

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Town Hall with Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack

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Report Highlights:

As part of Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack's Japan visit for the *Partners in Agriculture* series of events, a town hall meeting was held with Japanese students in the Auditorium of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Students from the Tokyo, Fukuoka, Sapporo and Naha areas had the chance to ask the Secretary questions about U.S. and Japanese agriculture in a moderated format.

General Information: Introduction

About Partners in Agriculture

Partners in Agriculture is a series of events that is taking place from March through mid-summer of 2010 aimed at commemorating the tremendous success of the cooperators program, the special agricultural relationship between the United States and Japan, the 50th anniversary of the Grains Council, and the 50th anniversary of the Iowa hog lift and the Iowa-Yamanashi sister-state relationship.



PIA Logo

Partners in Agriculture began on March 2 at FOOD EX 2010, Asia's largest food trade show, and included a press conference held by U.S. Ambassador John Roos to kick off the celebration.

Town Hall Meeting



The setup encouraged interaction between Secretary Vilsack and the Japanese students in attendance

As part of Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack's Japan visit for the *Partners in Agriculture* series of events, a town hall was held with Japanese students in the auditorium of the U.S. Embassy. Taking place on Wednesday April 7, the event welcomed approximately 100 students of agriculture from universities all over Japan. The event setting involved stadium style seating, multiple *Partners in Agriculture* banners and simultaneous Japanese – English interpretation from the auditorium sound booth.



Minister Counselor Geoffrey Wiggin introduces Secretary Vilsack to students in four locations around Japan.

The event was moderated by US ATO Marketing Specialist Thomas Sumio Aoki, who chatted with the students prior to the Secretary's entrance. Students were greeted by the Minister Counselor for Agricultural Affairs Geoffrey Wiggin. Mr. Wiggin noted how the event was not only a special opportunity for the students, but also a special opportunity for FAS JAPAN to introduce the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to those in attendance.



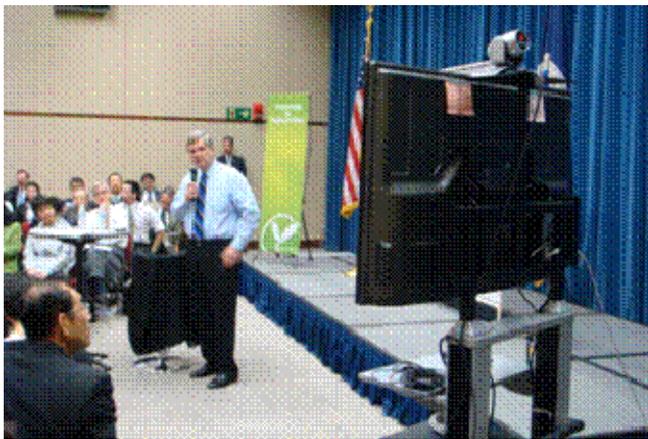
Secretary Vilsack listens to a question as students in four locations Around Japan tune in

Secretary Vilsack spoke for about 15 minutes on some key themes surrounding the Japanese – American relationship in agriculture. Topics included biotechnology, international trade policy, organic agriculture, domestic subsidies, and multi-lateral trading agreements.

The floor was then opened for questions from the students. To the surprise of many, more than half of the questions were asked by the Japanese students in English, showing a dedication to engage

with the Secretary. Questions focused on historical and current agricultural policy, GMO and organic food production and food security. Secretary Vilsack expressed the key ideas of using food as a relationship builder in preventing conflict, the necessity for both GMO and organic foods, and the need for Japan and the United States to cooperate to facilitate worldwide food security.

In cooperation with American consulates and centers around Japan, students from three remote locations had the opportunity participate in the town hall event. A monitor showing students in Sapporo, Fukuoka and Naha was set up such that the Secretary could engage with those in the respective locations, and those attending in each location could view the event live in Tokyo.



Secretary Vilsack takes a question from a student at the U.S. Consulate in Sapporo through teleconference



A participating student is interviewed by Reuters following the event

Media Coverage

The town hall event attracted major media outlets and journalists to the venue to cover the dialogue between Japan's students of agriculture and Secretary Vilsack. Among those attending were local NHK affiliates and Reuters and the story was also featured on the main news page of the U.S. Embassy Japan website and multiple blogs within Japan's academic community. Following the event, working press remained to speak with students to get their insights on participating in the event.

U.S. Embassy News Page: <http://tokyo.usembassy.gov/t-main.html>

Gift Bags

FAS Japan prepared gift bags for attendees of the event. The package included information on Secretary Vilsack's visit, Partners in Agriculture gift pens and a PIA themed stuffed animal.



Students leave the auditorium with souvenirs from the town hall event