

Supervisors travel to Japan to promote agriculture and industry

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Exporting local agriculture and importing new industry were the two main topics for George County Supervisors during a recent whirlwind trip to Japan.

“This is the most aggressive economic development trip our County has organized since I’ve been on the Board,” Supervisor Henry Cochran explained. “We are trying to strike while the iron is red hot on Enviva and our Industrial Park.”

The County’s delegation met with five Japanese organizations/businesses in just two days in three different cities (Osaka, Himeji, and Kobe.)

One of the trip’s highlights was a port tour of large storage silos that will hold Enviva Lucedale wood pellets after coming across the Pacific Ocean. The port is also planning major upgrades to the off-loading ship facilities.

Supervisor Larry McDonald says it’s clear; these industries are excited about receiving this new source of biomass fuel.

“The investments being made in Mississippi are also being made in Japan right now. They all know Enviva’s name. They all know the wood pellets are coming from Mississippi. The pellets made in George County are truly going to be an international export,” McDonald said.



George County made local and regional business headlines less than a month ago when Enviva Lucedale broke ground on a new \$140 million biomass facility in the George County Industrial Park.

Wood pellets and local timber were not the only exports discussed during the development trip. County officials also met with Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) representatives to discuss the potential for local produce being exported to Japan.

“This was just the introduction, the start of new conversations but there is some agricultural potential here. Wood pellets opened this international door to the County and we are starting to push it open a little bit wider,” Supervisor Kelly Wright added.

Supervisors also took the opportunity to promote the advantages of the George County Industrial Park with several Japanese representatives. They described improved railroad access, close connection to the Port of Pascagoula, two Project Ready sites within the park, and major capacity improvements related to water volumes, electric power, and natural gas.

“This was also a great opportunity to listen to their feedback and thoughts. Their representatives know the market. We also asked, ‘what do we need to do next?’ Their answers were very insightful for the whole Board,” Cochran said.

Staying with long standing Japanese tradition, the County presented each host business with gifts including pottery made from Red Creek clay by MGCCC instructors and local pecans from the Lucedale Farmers Market.

Supervisor Fred Croom says in many ways, this was a reciprocal invitation for supervisors to visit Japanese businesses. The County had hosted several delegations from Japan in March 2018 and November 2018 with Industrial Park site tours, utility updates, and a formal sit down presentation that included hot green and black tea for guests.

“It was really something to see familiar faces as we walked into meetings in Himeji and near Kobe. We were on the outside of the world reconnecting with businesses associates. They remembered all sorts of details and shared stories about their visits to Lucedale, George County, and the South,” Croom said.

Another Japanese delegation is tentatively expected to visit George County in Spring 2020.

The County delegation included Supervisors Larry McDonald, Henry Cochran, Kelly Wright, Fred Croom, along with Clerk of the Board Cammie Byrd and Community Developer Ken Flanagan.

“We made real business contacts during the trip and I expect the County will benefit from these connections in the future. Our entire delegation was so warmly received. By all accounts, we represented George County, the State, and the South very well. In fact, there were several emails and pictures from our Japanese contacts waiting on us when we returned,” Flanagan said.

It took more than six weeks to organize meeting schedules after being invited for site tours by Japanese representatives. According to MDA research, Japan is the State of Mississippi’s top international trading partner.