally located for North American distribution and close to wheat and soy growing regions, Miller cites the state's water resources as a critical reason for moving here.

"We needed a good supply of pure, clean groundwater, which Wisconsin has," Miller says. "We have so many tremendous resources in Wisconsin that other parts of the world do not enjoy."

A gutsy move for any business, but

for a Japanese company to move to the United States in the 1970s — when feelings for any Asian-based company weren't so positive due to a bitter marketing battle between the two countries' competing automobile industries — was, in Miller's own words, the "biggest chance" ever taken by the company.

But the chance was still consistent with the company's age-old belief.

"We don't hesitate to make the investment to do the right thing in the areas of food safety, employee safety and environmental protection," Miller says.

A new approach — DNR's Office of Business Support and Sustainability

Jon Raymond is Kikkoman's environmental, health and safety coordinator, and the main reason the company's long and storied history wound its way to the door of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Raymond has worked in the environmental field for nearly 30 years, and Kikkoman's environmental ethic is a main reason he joined the company and why he contacted the DNR's Office of Business Support and Sustainability about joining Green Tier, the state's flagship environmental program that aims to provide credible, creative ways to enable businesses to be powerful, sustainable forces for environmental good and enhance their productivity, cut their costs and strengthen the health of their culture and community (visit dnr.wi.gov and search "Green Tier" to learn more).

"Given our mission, joining Green Tier was pretty much a 'no-brainer,'" says Raymond. "We've had recognition before, but to get recognition from your regulator has some extra clout and weight. We're always looking for everything and anything to get a little bit better."

Greg Breese works for the Office of Business Support and Sustainability as its brewing sector specialist. Breese worked with connecting Raymond and the company to Green Tier. This effort included a ceremony attended by DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp, welcoming Kikkoman into the program.

Through this new office and through out-of-the-box thinkers like Breese, department leaders are hoping to better mesh environmental protection with



DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp welcomes Kikkoman into the Green Tier program with company President and CEO Kaz Shimizu.

SHELLEY HEILMAN

pro-business thinking. Sector specialists have a deep understanding of the issues an industry encounters and position the department to assist with implementing approaches that are beneficial to a company's bottom line and also to improve their environmental performance.

"Our job as sector specialists is to tie it all together," says Breese. "We want to provide flexibility, as well as a vision beyond regulation, while at the same time helping businesses work through DNR's traditional environmental programs."

A big part of that assistance is providing companies with a single point of contact. For Kikkoman, that individual was Bryan Hartsook, a DNR water resources engineer in Waukesha.

Like a number of other department staff, Hartsook's engineering background naturally draws him to programs like Green Tier and the Office of Business Support and Sustainability.

"We're problem solvers by nature. Also, given the current times, with all the new technologies and innovations being developed, companies develop at a much faster rate than our codes and statutes do," adds Hartsook. "So it helps to have one DNR person to go to, to think outside that box and work with other program experts."

Raymond couldn't agree more.

"The DNR has been very good to work with," he says. "To have that one-on-one point of contact with Bryan, he kind of works it through the bureaucracy and saves me time. And the feedback and info that comes back has been great."

Innovative examples from cardboard to salt

A good example of this partnership is Kikkoman's change to the way it "drop packs" — the method used to wrap packaging around glass containers for shipping. Instead of using different boxes

and colored packaging for the various products they ship, Raymond says they consulted with the department on changing to jet printing the code right on the wrap.

"The result was we eliminated the cardboard insert, saving hundreds of tons of cardboard per year, and we also saved on colored printing, on the chemicals we used in the process and on energy use," Raymond says. "Of course, there was a manufacturing

benefit driving this. But there's an incredible environmental benefit as well."

Another innovation the company is working with the department to pilot is using brine wastewater as a de-icing and anti-icing additive on winter roads, something the dairy industry is also keen on piloting.

"One method is to mix the brine solution with the salt to help make it stick to the roads, which lessens the amount of salt applied for de-icing. The other method is to put the brine in saddle tanks that can be sprayed before the salt is applied, pre-wetting the roads before a storm to help prevent ice from forming in the first place," explains Hartsook.

Normally with municipalities, the salt-water mix contains about 23 percent sodium chloride, Hartsook notes, but the company's brine only has a little more than 8 percent sodium chloride.

"It won't address all winter events, but it can address the majority of them, and can be done with less chloride," says Hartsook.

Keeping that extra salt off the roads and out of the waterways helps the environment and is cost effective for counties that don't have to purchase as much raw salt, especially during snowy winters like last year.

From centuries-old family traditions steeped in ancient creeds, to modern-day technologies bent on improving business and protecting the environment — as Miller looks at it, it's just another way the company is "Making Haste Slowly."

"You're never really done, you never really get to your destination with sustainability, and that's okay — that's the point," says Miller. 

Andrew Savagian is a public affairs manager for DNR's Office of Communications.