



**S**an-J has been making wheat-free tamari since 1804. When they brought it to the U.S. in 1979, the company was a manufacturing pioneer in the world of gluten-free sauces. They offer a vast Asian-influenced product line that includes multiple types of tamari, cooking sauces, salad dressings, and brown rice crackers.

Misako Binford, marketing manager for San-J, spoke with me about the company and the tradition surrounding tamari. First, she explained the difference between tamari and soy sauce: traditional tamari is made with 100% soy and no wheat, while soy sauce is a combination of both wheat and soy. San-J has always produced their product without wheat because they believe the flavor is superior. With a high concentration of soy, San-J’s tamari is deep in color and rich in flavor.

When I first started as a gluten-free commercial buyer, many customers were confused by San-J’s product label because it stated that it was wheat-free, but not gluten-free. In an effort to clear up labeling confusion and to ensure consumer safety, San-J sought and obtained gluten-free certification for their tamari from the Gluten Free Certification Organization (GFCO) in 2007. Now all of San-J’s gluten-free products bear the “GF” symbol. Their cooking sauces obtained certification in 2009, followed by their dressings, four more flavors of tamari, and their crackers in 2010. Any new products are automatically put through the certification process.

In the GFCO process, each company undergoes an audit of their ingredients, manufacturers, and production facility to ensure there is no possibility for cross contamination. It is a very thorough process that companies enter into voluntarily. It provides an effective way for companies like San-J to convey their concern about the health of consumers while ensuring that gluten-free labeling holds a real significance for their products.

Not all companies own their own production lines, which gives them very little allergen control. This is not the case with San-J, as their products are made on dedicated gluten-free lines in their facility in Richmond, Virginia. Each batch of tamari is internally tested for gluten before being sent off to third party auditors to ensure it tests at or below 10 parts per million (ppm) of gluten.

The FDA is proposing legislation that would allow a product to be labeled gluten-free if it tests below 20 ppm. In actuality, San-J’s internal tests confirm that products contain less than 5 ppm of gluten although they would probably test lower if there was a reliable test for detecting gluten at less than 1 ppm.

I learned from Binford that it takes six months to brew San-J tamari sauce. Their sauce isn’t chemically processed, like some other brands, but rather is fermented and acquires its rich flavor and color when the soy proteins break down into amino acids. Tamari made with corn syrup and caramel



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avoids dairy/casein, hydrogenated oils, and MSG. Jennifer is a Gluten-Free Product Specialist and an Industry Consultant for her own consulting company, Just Gluten-Free. She also is the marketing coordinator for Pure Knead, a dedicated gluten-free and allergen-friendly bakery in Georgia. Email Jennifer at: [jenniferharris326@gmail.com](mailto:jenniferharris326@gmail.com)

color is considered taking a “short cut” because it can decrease production time to less than a week. Chemically created tamari won’t have the taste or color that makes San-J such a quality product.


Beyond their signature tamari, all of San-J’s products, in addition to being “GF” certified, are made with natural ingredients, no artificial flavors, colors, or preservatives, and contain no added MSG per Binford. The alcohol used to make the tamari sauce is derived from either corn or sugarcane. Their tamari, cooking sauces, and salad dressings are all certified Kosher.

San-J also participates in the Non-Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) Project and they have a number of gluten-free offerings that are Non-GMO certified: Tamari Gluten-Free Soy Sauce (black label), Tamari Gluten-Free Reduced Sodium Soy Sauce (white label), Organic Tamari Gluten-Free Soy Sauce (gold label), and Organic Tamari Gluten-Free Reduced Sodium Soy Sauce (platinum label).

San-J’s product line was developed to offer convenience and expanded cooking options for consumers. For a quick dinner, simply cook your protein, choose your vegetables, and doctor it up with one of San-J’s six cooking sauces. Use their dressings to marinate meats or jazz up your typical salad. San-J’s website features a wide variety of recipes from chicken wings to Asian-inspired Cobb salad, paté, and meatballs—all easily enhanced with San-J’s cooking sauces and dressings.

While many people are familiar with San-J’s tamari, salad dressings, and cooking sauces, my favorite product is their rice crackers, which are made from whole brown rice that is steamed, crushed, rolled into thin sheets, and cut into rounds. The rounds are then coated with San-J’s tamari and baked until golden and crispy, resulting in a delicious Asian-style version of flatbread. Flavors include: Tamari Brown Rice Crackers, Tamari Brown Sesame Brown Rice Crackers, Tamari Black Sesame Brown Rice Crackers, and Teriyaki Sesame Brown Rice Crackers. I enjoy them plain or topped with tuna or chicken salad. (The sesame flavors, with their added texture, are my favorites.) The company is preparing to conduct research and development for new products to add to their line in the near future.

San-J’s products are nationally distributed and can be found on most local store shelves. They are also served by a number of restaurants. One of the most popular additions to the San-J product line is their single-serve packets of tamari. Now restaurants like P.F. Chang’s can offer gluten-free tamari with their take-out orders and consumers can carry packets with them to their favorite Asian restaurants.

Generations of tradition have led to San-J’s current status as a leading brand in the gluten-free marketplace. And to think, it all started with tamari! 



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