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INTERVIEW

“For Swissoja, going organic was an obvious choice”

Interview with Manuel Martinez, CEO at Swissoja SA

Swissoja has been a pioneer in organic tofu production in Switzerland since 1977. First known as “La Maison du Tofu”, the company creates nutritious plant-based products, including tofu, skewers, burgers, soya drinks, and okara. All products are 100% vegan and made with organic soya beans from Switzerland and certified organic vegetables. For this edition of our newsletter, we interviewed Mr. Manuel Martinez, CEO of Swissoja.



Manuel Martinez, Swissoja's CEO since 2007 © Swissoja SA

What inspired Swissoja to focus on soy-based products and adopt organic practices so early on?

In 1977, Swissoja's founder established "La Maison du Tofu" in Carouge, Switzerland, with the aim of promoting a healthy, environmentally conscious diet at a time when vegetarianism was still quite marginal. During a trip to Japan, he discovered traditional tofu-making methods and decided to bring this expertise to Switzerland, making him a pioneer in the field. For Swissoja, going organic was an obvious choice—not only to meet consumer expectations for natural, high-quality products but also to distance soy from its association with GMOs. By definition, organic products cannot be genetically modified, ensuring that Swissoja's soy-based foods remain 100% natural and GMO-free.

Could you briefly describe Swissoja's journey from its

beginnings to its current position in the Swiss market?

Swissoja's journey began in 1977 as "La Maison du Tofu" in Carouge, Switzerland, pioneering high-quality soy-based products. In 1993, my uncle Alfonso Martinez took over the company and expanded its presence in French-speaking Switzerland. The early 2000s saw the achievement of organic certification with the Bourgeon label. I took over as CEO in 2007, driving growth while maintaining traditional methods. In 2013, we relocated to new production facilities in Geneva and launched an organic soy drink in 2015. In 2016, we began exporting our products to the “Rungis” market in France. Three years later, in 2019, we started commercializing Okara, the leftover pulp from soybeans after they are filtered to make soy milk and tofu, addressing the growing demand for vegan and organic products. By 2024, we launched online sales via our website to be closer to consumers and offer the full assortment to a larger audience.

Today, Swissoja is recognized for its high-quality vegan products made from Swiss organic soybeans.

Can you elaborate on the process of sourcing organic soybeans from Switzerland and ensuring the quality of your ingredients?

Swissoja exclusively sources Swiss organic soybeans, which are certified by Bio Suisse. This certification guarantees that the beans adhere to strict organic production standards. By prioritizing local, certified ingredients, Swissoja ensures the traceability and superior quality of its products.

What are the unique characteristics of Swissoja's tofu that differentiates it from competitors in the market?

Our tofu is renowned for its exceptional quality, thanks to several key factors. Firstly, it is crafted exclusively from locally sourced Swiss organic soybeans, with other ingredients also

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Tofu in the making and organic soy beans used for Swissoja products © Swissoja SA

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originating from Switzerland whenever possible. Secondly, Swissoja adheres to traditional artisanal production methods inspired by Japanese techniques, emphasizing human craftsmanship over automation. Lastly, we are committed to delivering premium quality tofu that is naturally soft and smooth, free from artificial flavors and preservatives. The goal is to provide the healthiest option possible while preserving high nutritional value. These factors contribute to Swissoja's reputation for premium tofu with superior texture and taste.

How has the demand for vegan and plant-based products evolved in Switzerland over the years?

In Switzerland, demand for vegan and plant-based products has grown significantly in recent years. According to a study by Coop, 63% of the Swiss population actively reduces meat consumption. 40% of respondents expressed a desire to increase their consumption of plant-based alternatives in the next five years, reflecting a lasting shift toward plant-based diets. At the same time, the demand for organic and healthy products has also risen, driven by consumers looking for high-quality, natural foods. Interestingly, the biggest

market potential for Swissoja does not necessarily lie with strict vegans or vegetarians, but rather with the large number of flexitarians—people who are not fully plant-based but actively seek to reduce their consumption of animal products. These consumers are looking for tasty, nutritious, and convenient alternatives, which aligns perfectly with Swissoja's product offering.

Do you have any plans to export your products to Japan or to collaborate with Japanese companies in the future?

Exporting our products to Japan is not in our immediate plans. However, in terms of collaboration, we have a long-standing connection with *Takai Tofu*, from whom we purchased machines decades ago—machines that we are still using today. This partnership reflects our commitment to quality and traditional craftsmanship.

What kind of partnerships or collaborations would Swissoja be interested in exploring with Japanese companies?

Swissoja's ingredient sourcing strategy is to source as locally as possible, but we still import *nigari* from Japan, as it is a unique product that cannot be found in Europe. In terms of machinery, we continue our longstanding partnership with *Takai Tofu*, as they supplied us with equipment decades ago, and we are still using those

machines today. We are always open to exploring further collaborations that align with our commitment to superior quality.

What are some of the latest innovations in your product development or production processes? Are there any upcoming products or projects you can share?

One of our latest innovations is the *breaded tofu*, which makes tofu more accessible and fun, especially for children—a target group that is particularly important to us. Another exciting project is the transformation of okara into flour, which aligns with our zero-waste approach. This unique product is rich in plant-based proteins and fiber, and it is also gluten-free. This initiative reflects our commitment to sustainability. In 2028, we will be opening a new state-of-the-art factory in Satigny (GE). This 6000 square meter facility will not only increase our production capacity but also allow us to diversify our product range. We are particularly excited about the introduction of a new production line that will focus on three innovative soy-based products: soy cream, soy yogurt, and soy fresh cheese.

Thank you for the interview!

You can use the special promo code JAPAN10 in [Swissoja's online store](#) to get 10% off your first purchase! This code is [valid until 31 December 2025](#).

Martin Pfister Succeeds Viola Amherd in the Federal Council

On 12 March, the Swiss Parliament elected Martin Pfister to replace Viola Amherd, who had announced her resignation from the Federal Council earlier this year. Mr. Pfister will officially take office on 1 April 2025.

Pfister was elected in the second round, after he failed to secure the absolute majority of votes in the first round. His competitor, Markus Ritter, National Councilor from St-Gallen and president of the Swiss Farmer's Association, failed to garner enough support to win the election. In the second round, Pfister received 134 votes out of 245 valid votes cast, surpassing the absolute majority of 123 votes required. Ritter received 110 votes in the final round.

With Pfister's election, which came as a surprise to many, the linguistic balance in the Federal Council is maintained, with four German-speaking, and two French-speaking members, as well as one Italian-speaking member. However, the gender balance has shifted, resulting in only two women remaining in the government. Central Switzerland has lacked representation on the Federal Council since Kaspar Villiger, who hailed from the canton of Lucerne, retired in 2003.

Martin Pfister is a native of the canton of Zug, where he began his political career in 2003 as a member of the Guardianship and Social Welfare Commission of the municipality of Baar. In 2006, he was elected to the Zug Cantonal Council, later becoming parliamentary group leader and then president of the cantonal Christian Democratic Party (CVP), now known as the Center Party. He has been a member of the Zug government since 2016. As for his professional life, Martin Pfister has worked as a teacher and research assistant, among other things. He has also worked as a consultant for non-profit organizations and associations. In the army, Pfister most recently held the rank of colonel and was head of disaster relief for Territorial Region 3.

On 14 March 2025, two days after the election, the department allocation took place. There, it was announced that Mr. Pfister would take over the Federal Department of Defense, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) from his predecessor. The distribution of departments will formally be confirmed at the Federal Council meeting on 2 April 2025.

Sources: [admin.ch](https://www.admin.ch); [swissinfo](https://www.swissinfo.ch)

動向

SITUATION

Christian Schwarzenegger Awarded Imperial Japanese Order

On 27 February 2025, Christian Schwarzenegger, Vice President of the University of Zurich, was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun from the Japanese Ambassador to Switzerland, Yoshinori Fujiyama. This honor comes as recognition of his contributions to academic exchanges and of his efforts aimed at promoting mutual understanding between Japan and Switzerland.

Schwarzenegger's connection with Japan dates to the 1990s when he worked as an assistant professor, teaching European law at universities in Niigata and Aichi. Upon returning to Switzerland, Schwarzenegger played a key role in establishing academic collaborations with leading Japanese institutions, including the launch of a Double Degree Program

with Doshisha University in 2014. In 2022, Schwarzenegger initiated the Japan Lecture Series, bringing renowned Japanese speakers to UZH. This initiative led to significant scientific collaborations, such as the partnership between UZH's Institute for Regenerative Medicine and Kyoto University's Center for IPS Cell Research and Application. Beyond academia, Schwarzenegger has been actively involved in promoting Japanese culture in Switzerland. As President of the Swiss-Japanese Society since 2022, he organizes various cultural events showcasing Japanese art, music, and traditions. To commemorate the society's 70th anniversary, a special event is planned at Kunsthaus Zürich

on 13 September 2025, featuring Japanese calligraphy, jazz music, and visual arts. Schwarzenegger's passion for Japanese culture extends to his personal interests, including fine art, ceramics, origami, and traditional handicrafts. He also expresses admiration for Japanese cuisine and the Shinto religion, appreciating its reverence for nature.

The award of the Order of the Rising Sun, one of Japan's highest honors, reflects Schwarzenegger's significant impact on Swiss-Japanese relations.

Sources: [swisstrade](https://www.swisstrade.ch); [UZH website](https://www.uzh.ch)

文化

CULTURE

Big Kaiser Becomes Global R&D Hub of Big Daishowa

革新

INNOVATION

Big Kaiser, located in Rümlang (ZH), is set to become the global Research and Development (R&D) hub for its Japanese parent company, Big Daishowa. This strategic move signifies a major restructuring and investment in the European operations, solidifying Switzerland's position as a key center for precision technology.

Big Daishowa is undertaking comprehensive investments across its European divisions, including rebranding *Big Kaiser Europe* as *Big Daishowa Europe*. A central component of this strategy involves transforming the Rümlang-based R&D department into a global competence center, focusing on pioneering digital and automated tooling solutions. The R&D center will concentrate on developing cutting-edge innovations, particularly in the realm of boring tools. Key areas of focus include the evolution of EWE boring heads and the further advancement of fully automatic EWA fine boring heads. This commitment underscores *Big Daishowa's* dedication to leading the industry with state-of-the-art technology.

While innovation thrives in Switzerland, *Big Daishowa* is optimizing its global supply chain by transferring production activities for boring tools to Japan. However, assembly and

customer service operations for the European market will remain in Switzerland, ensuring continued support and responsiveness to regional clients. Further enhancing its European presence, *Big Daishowa* plans to open a new European headquarters with a logistics center in Germany in 2026. This strategic location will improve customer service and operational efficiency across the continent.

Reto Adam, CEO of *Big Daishowa Europe*, emphasizes that this reorganization will ensure the company remains at the forefront of tooling quality and innovation. By merging Japanese manufacturing expertise with European innovation, *Big Daishowa* aims to create a synergistic environment for developing next-generation tooling solutions. This strategic realignment has potential to strengthen *Big Daishowa's* position as a global leader in the tooling industry.

Sources: [swisstrade](#); [Big Daishowa website](#)

Agenda

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AGENDA

- ✓ EXPO 2025 in Osaka
Dates: 13 April – 13 October 2025
Theme: *Designing Future Society for Our Lives*
Find more information [here](#)

The official Swiss National Day at Expo 2025 is 22 April 2025. Find more information about the Swiss Pavilion [here](#)

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>

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