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**Letter, Secretary of Agriculture, John R. Block from David R.
Bowen, February 26, 1892**

The office of Congressman David R. Bowen

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February 26, 1982

The Honorable John R. Block
Secretary of Agriculture
14th Street and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D. C. 20250

Dear Secretary Block:

My purpose in writing is to ask for your help on a matter of great importance to the American rice industry concerning our trade with Japan.

On Tuesday, I sent the enclosed letter to Ambassador Okawara because of what I consider to be a very unfortunate situation: the Japanese Government, needing to import large quantities of a specialty rice known as "mochigome," which they have in the past purchased in part from the United States, has turned to China and Thailand rather than America for its imports, which are needed to supplement domestic production. If this is an example of how the Japanese plan to help narrow our expected \$18 to \$20 billion trade deficit with them, then we may face grim prospects for improving that situation.

Japan's explanation for not buying American mochigome is that our farmers in California, where such rice is grown, cannot promise delivery until October 1982. That fact alone is true, but it is not the whole story. Not knowing Japan would need to import mochigome, only small quantities of the rice were planted during the last crop year, and so none is available now for shipment. Another fact, however, is that the Japanese Food Agency traditionally maintains stockpiles of mochigome. I assume those supplies are being drawn on now, together with current imports to make up the Japanese shortfall that I gather is even greater than what the enclosed article reports. My feeling is that the Japanese, if they in fact possess the desire to ease trade tensions, would easily use American mochigome delivered this fall to replenish their Food Agency's low reserves. I understand that California could supply at least 15,000 metric tons of mochigome to Japan this fall, if that country committed itself now to buying it. Price, incidentally, is not the issue since California prices are very competitive with China and Thailand.

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One Japanese Government official has told me what such a plan is not possible because of the political sensitivity of all rice issues in Japan. He argued that importing mochigome on an emergency basis when it will be consumed is one thing, but that entering into a contract for delivery during the next crop year is quite another.

Unfortunately, the Japanese claim their entire political and economic system will tumble every time someone suggests that they change one of the agricultural rules by which they play. Their country cannot be that fragile. Fifteen thousand tons of mochigome is a small percentage of Japan's annual production. I think that they could and should accommodate us by buying that much from California farmers this year. Such purchases would be particularly appropriate given the disruption Japan has caused those growers in recent years by dumping its subsidized surplus rice in countries that would otherwise purchase their rice from America.

I would be most grateful for any help that you and your staff might provide in helping re-open this export door. Action, however, needs to be taken now. As I pointed out to Ambassador Okawara, orders must be placed by March 15 if American farmers are to plant mochigome for harvest next fall. This does not give us much time, but Japan turned down the U.S. offers for fall delivery only a few days ago. I would very much appreciate your having someone on your staff let me know by March 10 if you will be able to provide assistance in this matter.

I am writing a similar letter to Secretary Haig and Ambassador Brock.

Sincerely,

DAVID R. BOWEN
Chairman
Subcommittee on Cotton, Rice
and Sugar