

Blue Economy Case Study: Umios

Umios Corporation is Japan's seafood processing and aquaculture leader. It began operations in 1880, when its founder, Ikujiro Nakabe, began a fish sale business in Osaka. The company is the largest of its kind in Japan, with Nippon Suisan Kaisha and Kyokuyo as its main competitors. Umios has subsidiaries in Japan, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, across Europe, Asia and South America.

Umios develops farming technologies that protect natural marine resources and runs one of the world's first egg-to-harvest-raised bluefin tuna farms. Where the company is expanding its fish farming businesses it is committed to safe capture to produce a more sustainable planet.

In food processing, Umios is developing new products (nursing care food, pet foods, supplements, and space food) that all come from sustainable sources.

Sustainable Business: Strategy & Targets

Umios recognises that Sustainable practices contribute to a thriving society and claims to be the world's first carbon neutral fishing company.

The company seeks to prevent the depletion of resources and protects marine life by gaining Marine and Aquaculture Stewardship Council (MSC/ASC) certifications. MSC is given to well-managed and sustainable fisheries, while ASC certifies seafood products raised through responsible aquaculture.

Sustainable fisheries management

For every marine resource Umios handles, it tries to use scientific data and international assessments to identify the risk of resource depletion and reflect those findings in its procurement policies. By 2030, its goal is to achieve a 100% confirmation rate of resource status for all seafood handled across the group of companies.

Umios also conducts biodiversity risk assessments and practises environmentally conscious aquaculture. These measures aim to help keep its business activities sustainable while protecting biodiversity in marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

GSSI-certified seafood

Umios is strengthening its use of internationally accredited programs and promoting sustainable wild-capture fisheries and responsible aquaculture. It is increasing its handling of seafood certified by GSSI-recognized programs*, with a goal of ensuring that more than 15% of total sales across all products - including seafood and seafood-derived items - come from certified sources by 2030.

This approach reduces risks such as wild stock depletion, environmental degradation from aquaculture, and involvement in IUU fishing.

*Seafood certified under programs recognized by the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI)

Ecosystem conservation

The company works with industry partners, NGOs, and local groups on coastal and marine restoration, conducting regular beach cleanups and supporting projects that restore coastal environments, including eelgrass beds and mangrove habitats. These efforts contribute to ecosystem recovery and protect vital ocean resources for the next generation.

Social

Umios is working to systematically develop sustainability human resources with the aim of achieving both a sustainable society and increasing corporate value. The expectation is that this will be a driving force for company-wide sustainable management.

Umios has set a goal of assigning human resources who can formulate and promote strategies in each business unit in these areas: environment, supply chain management, human rights, fishery resources, and stakeholder communication.

To achieve this goal, Umios has set quantitative KPIs for the development of "expert human resources who can promote awareness-raising activities externally" and "expert human resources who can lead awareness-raising within the company" in each field.

Human rights

The company has formulated its Group Human Rights Policy based on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to fulfil its responsibility to respect the human rights of stakeholders, including those in the supply chain.

In 2019, Umios began full-scale efforts to establish a system for human rights due diligence and are making progress toward identifying human rights risks and understanding the current situation through business activities both in Japan and overseas. The company is also striving to increase awareness of international standards with respect to human rights through human rights training targeted at group employees.

Emissions

The Decarbonization Roadmap formulated in September 2022 divides the period up to FY2030 into three phases, with FY2017 as the base year: Phase 1 (FY2022 to FY2024) targeting a 10% CO₂ reduction rate, Phase 2 (FY2025 to FY2027) a 20% CO₂ reduction rate, and Phase 3 (FY2028 to FY2030) a 30% or more CO₂ reduction rate, ultimately aiming for carbon neutrality.

In Phase 3 (FY2028 to FY2030), the company aims to achieve a CO₂ reduction rate of 30% or more, with the ultimate goal of becoming carbon neutral.

In FY2024, the final year of Phase 1, CO₂ emissions were reduced by 33,784 tons compared to FY2017. This represents a 13.3% reduction compared to the same year, achieving the Phase 1 goal of a 10% reduction.

Continuing from FY2023, solar panels at the New Ishinomaki Plant, Umios Kyushu, Umios Sun gourmet, and the Umios Fish Lab have been in operation, generating approximately 1.44 million kWh in FY2024 and reducing CO₂ emissions by 677 tons. In addition, the purchase of non-fossil certificates at Nihon Silo has enabled the company to reduce CO₂ emissions by 1,176 tons per year compared to the previous fiscal year.

In FY2025, when entering Phase 2, CO₂ emissions are expected to reduce by approximately 25,000 tons through the introduction of non-fossil certificates at the five directly operated plants. In addition, the Gunma Factory is expected to generate 430,000 kWh of electricity and reduce CO₂ emissions by approximately 191 tons, etc., through the introduction of solar power generation. The company will continue to study the possibility of switching to CO₂-free electricity and installing on-site and off-site solar panels to further accelerate reductions.

Materiality

The Umios Group connects its business activities to medium- to long-term corporate value enhancement and sustainable growth, and has identified nine priority issues (materiality) in the field of sustainability

Creation of Environmental Value

1. Action for climate change
2. Contributing to a recycling-oriented society
3. Action for marine pollution by marine plastics
4. Action for preserving biodiversity and ecosystem

Creation of Social Value

1. Provision of safe and secure food
2. Food provision contributing to creating health value and sustainability
3. Build a work environment that diversified employees can work with a sense of security
4. Respect for human rights in business operations
5. Development of sustainable supply chain

Marine stewardship and waste management

Umios is committed to producing healthy, convenient, and environmentally-friendly fish and food products.

For example, its Ocean Blue White Fish products are certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), an international non-profit organization for the protection of the natural environment and marine resources.

Companies around the world are increasingly recognising the importance of achieving MSC certification as the most important standard in sustainable fishery and supply chain practices. Since 1996, MSC has been on a mission to end overfishing, illegal fishing, and destructive activities to ensure that future generations can enjoy the same seafood that we enjoy.

Umios is also seeking to eliminate waste in the supply chain using natural resources effectively, by reducing plastics in product containers and packaging, and utilising fishery waste during food processing.

SeaBOS Initiative

The SeaBOS (Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship) is a global initiative that was launched in 2016 together with the world's eight largest seafood companies (currently 6 companies) and scientists who research the ocean, fishing, and sustainability. Their cooperation, strategy and activities is based on scientific evidence to ensure sustainable seafood products production and a healthy ocean environment.

SeaBOS's mission is to accelerate transformation with regards to ocean management. In cooperation with governments and other sustainability bell-wethers, the industry actively engages in ocean management and bears global responsibility for the world's oceans. Umios is actively contributing to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, Goal 14 to "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development."

The company participated in SeaBOS from its inception, and in September 2018, upon the organisation's establishment, Shigeru Ito, the company's President & CEO (at the time), was named its first Chairman and served as Chairman until October 2020.

Austral Fisheries

As a partner within the Umios Group since 2013, Austral Fisheries is a leading Australian sustainable fishing brand, backed by value, strength, and eco-conscious practices.

In 2016, Austral Fisheries became the first fishing company in the world to receive carbon neutral certification, and their story is one of a long-standing commitment to consumers, the environment, and the continual development of the fishing industry.

They also played a significant role in saving the Patagonian Toothfish from poachers by collaborating with government agencies, conservation groups, and other legitimate fishers to shut down illegal Toothfish fishing operations.

Sources: Umios, Wikipedia, IMARC