

## Sec. Vilsack and Ag Minister Akamatsu agree to hold beef trade talks

**By Stewart Doan**

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Tokyo, Japan, April 8. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack met with Japanese Ag minister Hirotaka Akamatsu on Thursday and came away with an agreement to begin discussions on opening more beef sales to Japan, while recognizing that “this is a difficult and sensitive issue for the Japanese people and the Japanese government.”

“We had a frank and candid conversation about the differences that have separated us on beef for a considerable period of time,” explained Vilsack in an exclusive interview with *Agri-Pulse* after his meeting with Akamatsu. “At this point the two countries are sort of on parallel tracks: the Japanese concerned about safety and the United States trying to make the case that we’ve improved our protocols, that we’ve not had an incident in the last three years and just a small number within the last twenty years, and that it’s time for us to reopen the trade in a meaningful way.”

Japan resumed American beef imports in 2006, but restricted trade to meat from cattle 20 months old or younger — a limit that U.S. officials say has no scientific basis.

Vilsack said he needed, in a sense, to “reset the table.”

“By expressing some degree of flexibility.... there’s now a commitment on the part of the United States and Japan..... On our part, to send a team of people to Japan to have continued dialogue about the issues and on the part of the Japanese government, to receive those individuals and to engage in dialogue. We’re still on parallel tracks. We’re trying to figure out through this increased dialogue how we get on the same track.”

Vilsack said the next steps include talking with USTR Ambassador Kirk, to begin identifying the people that we would send over to Japan and then make arrangements for them to travel back here to begin discussions.

For more on Vilsack’s trip to Japan, listen to the daily audio updates on [www.Agri-Pulse.com](http://www.Agri-Pulse.com)