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Baucus Encouraged by News That Japan Is Taking Steps to Ease Import Restrictions on U.S. Beef

Senator Met With Japanese Leaders During Weeklong Trade Mission Last Month

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today welcomed news that Japan is taking steps to ease its restriction on imports of U.S. beef, from animals no more than 20 months old to 30 months.

While in Tokyo last month, Senator Baucus met with Japanese leaders to discuss opportunities to expand the export of U.S. goods to Asia. He specifically pressed the scientific case for lifting the ban on U.S. beef in meetings with Japanese cabinet officials.

"I am encouraged by the steps taken today by the Japanese government. I had very constructive meetings in Tokyo last month and am confident we will continue to strengthen our trade ties with Japan," Senator Baucus said. **"We're headed in the right direction. U.S. beef — from cattle of all ages — is the safest in the world and I am confident we will continue to expand exports on the global market."**

An expert panel announced today its recommendation that Japan further ease import restrictions on beef from U.S. cattle. Japan currently only accepts American beef from cattle under 21 months of age. However, the panel is proposing loosening the ban and accepting cattle up to 30 months old.

The recommendation was made to Japan's Food Safety Commission. The Commission would accept public comment on the proposed new policy before choosing to implement any change.

Japan, once the largest importer of U.S. beef, banned U.S. cattle in 2003 when BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) was first discovered in the U.S. Since then, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) have declared that U.S. beef derived from cattle of all ages is safe. Japan re-opened its market to American beef in 2005, but with the 20 month age limit in place.

Japan was the third-largest export market for U.S. beef after Mexico and Canada last year. The easing of the 20 month restriction would further increase opportunities for U.S. beef exporters to boost sales to Japan.

Senator Baucus is the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over international trade.

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