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Texas peanut reps visit Japan to build export relations

Members from the Texas Peanut Producers Board (TPPB) and the American Peanut Council (APC) traveled overseas last week to meet with the Japan Nut Association and U.S. Embassy trade officials to look for ways to promote and increase imports of American peanuts into Japan.

For many years, Japan imported Chinese peanuts until the pesticide residue levels became unacceptable. Over the past two years Japan has been looking for more stable and reliable markets. Shelly Nutt, TPPB executive director, said the trip was very successful and there are hopes to fill the potential market. "In order to increase our exports we need to build our relationship with the Japanese," Nutt said. "This trip opened dialogue and built trust in our peanut crop and with us as individuals."

America has built a strong relationship with Canada over the years, exporting peanuts valued at over \$60 million annually. The APC hopes to build relations with Japan to continue the rise in market exports America already has with Japan. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, peanut exports to Japan from the U.S. are currently at \$12.2 million, up 148 percent from 2007.

Seminole, Texas peanut farmer Otis Lee Johnson, who is the chairman of both the APC Exports committee and TPPB, gave a presentation to members of the Japan Nut Association describing every aspect of America's traditional peanut growing process, including peanut processing and shelling. Johnson also discussed the high quality of American peanuts with the Japanese representatives, promoting their value as an export product.

To help build a relationship with the Japanese, Nutt and Johnson, along with National Peanut Board Chairman Roger Neitsch of Seminole, APC Director of International Marketing Stephanie Grunenfelder, and Bob Coyle of Lawler Ballard Van Duran in Atlanta, Ga., spent their time touring manufacturing facilities and peanut farms.

The five American representatives toured the Tabata and Ikenobe factories where they roast, chop and manufacture a variety of peanut products, including whole, shelled and peanut powder. Nutt said the businesses were much smaller than American factories, but were just as efficient, using every amount of space available for stacking, storing and processing.

Although the Japanese peanut farms toured are smaller than typical American fields, the Japanese plants are higher yielding and produce great crops. Nutt said the farming techniques are also different from those used in America. The Japanese plant peanuts mechanically, but harvest by hand, whereas the entire production process in America is done mechanically and average around 3,500 pounds per acre.

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The Texas Peanut Producers Board is a state-wide board funded by a \$2 per ton voluntary check-off program. For more information, contact Lindsay West, TPPB communications director, at lindsay@texaspeanutboard.com or call 1-800-734-0086.