

1 Together with Abundant Nature

Ranking of Products from 1916

In 1916, Hokkaido found itself in the midst of an economic boom brought on by World War I. This table made then, created to look like a sumo wrestling ranking chart, contains a list of products made in Hokkaido in order of production value. At that time, agriculture and food industries were expanding, with soybeans and starch exported to Europe and North America. The steel and paper manufacturing industries were also developing thanks to the wealth of local coal and timber resources. On this nearly 100 year-old ranking chart you will find an array of products: some that are still made in Hokkaido today, some now made outside of Hokkaido or overseas, and some no longer used.

Hokkaido's herring, salmon and other fishing industries began from around the end of the 18th century, while agriculture incorporated new technologies from abroad around the end of the 19th century, becoming one of Hokkaido's key industries. At the start of the 20th century, industry itself grew on the back of a strong economy. Driven by these changes, Hokkaido began to produce a number of products, such as potato starch, sugar beets, dairy products, canned goods, laminated wood boards, and rubber, among others.

The reason for this growth can be attributed to Hokkaido's wealth of resources, including the surrounding oceans as well as the expansive forests and farm lands. Over the years people have tried various means to create products from Hokkaido's land, sea and mountain resources.

Today, Hokkaido is one of Japan's major agricultural production areas. Expansive fields, rice paddies and pasture lands await just a short distance away from cities. These were made possible by the hard work of the people in the past who developed the forest land and created irrigation canals. Additionally, a great deal of effort was required to cultivate crops in Hokkaido's extremely cold environment.

Hokkaido also had a wealth of marine resources, including herring, salmon, squid, crab, cod, scallops, abalones, and sea cucumbers, among others. Along the coastline people used tools skillfully to fish, a short distance off the coast people used large nets, and further away in the northern seas people traveled in fleets of vessels to catch fish. The fish that they caught were dried, canned or even used as fertilizer for fields.

Hokkaido's mountains had huge, hidden reserves of coal. Coal mines were developed in earnest from around the end of the 19th century, making Hokkaido a production center for the coal used to power Japan's industry and its lifestyles. Hokkaido's mountains also contained forests with countless huge trees. During the winter time people would cut down these trees with giant saws, using horse-drawn sleds and other means to transport this timber.

Once a transportation network of sea lanes, roads, and railways was developed, products made in Hokkaido started to be transported outside the island and even abroad. Behind the scenes, however, we must not forget that many prisoners and people referred to as *tako*, the name given to laborers who were placed in confinement and exploited to make up for a shortage of workers, lost their lives after being forced to work in dangerous and deplorable conditions.



The Era of Herring

In the past, Hokkaido's spring fishing season began with herring. More than a century ago nearly one million tons of herring were caught in the waters off Hokkaido. The herring is one of Hokkaido's most well-known fish species and most of the catch was used in fishmeal for fertilizer. A great deal of labor was required during the herring season, which attracted large numbers of migrant workers from Honshu and within Hokkaido. Large tools were also needed to efficiently process the huge amount of herring that was caught.



The Era of Black Diamonds

Hokkaido had a wealth of underground mineral resources, from metals, such as gold, silver, copper and lead, to coal, sulfur and limestone, among others. Around 1887 a detailed study of Hokkaido's geological deposits was carried out, leading to the development of mines throughout the island. In particular, a number of mines for coal, which was often referred to as black diamonds, were developed from around the start of the Meiji period (1868-1912), and by around 1926 coal had grown into one of Hokkaido's most important industries.