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Ag secretary visits Weld to hear farmers' concerns

By The Associated Press

GREELEY — Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said he expects Japan to open its markets to U.S. beef and agreed with speakers at a hearing Monday that the estate tax should be repealed so farmers can pass their land onto their family.

Johanns appeared with Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., in a session on the 2007 Farm Bill. About 400 people turned out for the meeting in Greeley, one of 37 sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 37 states.

Bob Sakata, president of Sakata Farms in Brighton,

said there is no way the third generation can take over the family's vegetable operation. He said land he bought for \$500 an acre is now worth \$1 a square foot if subdivided, so estate taxes are making it impossible to pass the operation along.

"If you can't repeal estate taxes, then put in an

exemption of at least \$50 million per farm family," Sakata said.

Bob Winter, who farms 700 acres between Windsor and Severance, said low prices for the commodities he and his wife produce prevented his son from staying in the business. He said a strong farm

bill may be the only way many in agriculture can survive.

Other speakers contended that farm subsidies go to large farms while smaller ones suffer. They said the high price of diesel fuel is driving up costs and that a strong renewable energy policy is needed.