

Beef still in demand in earthquake-ravaged Japan

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Exports to Asian country have doubled since 2010.

Despite the March earthquake that spurred tsunamis and damaged power plants, beef is still in demand in Japan.

Big demand.

According to Jeff Stolle, vice president of marketing for the Nebraska Cattlemen organization, U.S. shipments of fresh, chilled and frozen muscle cuts have doubled since 2010.

Bloomberg.com reports that cattle futures in Chicago surged to a record high in April as demand for U.S. beef rose in Japan amid concerns that radiation from a stricken nuclear plant, damaged during the disaster, would contaminate food supplies.

From what Stolle and others in the Nebraska beef industry can tell, the disaster and its fallout in Japan have had no appreciable effect on beef exports.

“There have been no marked reductions in shipments to Japan,” he said.

From data Stolle shared, shipments of beef to Japan during the week ending April 25 more than doubled over the same time last year.

During the same time period, 2,700 metric tons of beef were shipped compared to 1,300 metric

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tons a year ago.

Whether or not that trend will continue, Stolle said it was difficult to tell but he noted that the market has been strong since the first of the year.

Stolle said the vitality of the U.S. export market has increased considerably in the past few years since 2003 when bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) issues dropped demand for beef dramatically.

BSE, also known as mad cow disease, affects the central nervous system of adult cattle and can spread to humans.

When the disease was first detected in an animal in Canada in 2003, followed by the discovery of an infected cow in Washington State, the export market for beef plummeted.

Regaining nation and worldwide confidence in the consumption of U.S. beef has taken time, Stolle said, noting that the relative weakness of the U.S. dollar compared to foreign currencies is also a factor in an improved export market.

“That’s why we’re seeing such an aggressive demand for our product,” he said. “Whether it’s a peso or yen, other countries are getting more bang for their buck.”

Stolle pointed out that within the last year, exports have increased in excess of what the United States was sending beyond its borders before the discovery of BSE.

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