**Show-Me Missouri Agriculture**

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**Country Spotlight**

*A guide to trade with Missouri’s 4th top export market.*

**Japan**

**Thinking Long-Term:**

As part of a spring evaluation, companies should consider how their efforts are matching up to their ultimate goals outlined in their business plan and marketing strategy. Understand it’s okay for goals to change but it’s important to be aware of those changes and work towards those achievements.

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**Marketing Tips**

*Spring Cleaning for Your Marketing Strategy*

1. **CUSTOMER APPRECIATION**
2. **BUSINESS PRODUCTIVITY**
3. **CYBER SECURITY**
4. **MEETING ANALYSIS**

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**MENFRO IS THE OFFICIAL MISSOURI STATE SOIL.**

It is found in more than 780,000 acres of Missouri soil, including underneath the Governor’s mansion.
Manager’s Message

Ancient Greek Philosopher Heraclitus famously said that change is the only constant in life. Applicable in so many of life’s circumstances, this particularly rings true when considering international trade. With the state of agricultural markets on the mind of every agribusiness and producer, we look forward to finalized and fairer trade agreements with some of our largest trade partners.

While global business leaders work toward an answer, business must continue and it becomes even more important that our industry leverages a global network in secondary markets. The Department has made it a priority to work to build those relationships and facilitate opportunities for our businesses so that you can continue to do what you do best—produce high quality products. Last year, companies reported $7,134,150 in actual sales as a direct result of Department-led trade activities, with more than $47 million in anticipated sales over the next year. The activities we facilitate are a direct result of the feedback we receive from the industry, so please reach out to our team to learn more about the events scheduled for 2019 and share your suggestions for markets you would like to see us work with.

On the topic of change, you will also notice that our website has a few new updates, and more on the horizon. We now have a page that houses our “Show Me Missouri Agriculture” stories, which highlight the producers and businesses that make agriculture so valuable to the state. We have also added a page that provides a summary of each of our trade activities with accompanying photos to show you the variety of work we do under “Our Past Events.”

While the future of trade relations remains uncertain, we encourage you to reach out and familiarize yourself with the many tools, resources and partners that can help provide new opportunities. When negotiations conclude and these relations and patterns normalize, Missouri agriculture will be ready and better diversified than ever before.

Brenda Verslues

Upcoming Events

**APRIL**
- 8-12: Asia Buyers’ Mission for Value-Added Food Ingredients & Service Products (Missouri)

**MAY**
- 18-21: American Food Fair (Chicago, IL)

**JUNE**
- 2-3: Food Export Food Ingredients Buyers’ Mission at IFT (New Orleans, LA)
- 3-6: USDA Trade Mission to Colombia (Bogota, Colombia)
- 19-22: Taipei International Food Show (Taipei, Taiwan)
TRADE STRENGTHS
In 2018, the United States and Japan announced they would begin negotiations for a U.S.-Japan Trade Agreement.

TRADE WEAKNESSES
Japanese consumers demonstrate increasing safety concerns for food products and frequent distrust of imports.

TRADE OPPORTUNITIES
Japan’s life expectancy is the highest in the world. Coupled with the fact that by 2020 nearly 30% of Japan’s population will be 65 or older, the country has a strong demand for “healthy foods”.

TRADE BARRIERS
U.S. exporters doing business with Japan for the first time may find Japanese food standards and regulations difficult to deal with.

International Business Relationships
The Japanese business culture attributes a high degree of importance to personal relationships and these take time to establish. A strong network of personal contacts is vital in the Japanese market. Be prepared for negotiations, which can move slowly and require a number of meetings to reach an agreement.

Country Spotlight: JAPAN
Official Language: Japanese
Population: 126 million (11th largest country in world)
Capital: Tokyo

GDP: $4.872 trillion

Top 5 Missouri Exports in 2017
In Thousands
SOURCE: USDA GATS 2017
1. Corn: $2,145,309
2. Beef: $1,889,152
3. Pork: $1,625,907
4. Soybeans: $973,570
5. Fish: $846,950
Steve McKaskle is a man of stories.

Stories with intrigue, characters and drama. Stories that are wrapped in a drawl that is distinctly southern and carried on a cadence that is distinctly gentile. The kind of stories that pull you in, take you on a ride, and drop you off at a life lesson that sticks with you long after the book has been closed.

These stories are not bound by exact dates marked in history, but rather remembered moments—moments that catalyze change, differentiating one segment of life from those that are meant to follow. Moments that climax in drama, only to settle in memory. Moments that are endured, pass and serve as foundation for the next. Moments that, when taken in aggregate, culminate to comprise the story of a life. These are a few of the stories of Steve McKaskle’s life. He’s got a story about adventure, unknown lands and incredible risk.

This is a story about a young Steve whose course of direction changed, as so many often do, upon meeting a woman who would later become his wife. Professional aspirations of a legal career set aside, he joined his father-in-law’s family farming operation. At 19 years old he found himself taking a seat he’d never considered before—a seat atop a tractor, amidst a field of cotton.

“Farming was terrible back then,” he attests.

Working conventional cotton and beans without irrigation was nothing short of a constant struggle. Searching for alternative avenues for success, Steve was intrigued by a flier he saw advertising a meeting for opportunities in organic cotton farming, held at the local Delta Research Center. Hosted by a female clothing company with a French title, he had no idea its brand would soon be a household name. He did know, however, that this company calling themselves “Esprit” had sparked his innovative spirit, and he was going to give organic cotton farming a try. Quite literally pioneering unknown fields (as the U.S. Department of Agriculture had yet to develop an official organic certification), Steve started adapting his acreage to a new method of farming. Receiving a dollar per pound for organic lint, premiums were sufficient to handle the challenges of weeds, and he slowly started converting his land. Finding success, it wasn’t long before he caught the curious eye of the press, and began receiving notoriety as one of the first farmers of his kind.

Gaining momentum in the field, Steve attended a vitamin health food show, and met the largest buyer of organic products at the time. He agreed to produce organic soybeans for the buyer, which he would later rotate with organic cotton and eventually popcorn.

Farming was by no means easy, but he had found a niche that worked for him. And although he didn’t know it at the time, he was laying the foundation for the next notable moment to come. A moment which would in turn, produce another story to be told.

A story about a monster. A monster so big, so voracious, it would go on to devour his farm, his home, and his town in seconds.

This monster was as dark and as ominous as any villain written into a children’s book, and it was staring him in the face less than a half mile away. Later to be classified as an F-4 tornado, Steve didn’t need a meteorologist to tell him he was in trouble. He grabbed his wife, sprinted to his truck, and flew across 20 acres of field desperately seeking refuge in his cousin’s basement, the closest semblance of shelter he could find. Barely making it in time, the pair joined his extended family underground and held their breath, just thankful to have it. In the frightening moments that followed, down beneath the very earth he made a living caring for, they listened to its utter destruction, grateful for their protection from the same. It’s hard to say how long they were down there as moments like that skew time and rationality, but like all moments, even the most frightening pass. Shaken as they were, they emerged from the basement to face their new reality on that April day.
A reality that included a pile of rubble where his cousin’s home once stood. A reality that included a crumpled piece of metal in place of the truck they had been in minutes before. A reality that included walking across the same 20 acres to find just half of his own house and his beloved pecan tree in the kitchen. A reality that included a macerated cotton gin—the broken remnants of his life’s work. A reality that, because of this monster and its path of destruction, included a realization that he would never farm cotton again.

And in that moment, when reality became a bit too much to bear, Steve turned to the only thing he had left—faith. Faith that, despite all evidence otherwise, life would go on. And go on it did, full of new realities. A new reality that took its shape in the form of cost effective rice farming. Unable to afford a new gin, rice would help him survive.

Having developed a passion for organics, Steve farmed the rice in the same fashion he’d come accustomed to, and adapted to the new crop accordingly. True to form, this moment, humble as it seemed, would serve as foundation for the next.

The next moment manifested itself in a story of love at first sight and the multi-year long courtship that followed. As with any occasion of such proverbial grandeur, he remembers being struck with it immediately.

“I was in Memphis, and I wandered into a new fast food chain restaurant I had never heard of before, and there it was, two huge bowls of organic rice.”

The restaurant was Chipotle, and while standing in the line of people clamoring for its rice-filled dishes, he was served a moment of pure unbridled motivation. On fire with excitement, Steve took a business card near the cashier, and began his pursuit to become one of the restaurant’s rice suppliers. Multiple phone calls, samples, flights to corporate headquarters, product tests, and an abundance of anticipation later, Steve got the call.

“We want you to start supplying rice for local Chipotle restaurants.”

Overjoyed that years of hard work and turmoil were paying off, he told Chipotle of his soon-to-be increased capacity to supply, and just like that, another moment bore way for another story.

This story is one of angels. Angels descending from the Heavens with further gifts of grace and good fortune. These angels were filmmakers from New York City, sent by Chipotle to tell the story of McKaskle Family Farms. They trudged through the fields, they took pictures of the land, they recorded Steve’s story. As a result of the crew and the film they produced, Steve’s rice is in every single Chipotle in Missouri; not to mention 60 Chipotle restaurants spanning Iowa, Kansas, Arkansas and Tennessee. Steve’s rice is even carried in Blue Apron food preparation delivery boxes landing on doorsteps across the country.

“It’s not every day planes from New York with gifts like that land on a farm in the Bootheel of Missouri” he said. “Now that’s a moment I’ll never forget.”

Success found and manifested in a myriad of monumental moments to his name, this man of stories, is as down-to-earth as the seeds he planted after that devastating day in April so many years ago. Asking nothing more of his provider than an opportunity to do it all again, he says his greatest vision—his most perfect reward for a lifetime of work, is to “Wake up early, have a great cup of coffee, go to work, come back to my house and wife, and see my grandsons one more time.”

Fiction has no place in a story like that.
MARKETING TIPS

Spring Cleaning for Your Marketing Strategy

1. GET TO KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS DAY
   Grow your business by taking the time to get to know your customers. You’ll be planting a seed that will flourish! This is observed annually on the third Thursday of each quarter.

2. CONSIDER PRODUCTIVITY
   Assess the technology your company is using and determine if it is still a good fit for your company. Use tools to assist with managing contacts, accounting, expense tracking, social media and project management.

3. CYBER SECURITY
   Ensure cybersecurity software is on all computers and mobile devices, and have backup systems in place.

4. MEETING ANALYSIS
   Determine how efficient your meetings are – consider the time and effort meetings require by the owner, managers and staff. Make sure the meeting has a specific and defined purpose.

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