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## Japan

## Asparagus

## Fresh Asparagus Annual

## 2000

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### Report Highlights:

**U.S. asparagus sales reached a five-year high in 2000 at just over 5,200 tons, with particularly strong sales during the months of April and May. Mid-to-late season U.S. asparagus is becoming increasingly competitive against local product in Japan, and Japanese buyers predict further growth during these months as local production is expected to gradually decline. Overall, the United States accounts for roughly 20 percent of total Japanese imports.**

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Includes PSD changes: Yes  
Includes Trade Matrix: Yes  
Annual Report  
Tokyo [JA1], JA

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## **Japanese Imports of U.S. Asparagus Reach 5-year High in 2000 at Over 5,200 Tons**

Boosted by strong sales in April through late Spring, successfully competing against local product, 2000 U.S. fresh asparagus imports reached 5,230 tons (through June), the highest level since all of 1995. Japanese retailers reported good quality and pricing on U.S. product, contributing to the strong performance.

The overall market for fresh asparagus in Japan has been fairly stable in recent years with an annual disappearance of 42,000 - 46,000 metric tons sharing evenly with domestic asparagus and imports. Fresh asparagus is marketed year-round in Japan with a number of foreign suppliers participating in the market. Mexican asparagus dominates the market in January through March; U.S. volume peaks from March through May, while volumes of domestic asparagus are heaviest in May and June. Asparagus from Australia is available in fall and winter and the Philippines ships almost year-round.

In value terms, Japan imports typically reach just over \$100 million (CIF) annually with the United States accounting for just over 20 percent of the total.

## **Opportunities Exist for Further Gains in Sales to Japan**

Although Japanese fresh asparagus market is mature, there are still marketing opportunities for U.S. growers to expand sales in Japan, particularly in May and June. In recent years, buyers are increasingly recognizing the superior quality of U.S. asparagus over local product and U.S. product has become more visible at retail during the month of May, a month once dominated by local asparagus. Imports in both May, 2000 and May, 1999 topped 1,200 tons, up more than threefold from trade volume during the same month in prior years.

Further declines in the competitiveness of local asparagus is expected due to the aging farm population in Japan and high labor costs. Many of Japan's asparagus fields are becoming aged and there are no major replantings of new trees. With sufficient volumes of fresh asparagus available in the United States through June, Japan's declining production represents continued growth opportunities for U.S. asparagus growers.

## **Imports from Mexico Continue to Rise**

While U.S. sales have grown during the months of April and May, Mexico has become a major competitor to early-season shipments from the United States. Peak shipments of Mexican asparagus take place in February and, in recent years, through the month of March, a month once dominated by U.S. product. Continued growth in demand for Mexican asparagus is expected as Japan's major fresh produce importers are working cooperatively with Mexican growers to produce and package asparagus for the Japanese market. The fine grading and packaging exclusively for Japanese supermarkets have gained a good reputation among Japanese retailers.

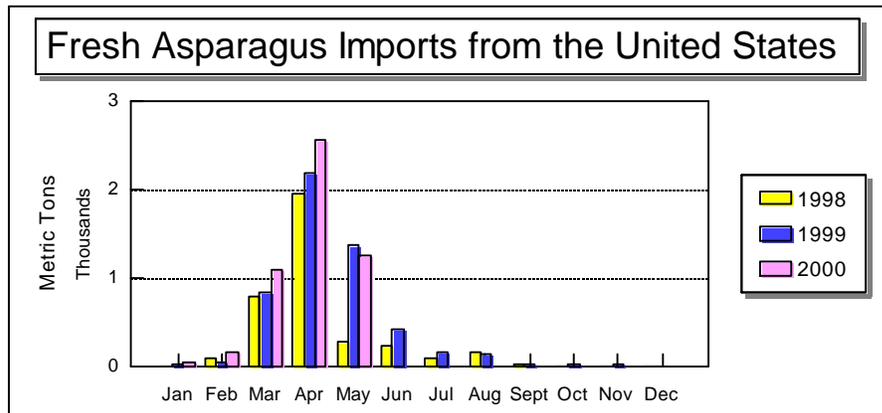
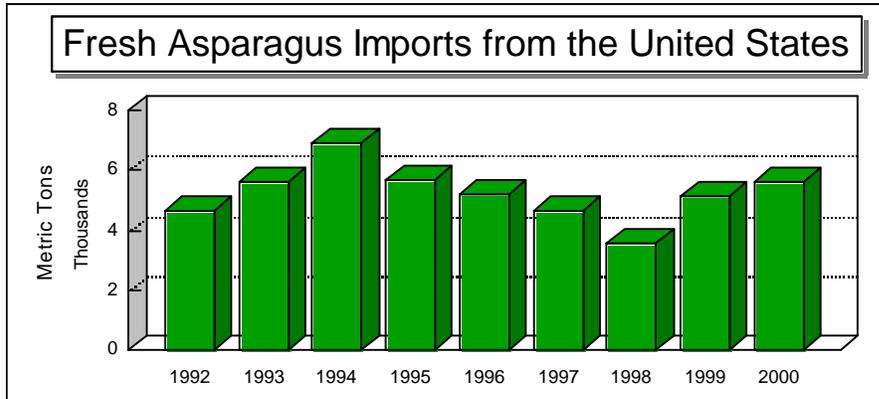
## **No Significant Changes in Prices in Japan's Asparagus Market**

Fresh U.S. asparagus is sold at 150 - 200 yen (\$1.37 - \$1.83) for a bundle of 150 grams at Tokyo's supermarkets. A bundle normally consists of 3 - 4 spears of green asparagus. Domestic asparagus is also sold at a similar price to U.S. asparagus. California asparagus is currently traded at 6,000 - 7,000 yen (\$55.04 - \$64.22) for a 6 kilogram container (an air shipment) at Tokyo's Ohta Wholesale Market. Mexican asparagus is also traded at a similar price to California asparagus. Asparagus from the Philippines are traded at 3,000 yen

(\$27.52) for a case of 8 kilograms (a boat shipment) at Tokyo's wholesale market.

**The GOJ Import Duty for Fresh Asparagus is Set to 3.0 %.**

There are no outstanding policy issues with respect to imports of fresh asparagus. The GOJ import duty for fresh asparagus (HS code: 0709.20-000) is presently 3.0 percent, CIF basis, under the WTO Uruguay Round Agreement. No further reductions are scheduled until the next round of WTO negotiations.



## PS&D Tables and Trade Matrices

### Fresh Asparagus PS&D Table

| PSD Table             |                 |         |             |          |          |         |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---------|-------------|----------|----------|---------|
| Country               | Japan           |         |             |          |          |         |
| Commodity             | Fresh Asparagus |         |             | (HA)(MT) |          |         |
|                       | Revised         | 1998    | Preliminary | 1999     | Forecast | 2000    |
|                       | Old             | New     | Old         | New      | Old      | New     |
| Market Year Begin     |                 | 01/1998 |             | 01/1999  |          | 01/2000 |
| Area Planted          | 0               | 7161    | 0           | 6636     | 0        | 6781    |
| Area Harvested        | 0               | 7161    | 0           | 6636     | 0        | 6781    |
| TOTAL Production      | 0               | 24953   | 0           | 19842    | 0        | 24730   |
| Imports, Fresh        | 0               | 19894   | 0           | 24466    | 0        | 23000   |
| TOTAL SUPPLY          | 0               | 44847   | 0           | 44308    | 0        | 47730   |
| Exports, Fresh        | 0               | 0       | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0       |
| Domestic Fresh Market | 0               | 43297   | 0           | 43078    | 0        | 46230   |
| For Processing        | 0               | 1550    | 0           | 1230     | 0        | 1500    |
| TOTAL UTILIZATION     | 0               | 44847   | 0           | 44308    | 0        | 47730   |

**Fresh Asparagus Import Trade Matrix**

| Import Trade Matrix |                 |             |             |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Country             | Japan           |             |             |
| Commodity           | Fresh Asparagus |             |             |
| Time period         | Jan. - Dec.     | Units:      | Metric Tons |
| Imports for:        | 1998            |             | 1999        |
| U.S.                | 3588            | U.S.        | 5147        |
| Others              |                 | Others      |             |
| Australia           | 5445            | Australia   | 5926        |
| Philippines         | 4166            | Philippines | 5243        |
| Mexico              | 3818            | Mexico      | 4471        |
| Thailand            | 1192            | Thailand    | 1538        |
| New Zealand         | 1255            | New Zealand | 1498        |
| China               | 322             | China       | 476         |
| Peru                | 65              | Peru        | 95          |
|                     |                 |             |             |
|                     |                 |             |             |
|                     |                 |             |             |
| Total for Others    | 16263           |             | 19247       |
| Others not Listed   | 43              |             | 72          |
| Grand Total         | 19894           |             | 24466       |

**Fresh Asparagus Wholesale Price Table**

|               |                 |                      |          |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------|
| Prices Table  |                 |                      |          |
| Country       | Japan           |                      |          |
| Commodity     | Fresh Asparagus |                      |          |
| Prices in     | Yen             | per uom              | KG       |
|               |                 |                      |          |
| Year          | 1999            | 2000                 | % Change |
| Jan           | 991             | 937                  | -5.45%   |
| Feb           | 707             | 769                  | 8.77%    |
| Mar           | 857             | 788                  | -8.05%   |
| Apr           | 1076            | 881                  | -18.12%  |
| May           | 964             | 826                  | -14.32%  |
| Jun           | 1036            | 999                  | -3.57%   |
| Jul           | 1064            |                      |          |
| Aug           | 881             |                      |          |
| Sep           | 781             |                      |          |
| Oct           | 694             |                      |          |
| Nov           | 664             |                      |          |
| Dec           | 962             |                      |          |
|               |                 |                      |          |
| Exchange Rate | 109.53          | Local currency/US \$ |          |