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# Smith calls for hearing on new ag export markets

by Robert Pore  
World-Herald News Service

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With beef exports to Japan picking up, Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb., would like to see that trend continue for American agricultural products.

Last week Smith, who is a member of the House Agriculture Committee, sent a letter requesting a committee hearing on developing new overseas markets for U.S. farm products.

In the letter to Rep. Mike McIntyre " chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Rural Development, Biotechnology, Specialty Crops, and Foreign Agriculture " Smith specifically called for testimony from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service.

The Foreign Agriculture Service, he said, works to improve foreign market access for U.S. products, build new markets, improve the competitive position of U.S. agriculture in the global marketplace, and provide food aid and technical assistance to foreign countries.

"With so much uncertainty coming from Washington, agriculture producers are feeling extremely strained and uneasy," Smith said. "Whether it is new environmental regulations or volatile energy prices, the cost of doing business for farmers and ranchers is on the rise."

According to a recently released report by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Smith said, U.S. agriculture producers will need to reach more and more foreign customers in order to restore profits.

"Since exports are imperative for U.S. producers, I would welcome the opportunity to listen to testimony and examine expert witnesses from the Foreign Agriculture Service on their mission and overseas operations," he said. "Such a hearing will provide a valuable forum to discuss steps toward long-term stability for our producers."

Smith said that, now more than ever, "Our products must be as competitive as possible in the

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world market."

Nebraska profits greatly from overseas agricultural sales as the state ranked fifth in the nation last year, with \$5.944 billion in sales. Nebraska was fifth in soybean exports, third in feed grain exports, second in live animal exports, and first in animal fats and hides and skins.

Nebraska is also the nation's leading commercial red meat production state, with many of those finished products heading overseas for sale.

With Nebraska being one of the nation's leading livestock products export states at more than \$1.7 billion in 2008, one of the most popular destinations for Nebraska beef is Japan, though recent restrictions have limited the amount of U.S. beef being exported there.

But, according to the U.S. Meat Export Federation, U.S. beef is increasing its popularity with Japanese consumers.

"Over the past three years, the number of consumers who feel "extremely safe" or "somewhat safe" in consuming U.S. beef has more than doubled from 12.1 percent in 2006 to 30.1 percent in August 2009, according to surveys commissioned by USMEF and conducted by Macromill. Those consumers who feel "not very safe" or "not safe at all" have declined from 62.5 percent to 30.8 percent, while the balance have no firm opinion.

The survey revealed that Japanese consumers look to certain outside information sources to reinforce their confidence in U.S. beef. When asked what would encourage them to buy U.S. beef, the survey participants cited several leading factors: 41 percent said the approval of the safety of U.S. beef by the government of Japan. 23.4 percent said U.S. government safety guarantees. 22.1 percent said safety approvals offered by specialists and celebrities. 20.5 percent said safety explanations offered by U.S. producers. 14.4 percent said the serving of U.S. beef in well-known restaurants and hotels.

Last month, 100 Japanese families were selected from among 4,000 families that applied to participate in a USMEF barbecue hosted in Tokyo by four representatives from the Nebraska Soybean Board (NSB). The NSB delegation grilled steaks with the families, visited a Japanese cooking school and toured meat industry facilities in the country during their visit.

"Japanese consumers enjoy meeting the producers behind the products they serve their families," said Takemichi Yamashoji, USMEF-Japan senior marketing director. "Talking with typical American meat and grain producers puts a face on U.S. beef and pork and reinforces the message of quality."



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