



## **Lincoln, Chambliss give Kirk bipartisan kudos for his tough stance in Doha trade talks**

**By Agri-Pulse Staff**

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Washington, Jan. 14 – Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Ranking Member Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) praised U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Ron Kirk Thursday for strongly defending the U.S. position at the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial meeting last December in Geneva. In a letter to Kirk, the senators welcomed his call for an ambitious agricultural market access agreement within the Doha Development Round. They stated that they agree with Kirk that “no agreement is better than a bad agreement” and warned that “an agreement based on the current draft negotiating texts would qualify as a bad agreement.”

They also highlighted the importance of maintaining the “single undertaking” approach with respect to cotton, which ensures that no separate agreements affecting U.S. cotton programs would be signed outside of a comprehensive Doha Round agreement. They emphasized that such an insistence is specifically important to maintain the Senate’s support for and confidence in the multilateral negotiations.

“We greatly appreciate Representative Kirk’s strong defense on behalf of U.S. agriculture as we negotiate with our partners around the world,” the senators wrote. “With U.S. cotton production and exports down more than 40 percent in the past five years, it is time for critics to stop focusing on U.S. policies, and to start taking note of the market distortions caused by trade barriers imposed by major importing and other cotton exporting countries. Throughout the negotiations we clearly stated that our support for an agreement in the Doha Round is contingent on a market access agreement that lowers such trade barriers. We cannot support a one-sided agreement that exposes our farmers and ranchers to a greatly reduced farm safety net without corresponding improvements in market access.”

The complete text of the senators’ January 14 letter follows:

The Honorable Ron Kirk  
United States Trade Representative  
600 17th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

We would like to thank you for your recent comments at the World Trade Organization Ministerial calling for an ambitious agricultural market access agreement in the Doha Development Round and recognizing the importance of a single undertaking specifically regarding cotton. Agriculture remains a critical issue in the negotiations and your strong defense of the U.S. position is important in maintaining support and confidence in the Senate for the multilateral negotiations.

As you know, the United States is under significant pressure from our trading partners to conclude the Round based on the current, draft modalities texts. As you have stated on numerous occasions, no agreement is better than a bad agreement, and we believe that an agreement based on the current draft negotiating texts would qualify as a bad agreement. Derogatory comments about the negotiating objectives of the United States merely serve to erode good will in bilateral and multilateral talks. Throughout the negotiations we have been clear that our support is contingent on an ambitious market access agreement that lowers trade barriers in both developed and developing economies. We cannot support a one-sided agreement that asks our farmers and ranchers to disproportionately shoulder reductions in the farm safety net without corresponding improvements in market access.

We were particularly pleased with your comments regarding cotton. Congress has twice amended statutory authority for the U.S. cotton and export credit guarantee programs legislation, and the Department of Agriculture has made administrative changes to the GSM-102 program in response to critics and the WTO dispute settlement body's decisions. With U.S. cotton production and exports down over 40 percent in the past five years, critics need to take notice of market distortions caused by trade barriers in key importing countries, as well as other major cotton exporting countries, instead of just focusing on the policies of the United States. While we are willing to support a negotiated solution to the cotton portion of this dispute, Brazil must acknowledge that market conditions have changed, and any resolution also needs to reflect the realities of today's market. We believe it is imperative for a solution to the cotton case to be incorporated into the single undertaking of the Doha Round.

In the months ahead, we believe it is possible to reach agreement in the Doha Round that will gain our support, although the challenge is formidable. We look forward working with you and stand ready to assist your efforts in any way possible.

Very truly yours,

Senator Blanche Lincoln, Chairman  
Senator Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Republican Member

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