

LINCOLN(AP)—Gov. Dave Heineman announced plans Aug. 14 to send a Nebraska delegation on a trade mission to Taiwan and Japan, markets he described as critical to expand the state economy.

Lt. Gov. Lavon Heidemann will lead the two-week trip in September, along with state officials from the departments of Agriculture and Economic Development. Heineman said officials in Taiwan have shown strong interest in Nebraska's agricultural products.

"These relationships with a wide variety of countries are important to Nebraska, because we export a lot of products—especially ag products," Heineman said.

Nebraska officials are traveling to Japan for the annual Midwest U.S.-Japan Association Conference in Tokyo. The delegation will also visit the Nebraska Center in Japan, which opened in 2006 as the state's first foreign trade office.

The delegation will receive an update on a 2010 trade agreement signed with Taiwanese officials, said Nebraska Department of Agriculture Director Greg Ibach. The agreement was worth an estimated \$450 million in future sales of corn, soybeans and wheat.

Ibach said state officials will also push to expand Nebraska's farm-and-ranch exports to Taiwan, a nation with more than 23 million people.

"It's just like any other business venture: If you don't show up, if you don't ask for the business, they'll find somebody who will ask for the business," Ibach said.

Japan remains Nebraska's largest direct, foreign investor. Nine Japanese companies have invested about \$3.7 billion in Nebraska in the last five years, said Catherine Lang, director of the state Department of Economic Development.

Lang pointed to the Marubeni Corporation, which has almost completed a six-story grain-trading building in downtown Omaha.

Lang said Japan also is Nebraska's largest export market, having generated \$468 million in exports last year.

The trip to both countries will cost the state about \$14,700, according to the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.