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(AP) GREELEY, Colo. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said he expects Japan to open its markets to U.S. beef and agreed with speakers at a hearing on the new federal farm bill that the estate tax should be repealed so farmers can pass their land onto their family.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 Monday 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.

Johanns, the former governor of Nebraska, said that only one-third of the nation's farmers receive subsidies of some kind. He also said that the re-opening of the Japanese market to U.S. beef is coming.

Japan banned this country's beef after a Canadian-born cow in Washington state was diagnosed with mad cow disease in 2003. That year, Japan bought about \$1.5 billion worth of U.S. beef, making it the most lucrative overseas market for American beef products.

"We should see the Japanese border open to U.S. beef by the first of the year and if that doesn't happen, I would expect Congress to take some sort of retaliatory action," Johanns said.

He added that while governor of Nebraska, he supported development of renewable energy and that the Bush administration does, too.

"I really believe strongly that renewable energy is our future. I would much rather get our energy from the plains of Colorado, the Midwest or other parts of this country than from the plains of the Middle East," he said.

Musgrave, whose district includes the eastern plains, said it's important that federal officials listen to farmers as they shape policy.

"If the federal government is going to get it right, the advice shared today must be conceded," she said.