

Lt. Gov. Sheehy, Nebraska Delegation Open Nebraska Center (December 1, 2006)

(Tokyo) Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy joined a 28-member Nebraska delegation in celebrating the grand opening of the state's first foreign trade office abroad during a reception Friday night in Japan. More than 200 leaders from Japanese business, industry and governmental bodies attended the Nebraska reception at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo.

The reception concluded a five-day trade mission to the island nation that is home to world's second-largest economy. Japan is Nebraska's top overseas trading partner. The Nebraska delegation returns to Omaha shortly after noon on Saturday.

Lt. Gov. Sheehy said, "Today's opening of the Nebraska Center was very positive. We received a lot of positive feedback from people involved in Japanese business, industry, and government. The presence of the Nebraska Center shows our true commitment to our businesses and investors from Japan and to growing our businesses in Nebraska. I believe we have had a very successful and productive trade mission, one that will help solidify current relationships and help us build new ties."

Over the course of the week, the Nebraska economic development delegation visited with more than 20 Japanese companies. Agricultural delegates also visited with four Japanese grocers who stock U.S. and Nebraska beef, four restaurateurs interested in providing their customers with Nebraska beef, two Nebraska exporters with Japanese outposts, and two import firms that deal in Nebraska agricultural products.

Richard Baier, director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED), worked with his counterpart at the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Greg Ibach, to secure a memorandum of understanding with a Japanese company involved in producing specialized cooking oils. The Japanese company, which has requested anonymity, expressed its preference to locate its first American manufacturing plant in Nebraska. The company already has plants in Korea and China and is looking to expand.

Baier said, "The most important result of this trip has been our ability to reach out and make contact with the partners and service providers of current Nebraska companies, whether owned by Japanese businesses or owned by Nebraskans. We've also had an opportunity to meet with several prospective companies and site selection firms."

The agricultural part of the delegation focused on assessing Japanese opportunities for Nebraska farmers and ranchers in what was, until the recent implementation of beef restrictions, Nebraska's largest agricultural export market.

Ibach said, "This was a valuable trip. We have gained a better understanding of the current market conditions, consumer attitudes and the potential for future trade with Japan. We hear at home that Japanese consumers don't want U.S. beef, but we came over here, and it's exactly the opposite. There are some great opportunities."

The Nebraska delegation visited the Nebraska Center office Friday morning, Tokyo time. Office staffers, under the direction of former Itochu Corp. executive and Nebraska Center Director Koji Nagasaka, have been preparing for its public debut as a hub for business, educational and agricultural opportunities for Nebraskans in Japan. The center will be available as a public work and meeting space to business partners and Nebraskans visiting for economic development, agricultural or educational purposes.

One of the office's key sponsoring partners, the University of Nebraska and specifically the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), hopes to attract additional patients, staff, research and opportunities for technology transfers.

Nizar Mamdani, the executive director of the Office of International Healthcare Services for UNMC who participated in the trade mission, said, "This trip has been a valuable experience, and this office will offer the university a multitude of opportunities."

DED and UNMC have pledged up to \$20,000 each to support the Nebraska Center, which represents approximately half the funds needed. The remainder will come from other sponsors, including: the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce,

the Lincoln Area Chamber of Commerce, the Elkhorn Valley Economic Development Council and the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, the Nebraska Diplomats, Election Systems and Software of Omaha, First National Bank of Omaha, Oxbow Pet Products of Murdoch, Bruckman Rubber of Hastings, Werner Enterprises of Omaha, the Nebraska Corn Board, The Nebraska Wheat Board, the Nebraska Farm Bureau, Kawasaki of Lincoln, the Nebraska Public Power District and the Omaha Public Power District.

"This is a tremendous day for the future of Nebraska agriculture and Nebraska's economy," Gov. Dave Heineman said from Lincoln. "This office is an important step in our global strategy to market Nebraska to the next generation of entrepreneurs."

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Aaron Sanderford, 402-471-1967

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