

# Gov. Evers: Attends Midwest U.S.—Japan Association conference, meets with corporate leaders

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TOKYO — Gov. Tony Evers participated in the first full day of the Midwest U.S.-Japan Association (MWJA) Conference in Tokyo on Monday and met with corporate leaders from Kikkoman, Komatsu, and Toyota to discuss their companies' investments in Wisconsin.

The governor is in Japan on his first international trade mission to meet with corporate and government leaders, highlight Japanese investments in Wisconsin businesses and promote the state's exports. He is leading a 28-member delegation that includes 12 officials from nine Wisconsin businesses.

In his first address to the MWJA, Gov. Evers emphasized the longstanding ties and deep relationships between Japan and Wisconsin.

"Although we are separated by considerable geographic distance, Wisconsin and Japan are close in our business, academic and cultural relations," he said. "As Wisconsin's governor, I appreciate this opportunity to build on those relationships."

The governor noted that in 2018, Wisconsin exported more than \$734 million in goods to Japan, including scientific and medical equipment, industrial machinery, and prepared foods and dairy products.

"We are a state of makers and growers, and we consider it a compliment to the quality of our state's products that we are able to access the Japanese market to this degree," he said, adding that agricultural exports to Japan alone grew 21% in 2018.

The governor highlighted the growth of organic agriculture in Wisconsin. The number of organic farms in the state has doubled in the past decade, and Wisconsin ranks first

nationally in the number of organic farms growing field crops and second in the total number of organic farms.

“As concerns about the environment continue to grow, Wisconsin is leading the way to make agriculture both more sustainable and more responsible,” he said.

The state is also a global leader in developing water technology. With more than 200 businesses in the state involved in water technology, Wisconsin is recognized as “the Silicon Valley of water,” Gov. Evers said.

Wisconsin is the only state to have established a private organization, The Water Council, to support innovations in freshwater technology, he noted. The University of Wisconsin System, with support from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), has also launched the Freshwater Collaborative, which will enable students to specialize in freshwater-related studies across all 13 campuses and promote cross-disciplinary research in the field.

In introducing himself to association members, the governor discussed his own background in education – as a teacher, school administrator, and state superintendent of education. Wisconsin’s economic growth depends on a highly educated workforce, he said.

“Last year, Wisconsin colleges and universities awarded more than 4,500 degrees in engineering and engineering technology fields, including certificates as well as associate, bachelor’s and advanced degrees. These graduates become the high-knowledge workers that are so prized by employers,” he said.

Gov. Evers added that “to meet the demands of the global economy, Wisconsin’s next generation must be able to engage across linguistic, cultural and national boundaries” and said he is establishing the Wisconsin Language Roadmap Initiative, which aims to ensure that all students become proficient in at least one language other than English.

The governor acknowledged the contributions of the nearly 30 Japanese-owned businesses—including Kikkoman and Komatsu—that employ more than 8,000 Wisconsin residents.

Kikkoman established the first Japanese-owned production facility in the U.S. in Walworth in 1972; it now employs more than 200 workers and produces more brewed soy sauce than any other facility in the world—including at the company’s home plant in Chiba City.

Komatsu, which manufactures heavy construction equipment, is investing more than \$285

million in Milwaukee to relocate and expand its headquarters. The project is considered a major driver of development in the city's Harbor District.

Also on Monday, Gov. Evers met privately with Yuzaburo Mogi, the honorary chairman and CEO of Kikkoman; Hiroyuki Ogawa, the president and CEO of Komatsu; and Shinichi Yasui, the executive vice president of Toyota North America.

The MWJA is comprised of 10 Midwest states—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin—and includes business and government leaders. Governors from five states, including Wisconsin, are attending this year's annual conference. Former Governor Tommy Thompson is serving as the association's chair this year.

WEDC is coordinating the trade mission for the governor and Wisconsin business leaders. The mission continues through Sept. 14.