



Bipartisan support for removing restrictions on ag exports to Cuba

By Stewart Doan

© Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc.

Washington, March 12 – The House Agriculture Committee held a hearing Thursday to review U.S. agricultural sales to Cuba.

Cuba relies on imports for most of its food needs, but current U.S. policies hinder American agricultural producers who want to sell their products in Cuba.

“The restrictions on agricultural trade with Cuba have failed to achieve their stated goal, and instead they have hand-delivered an export market in our own backyard to the Brazilians, the Europeans, and our other competitors around the world,” Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN) said. “It’s time we ask ourselves why we have in place policies that simply do not work and that only harm U.S. interests.”

In February, Peterson introduced the Travel Restriction Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TRREEA) to facilitate expanded U.S. agricultural trade with Cuba. This bipartisan bill is co-sponsored by more than 35 other members of Congress, including Reps. Jerry Moran (R-KS), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), and Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO).

The bill would reverse the restrictions on “payment of cash in advance,” eliminate the third country bank requirement and lift the ban on travel.

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), National Farmers Union (NFU) and groups representing corn, soybean, rice, wheat and dairy producers testified in support of the legislation, saying their ultimate goal is for U.S. farmers and ranchers to supply between 50 percent and two-thirds of Cuba’s imports of food, which have tripled during the past decade, according to the U.S. International Trade Commission.

U.S. agriculture has seen significant growth, but has also experienced significant setbacks, since being allowed to trade with Cuba in 2000. On average, the United States has exported roughly \$320 million in agricultural products per year since 2000, reaching a high of almost \$700 million in 2008. But, said AFBF President Bob Stallman, the United States is not viewed by Cuba as a reliable supplier due to our sales restrictions and the ability of the U.S. government to “alter those restrictions at a whim.”

“We deal with communist countries on an ongoing basis in a trading relationship in which we offer them credit,” Moran reminded, “and yet we are nervous about selling for cash upfront agricultural commodities, food and medicine to a country 90 miles off our shore. What a double standard!

“We would not object to selling Boeing aircraft to China, and yet we worry about selling wheat to Cuba?”

Rep. Leonard Boswell (D-IA) echoed Moran’s sentiments. “How many years do we have to wait to figure out [the embargo] is not working? Damn it, it’s time to do something!”

While supportive of loosening trading rules with Cuba, most Ag Panel Republicans objected to easing the travel ban,

NFU President Roger Johnson, who led eight trade-related missions to Cuba while serving as secretary of agriculture in North Dakota, countered that allowing Americans to visit Cuba whenever they want would be the best way to foster democratic change in the island nation.

“By allowing U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba, U.S. dollars will be put into the hands of Cuban citizens,” said Johnson. “This extra money will allow for the purchase of U.S. goods, improving the economy in both Cuba and the United States in the long term.”

For other *Agri-Pulse* news stories, go to: www.agri-pulse.com.

#30