

Excitement builds for Japan's Wagyu Olympics

By Kathryn Wortley

25-Jul-2017 Last updated on 30-Jul-2017 at 05:06 GMT

Japan's top cattle and meat producers are gearing up to compete in the country's next 'Wagyu Olympics', the country's premier beef cattle show, to be held in Sendai, Miyagi prefecture, on 7–11 September.

Delegations of wagyu experts, industry insiders and farmers from each prefecture, as well as overseas groups, are expected to attend for competitions as well as wagyu taste challenges and opportunities to exchange information and best practice.

The contest is held every five years.

After opening applications to compete in January (2017), the Olympics' organiser – the National Wagyu Ability Prize Show Promotion Office – was flooded with entries from 39 of the country's 47 prefectures. The coveted goal is the rank of Japan's best wagyu livestock.

In the animal quality category, 334 head of male and female cattle will be judged on their body shape according to their age in months, while tasters in the meat quality competition will determine a winner based on the condition of fat in carcasses.

Promoting the nature, history and culture of Japan

For the purpose of the Wagyu Olympics, Japan is divided into nine regional blocks, with each rotating to be the host of the contest and each sending one or a number of cattle to compete.

The event returns to Tohoku, northern Honshu island, this year for the first time since much of its eastern area was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami of 2011. This year, Miyagi was chosen from among Tohoku's six prefectures because of the potential of the event to bring much-needed incoming revenue to the region.

"The Wagyu Olympics helps promote the nature, history and culture of Miyagi," Eiji Kashiba, a representative of the National Wagyu Ability Prize Show Promotion Office, told GlobalMeatNews.

While Kashiba was unable to disclose the cost of holding the event, he said the anticipated value of its receipts would be immense for the local area, which has been extensively redeveloped following the disaster.

"Those coming from inside the prefecture will probably visit for the day, but others from elsewhere in Japan will spend the night, and we have also received enquiries from China and South Korea."

Locals are hoping the event is an opportunity for visitors to extend their stay or explore nearby tourist attractions.

This year's Olympics is based on four concepts: eating local [wagyu](#) brands; connecting wagyu producers nationwide for networking to develop wagyu; showing what the local area has to offer; and expressing gratitude to those who supported the recovery of Tohoku.

According to the organisers, highlights include an opportunity to taste and compare each of Japan's [wagyu](#) brands as well as a new dish made with local Sendai wagyu from the capital of Miyagi prefecture. Approximately 390,000 visitors and participants are expected to attend over the five days.

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