



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 16, 2026

Contact: [Josie Harms](#)

## **Lt. Gov. Venhuizen Leads Trade Mission to Japan and South Korea**

*Mission to Advance Agricultural Exports and Economic Partnerships in East Asia*

**PIERRE, S.D.** – Lieutenant Governor Tony Venhuizen is leading a high-level South Dakota delegation to Japan and South Korea this week, joined by South Dakota Trade President & CEO Jesse L. S. Fonkert, Governor’s Office of Economic Development Commissioner Bill Even, Secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources Hunter Roberts, SD Soybean Research Council Executive Director Jerry Schmitz, and businesses connecting with foreign buyers.

“We’re bringing a strong delegation and a clear message: South Dakota is Open for Opportunity, and our producers and businesses are ready to compete on the world stage,” said **Lieutenant Governor Tony Venhuizen**. “South Dakota is a state that punches far above its weight in agricultural production, and missions like this ensure buyers across the globe know just how strong our economy is.”

The mission aims to strengthen South Dakota’s commercial relationships with two of the United States’ most strategically important allies in East Asia, both of which have recently reached framework trade agreements with the United States. The mission will also open new doors for South Dakota agricultural exporters and attract investments to the state.

“This is 100 percent a business-driven mission,” said **Jesse L. S. Fonkert, President & CEO of South Dakota Trade**. “Japan and South Korea are two of our most important partners in East Asia, and both countries are actively engaged in expanded trade frameworks with the United States. This is exactly the right moment to be in the room, building trust and connecting South Dakota’s world-class industry with willing buyers.”

Commissioner Even will lead efforts to promote South Dakota as a destination for foreign direct investment.

“This trade mission is an opportunity to promote South Dakota exports while strengthening relationships that support future investment in our state,” said **Commissioner Bill Even, Governor’s Office of Economic Development**. “We are proud to share South Dakota’s business advantages with partners in Japan and Korea and to open doors for continued economic growth.”

“American agricultural products are in demand, and South Dakota’s farmers are ready to deliver,” said **Secretary Hunter Roberts, South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources**. “This mission puts our producers in front of the right buyers at exactly the right time.”

“South Dakota soybean farmers depend on strong export markets, and Japan and South Korea are among the most important,” said **Jerry Schmitz, executive director of the South Dakota Soybean Research Council**. “Having our producers represented at the government level on a mission like this reinforces that South Dakota is a reliable, high-quality supplier, and that matters when buyers are making long-term sourcing decisions.”

South Dakota businesses interested in future trade missions or export assistance should contact South Dakota Trade at [info@southdakotatrade.com](mailto:info@southdakotatrade.com).

South Dakota Trade is a 501(c)(6) association that navigates international trade for South Dakota, with offices in Sioux Falls and Rapid City. For additional information, please visit [www.southdakotatrade.com](http://www.southdakotatrade.com).

This trade mission was made possible thanks to the STEP grant program administered by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

###