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ODA Director negotiates trade opportunities with Korea

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Talks pave the way for Oregon blueberries, potatoes, & Christmas trees

ODA Director negotiates trade opportunities with Korea

October 5, 2000...Oregon Department of Agriculture Director Phil Ward met today with government officials in Seoul, Korea, urging them to allow greater access for Oregon agricultural products. The discussion has led to an official announcement by the U.S. Embassy in Korea that the United States will make a formal request of Korea to open its market to blueberries-- a development that could lead to Oregon being the first state to export fresh blueberries to Korea. Talks have also centered on increased opportunities for Oregon potatoes and Christmas trees.

The visit to Korea is part of an Asian tour that has included stops in China and Japan, where Ward is meeting with high level government officials and industry leaders.

In a meeting with a top official of Korea's National Plant Quarantine Service, Ward asked Korea to end its ban on fresh blueberries, expedite entry of Oregon Christmas trees and wreaths, and reclassify the custom codes at which dehydrated potatoes are assessed tariffs.

Ward estimates the potential for fresh blueberries in Korea to be very large, with Japan as a model. In 1997, Japan lifted its ban on fresh blueberries. One year later, the volume exported from the U.S. was 1.8 million pounds and is now at 3 million pounds. With a population of 47 million, compared to Japan's 125 million, Korea represents potential sales of about 680,000 pounds, with Oregon standing to take the lion's share of the business due to its proximity and reputation for quality. Blueberries are enjoying a wave of popularity in Asia, largely due to their health benefits.

The market for Oregon Christmas trees is equally impressive. About half the Korean population is Christian. Many Koreans celebrate Christmas with plastic trees, as the country does not have the volume or species of trees to develop a domestic market. Although not banned outright, imported Christmas trees are subject to stringent phytosanitary examination for pests and diseases by Korea, which presents a non-tariff barrier to trade, according to Ward. During his talks with the Korean government, Ward stressed the need for a transparent system with objective protocols that could be met through a program initiated by ODA's Plant Division.

Dehydrated potato flakes are subject to a prohibitively high tariff that discourages their purchase by Korean customers. Ward asked Korean

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Information Office

Oregon Department of Agriculture
635 Capitol St. NE
Salem, OR
97301-2532, USA

503-986-4550
Fax: 503-986-4747
TTY: 503-986-4762

Director of Communications

[Bruce Pokarney](#)
503-986-4559

agriculture officials to reassess the tariff.

The Asia mission is an example of ODA's role, through its Agricultural Development and Marketing Division, to negotiate access to international markets on behalf of Oregon companies.

For more information, contact Bruce Pokarney at (503) 986-4559.



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