

Meat and Livestock Australia hosts Tohoku high school students for Australia study visit

"Together With Japan" initiative furthers knowledge sharing between the next generation of cattle farmers in Tohoku and Australia

Tokyo (4 October, 2011) – Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) from 23 to 26 September hosted five students from agricultural high schools in the Tohoku region to visit Australia, as part of its ongoing "Together With Japan" program. The five are students of livestock production, animal husbandry and dairy farming from among the areas worst hit by Japan's March earthquake and its aftermath.

The visit was the latest in MLA's "Together With Japan" effort, which aims to provide practical ongoing support towards the restoration of the disaster impacted cattle industry in Japan's Tohoku region. During their time in Australia, the students toured the award-winning High Spa Angus Stud farm in Victoria and leading Australian Wagyu producer Blackmore's farm outside Melbourne. At the farms, the students learned about approaches to livestock management in Australia, and exchanged views with their Australian counterparts. They also learned about the challenges that Australian agriculture faces due to the country's harsh weather conditions, and the approaches developed regarding risk management.

In addition, the group inspected the diverse selection of fresh agricultural produce at Queen Victoria Market and visited local agriculture exhibition the Royal Melbourne Show, where they met their Australian counterparts at the School Steers & Heifers judging competition and presented sashes to the winning cattle. In addition, the group met with the Chair of the MLA Japan Taskforce, Mr Lachie Hart, who conveyed the support of the Australian beef industry to Tohoku farmers.

Building on the visit, MLA is exploring reunions and extended farmstay and scholarship opportunities, as well as visits to the earthquake impacted region in Japan by Australian producers, to further expand knowledge sharing between the two countries' cattle industries.

MLA Japan Regional Manager Melanie Brock commented, "From start to finish, the students felt a special bond with Australia. We hope the trip has provided Japan's next generation of cattle producers with a chance to create ties with their counterparts in Australia and learn about Australia's innovative beef industry, to advance rebuilding in their disaster hit communities."

The five students are Mr. Tatsuya Oosato (17 years old, Tono Ryokuho High School, Iwate Prefecture), Ms. Yuko Furuki (18 years old, Miyagi Agricultural High School, Miyagi Prefecture), Ms. Mao Kudo (18 years old, Miyagi Agricultural High School, Miyagi Prefecture), Ms. Aki Kobayashi (17 years old, and Soma Agricultural High School, Fukushima Prefecture) and Ms. Nao Watanabe (16 years old, Kawamata High School, Fukushima Prefecture). Miyagi Agricultural High School was wiped out by the tsunami, while the students from Fukushima have had to evacuate due to radiation fears. They were accompanied during their visit by Mr. Choetsu Kikuchi - an experienced Wagyu breeder whose own business has been affected by the March disaster.



Tohoku students at the Royal Melbourne Show

Student profiles

Mr. Tatsuya Oosato (Tono Ryokuho High School, Iwate Prefecture)

Tatsuya is 17 years old, and studies livestock production at Tono Ryokuho High School, which was used as a search and rescue operation centre after the earthquake. He is Chairman of the Agriculture Club at the school, and is keen to study Australian cattle management and how this compares with Japanese methods. He likes to play soccer, and study history.

Ms. Yuko Furuki (Miyagi Agricultural High School, Miyagi Prefecture)

Yuko is 18 years old, and is enrolled in the Animal Husbandry course at Miyagi Agricultural High School. The school was wiped out by the earthquake and tsunami, and its students have been temporarily housed within the nearby National Agriculture Research Institute. Yuko enjoys listening to music and likes Japanese food.

Ms. Mao Kudo (Miyagi Agricultural High School, Miyagi Prefecture)

Mao is 18 years old, and is studying dairy farming at Miyagi Agricultural High School. Despite the destruction the school and the community underwent, both she and Yuko continue to study hard. Mao loves trying new food, including different cheeses and yoghurts.

Ms. Aki Kobayashi (Soma Agricultural High School, Fukushima Prefecture)

Aki is 17 years old and is studying livestock production. The nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant forced the Soma Agricultural High school to close down and the school is yet to resume cattle farming classes. Aki is currently studying at a temporary facility nearby. She loves piano, tennis and sushi.

Ms. Nao Watanabe (Kawamata High School, Fukushima Prefecture)

Nao is a 16 year old student from Iitatemura, which has been entirely evacuated as a result of the Fukushima Daiichi plant accident. The village was famous for its highly praised Iitate Wagyu beef. However, cattle production has completely ceased due to nuclear contamination. Nao enjoys studying art and watching Japanese animated films.

Producer Profile

Mr. Choetsu Kikuchi (Wagyu farmer, Iwate Prefecture)

Kikuchi san is a 55 year old Wagyu breeder and has approximately 130 cattle in Iwate prefecture. His business has experienced enormous challenges since the March disaster, with radioactive contamination totally disrupting local agriculture. Concerned regarding Japan's food self sufficiency, he wishes to experience Australian cattle production first hand and explore mutually beneficial partnerships between Australia and Japan.

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About MLA's "Together with Japan":

The "Together with Japan" project is a **Meat & Livestock Australia** (MLA) initiative supported by the **Cattle Council of Australia**, **Australian Lot Feeders Association**, **Australian Meat Industry Council** and Australia's beef producers and processors.

It was launched on Saturday 14 May, on Sydney Harbour at a celebrity BBQ, in the presence of the Ambassador of Japan to Australia Shigekazu Sato, Australian Ambassador designate to Japan Bruce Miller, former Wallabies Captain John Eales, Meat & Livestock Australia Chairman Don Heatley, Meat & Livestock Australia Regional Manager Japan Melanie Brock and members of various peak councils such as the Cattle Council of Australia and the Australian Meat Industry Council), together with celebrity chefs from the Sydney area.

Three farmers from Tohoku, Ms. Mutsuko Ozawa, Mr. Shin Yamada and Mr. Hiroshi Sano, travelled to Australia for the launch of the program.

The launch raised more than AUD \$ 250,000 in financial support for the affected region, to go towards reconstruction projects focused on the Japanese beef industry, including scholarship support.

To date, MLA has also provided relief meals to various evacuation centres, and delivered containers of hay feed to the Tohoku cattle producers under the "Together With Japan" initiative.