

Government working to promote wild game as a delicious and healthy cuisine option

While wild game dishes made with deer and wild boar meat have traditionally been popular among the European aristocracy, gibier, as it is known in Japan after the French word for game, has never been the norm here — at least until recently.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of wild animals damaging produce due to them eating and ravaging the rice paddies and fields. At the same time, there has been an increase in hunting as well as trapping the harmful animals.

The damage caused by animals exceeds ¥20 billion a year, with about 60 percent of it caused by deer and wild boars, according to the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry.

On the other hand, game has long been highly valued by chefs and the Western idea of making full use of animals killed is gaining more recognition in Japan.

Headed by Norihiko Fujiki, a French chef who prepares wild game at his inn in Chino, Nagano Prefecture, the Japan Gibier Promotion Council, a nonprofit organization was founded in 2014 to promote wild game cuisine that contributes to regional revitalization.

Together with regional governments and the private sector, including restaurants and distributors, game is gaining more popularity nationwide — especially with the increasing construction of new hygienic disposal and treatment facilities where animals are processed quickly and hygienically before they are cooked.

The council organizes seminars, cooking classes and the Japan Gibier Summit, which promotes advanced game initiatives introduced by different localities in Japan.

According to Kazuhiko Akiba, director of the Rural Development Bureau at the Wild Animals Damage Prevention Office at the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry, game meats are highly nutritional compared to typical meats, as they eat “natural things that grow in the fields



and mountains and get more exercise in a natural setting. They are said to be high in protein and low in fat and calories, which is good for people's health."

Akiba added that today, there are quite a wide variety of ways to prepare them — be it Western or Japanese. He said that recently, new dishes that better suit the tastes of Japanese customers have entered the market, such as the venison burger at the Becker's hamburger chain — often located inside JR stations — and boar sukiyaki served at soba noodle restaurants.

"More and more restaurants are taking interest in healthy and tasty gibier cuisine. The more supply there is, the more widespread gibier becomes to the general public," stressed Akiba.

A booth dedicated to gibier cuisine was among 10 booths at the venue of the G7 Niigata Agriculture Minister's Meeting's welcome reception on April 23. Other booths offered sake, sushi, tempura, grilled Kobe beef, gluten-free pasta, roast beef, onigiri rice balls and *wagashi* Japanese confectionery.

The participating G7 agriculture ministers enjoyed Japanese gibier dishes made from ingredients from Kagoshima Pref.

"It's not quite right to hunt animals and just throw them away. We should be grateful for the natural blessings of wild animals and eat them thankfully. We also wish to continue to spread the recognition of delicious gibier dishes," said Akiba.