

The Nebraska Corn Board is sponsoring a team to travel to Japan with the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) to promote Nebraska corn-fed beef and pork and to see first hand how Nebraska farmers, through their grain donation program, are supporting Red Cross efforts to help those impacted by the earthquake and tsunami in the region.

Japan is a top importer of U.S. beef and pork, and it's a good marketplace to promote Nebraska corn-fed beef and pork. Japan is also a top importer of U.S. corn.

Nebraska Corn Board spokesman and Nebraska-native Olympic gold medalist Curt Tomasevicz will be traveling with the team to help promote U.S. corn-fed beef and pork in a balanced diet.

"Curt's role makes this USMEF mission different than those we've supported in the past," said Kelsey Pope, ag promotion coordinator with the Nebraska Corn Board, who is representing the board on the mission. "His status as a top-performing athlete will be exciting to those we meet with, including the kids sports teams we will be visiting. He will talk about eating U.S. red meat as part of a healthy, balanced, athletic diet."

The mission will take place July 5-12 and will include some activities with a Nebraska Beef Council team while in Tokyo.

Others going on the mission include John Willoughby, president of the Buffalo/Hall County Corn Growers Association and member of the Nebraska Corn Growers Association, and Bill Schuster, chairman of the Aurora Cooperative board of directors. Willoughby and Schuster were instrumental in launching the grain donation program with the Nebraska Corn Growers Association and KRVN to support tsunami relief efforts in Japan and the Pacific.

The relief effort began in April after Japan experienced the devastating earthquake and tsunami. As part of the effort, Nebraska farmers donate bushels of corn or any grain at Aurora Cooperative or Cooperative Producers, Inc., locations. The grain is sold and proceeds go to the Red Cross. Donations continue to be accepted through July 30.

"Even though this mission to Japan with USMEF began as a Nebraska corn-fed meat promotion, it was a natural fit to include representatives from the Nebraska Corn Growers Association and Aurora Cooperative. It will give them an opportunity to deliver meals to those displaced by the tsunami and see how the grain donation relief program is supporting people in Japan," said Don Hutchens, executive director of the Nebraska Corn Board.

To make that portion of the mission happen, USMEF arranged a special trip to the Tohoku area where the team will meet with evacuees, distribute free meals and meet with local media.