

Hiruzen Dairy

Hiruzen is the largest producer of Jersey cattle in Japan. The cows are mainly used for milk production, and have earned the area widespread acclaim for delicious dairy products.

In 1954, a herd of Jersey cattle was imported from New Zealand to make use of the semi-natural grasslands in Hiruzen that were unsuitable for crops. Jerseys are about two-thirds the size of Holsteins—the more familiar black-and-white dairy breed—but they produce a roughly proportional volume of milk. They also require less fodder than the larger Holsteins, and convert a higher percentage of their fodder intake to milk, rather than body weight. Combined with their hardiness and docile temperament, their efficient productivity made the Jerseys an ideal choice for establishing a dairy industry in Hiruzen. Today, about 2,000 Jersey cattle are raised here.

Jersey milk is particularly rich, with nearly 5 percent butterfat, compared to roughly 4 percent in Holstein milk. Along with calcium and vitamins, the fat contains high levels of the antioxidant beta-carotene, giving Hiruzen's milk an ever-so-faint yellow tinge—and the nickname “Golden Milk.” Jersey milk is also slightly higher in protein and nonfat solids, making it overall denser in composition.

Since the cows feed predominantly by grazing on the mountain grasslands, their milk's flavor also reflects the local terroir—a term often applied to wine grapes, denoting the combined effects of soil, terrain, and climate on a product's taste. Visitors can experience this distinct Hiruzen character in many local dairy products, including fresh milk, soft-serve ice cream, yogurt, and artisanal cheeses. The products are widely available at tourist facilities, supermarkets, convenience stores, and lodgings. Some small producers also sell directly to customers, attracting passing tourists with roadside signs.