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Japanese consumers support cultured eel: Forsea poll

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A recent survey conducted by cultured seafood innovator Forsea, Ltd. reveals an openness among Japanese consumers toward eel alternatives, including cultured versions. Consumers expect cultured eel options will create a new secure, sustainable and affordable supply channel for eels.

In response to the dwindling populations of wild, freshwater eel, and the subsequent skyrocketing prices, Forsea developed its cultured iteration of the cherished delicacy. The cultivated eel meat will bridge the growing gaps in demand, particularly in Japan, which consumes almost half of the world's freshwater eel supply.

In the online nationwide survey, conducted in January 2025 among 2,000 respondents evenly distributed by gender and age, results revealed an emerging awareness among Japanese consumers of cell-based products, with 35 per cent of respondents affirming familiarity of some level with cultured seafood and a willingness to try cultured eel. A quarter of the respondents expressed eagerness to try it irrespective of price, while the rest set various limits on what they were willing to spend.

Eel enjoys iconic status in Japanese cuisine. Freshwater eel (Anguilla japonica), known as unagi, is traditionally grilled in a sweet soy-based glaze and served over rice.

Japan consumes 50 per cent of the world's eel supply which is valued at up to USD10 billion demonstrating its enduring reverence there. However, the Japanese still can't enjoy it as much as they'd like to. In a previous survey conducted in August, nearly one-quarter (23 per cent) of those surveyed admitted that they "love eel" but refrain from purchasing it due to its steep price tag. Over a third expressed concerns over the ecological impact of overfishing of freshwater eel which has rendered them an endangered species.

More than 50 per cent noted that they consume eel at least once per year. 10 per cent enjoy it regularly while others allow themselves to indulge on special occasions. 50 per cent of the respondents also expressed that they were willing to pay premium prices for a high-quality product.