

How has the pandemic changed eating habits?

22 July 2020 | [Julie Roth](#)



You're not the only one eating differently during the pandemic. Stuck at home, the world's eating habits have changed. But how? Our innovative analytical work for one Japanese client helped us find out.

What we did

With restaurants closed during the pandemic, people who never cooked for themselves were forced to do so. Japanese food producer [Ajinomoto](#) needed to quickly make sure it was getting the right products to market to meet people's new eating habits.

So in March we got to work crunching the numbers to learn what food people in Japan were buying.

We partnered with [Zaim](#), a popular household expense management app used by more than 2 million people in Japan, to source critical data that would let us develop an analytical model to track changes in consumer spending. Our research dug deep into the habits of what people have been cooking at home and the products they use.

What we learned

The data showed that people were turning to traditional recipes — even ones difficult for beginners to cook by themselves. For example, more and more people in Japan have been making [Kinpira gobo](#), a traditional Japanese dish flavored with the burdock root (it tastes similar to an artichoke).

How have your eating habits changed during the pandemic?

“We usually enjoy kinpira gobo at a restaurant or get it at grandma’s house,” says project team leader [Takahiro Sasaki](#). “We found more people are making the dish at home now.”

As a result, Ajinomoto’s Hondashi brand of burdock soup stock has been in hot demand. Demand is also up for dashi, a traditional seasoning in Japanese cuisine.

Acting on the data

Our analytics work will also be valuable after the pandemic as people’s lifestyles shift again.

Now, Ajinomoto is using our data to make sure they can swiftly get newly popular ingredients like these to market. They’re developing a new system that adds more flexibility to food production and helps resolve logistical issues like these:

- a shortage of truck drivers
- rising distribution costs
- the need for environmental preservation

Takahiro says Japanese government statistics show consumer spending on groceries has increased 13% since February, and this trend is expected to continue even as restaurants reopen.

He adds that our analytics work is not only valuable now for Ajinomoto but in the post-pandemic future as people's lifestyles shift again. And we're looking to expand our market research work with Ajinomoto into other industries.

"Our findings are helping Ajinomoto adjust its marketing strategy, expand its line of products and help grow its e-commerce business," he says. "Using Zaim, we are tracking changes in consumer spending in real-time."

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The meaning of "Ajinomoto"

Ajinomoto's original business was making food seasonings, which is reflected in the company's name:

- "Aji" meaning "good taste"
- "no" meaning "of"
- "moto" meaning "raw material"

Put it all together, Ajinomoto translates in English as "raw material of good taste."

And if you're going to make your own kinpira gobo, know that "kinpira" refers to the dish's soy sauce flavoring, while "gobo" is the Japanese word for the burdock root vegetable.

Kudos to the team

Strategy, Consulting and Applied Intelligence worked together on this project.