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## Japan re-opens to U.S. sheep and goat meat

Mateusz Perkowski Jul 20, 2018



A band of sheep grazes in the Boise foothills. Japan has re-opened its market to U.S. lamb and goat meat.

Capital Press File

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Marketers plan to reintroduce U.S. lamb and goat meat to Japanese consumers after an absence from that market of nearly 15 years.

Japan stopped accepting meat from U.S. cattle and other ruminants, including sheep and goats, in late 2003 after the discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy — a neurological disease — in a Washington dairy cow.

The prohibition was recently lifted, allowing U.S. producers to compete with Australia and New Zealand in Japan, which last year imported \$169 million of sheep and goat meat from those countries.

“Even 10 to 15 percent of that market would be millions of dollars,” said Peter Orwick, executive director of the American Sheep Industry Association.

Australia and New Zealand will likely remain the major exporters of sheep and goat meat to Japan but the market’s re-opening will have an impact on the U.S. industry, particularly with “higher-end” cuts such as the rack of lamb, he said.

and cuts such as the lack of lamb, he said.

“This is like newfound customers for companies of ours that want to pursue it,” Orwick said.

Even without the Japanese market, U.S. exporters of sheep and goat meat have made major strides over the past decade and a half — shipments to other countries have more than doubled from \$7 million to \$15 million in that time, according to USDA.

Meanwhile, Japan’s consumption of imported sheep and goat meat has also grown from less than \$90 million to nearly \$170 million a year.

The U.S. Meat Export Federation plans to conduct educational seminars for Japanese chefs and distributors to remind them of the unique texture and flavor of U.S. lamb, said Joe Schuele, its communications director.

Unlike sheep from Australia and New Zealand, which are generally grass fed, those from the U.S. are finished on a diet of grains that imparts juiciness to the meat, he said. Grain-finished beef is already popular in Japan.

“It’s a concept that Japanese consumers are familiar with and which they’ve shown an appetite for,” Schuele said.

Japan has specific requirements for meat imports that can be found on the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service website, but U.S. processors are familiar with those requirements and well-prepared to meet them, he said.

“I think everyone in the supply chain will benefit from it,” Schuele said.

With Japan now re-opened to U.S. sheep and goat meat, hopefully trade negotiators can now focus on re-opening other markets to those products, including South Korea and countries in South America, he said.

Lifting the ban on U.S. beef in Japan was the top priority of USDA negotiators while the prohibition on sheep and goat meat probably took longer to unwind because it was tangled up with other trade issues, said Orwick.

“A lot of those trade issues don’t have anything to do with your particular commodity,” he said.