

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 26, 2024

The Honorable Katherine Tai
United States Trade Representative
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20508.

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Ambassador Tai and Secretary Vilsack:

International trade is critical to the continued success of U.S. agriculture. For roughly 60 years¹ the United States ran an agriculture trade surplus, demonstrating leadership in our nation's capability to meet global food challenges. We write to express our concerns regarding the rising agricultural trade deficit and loss of opportunities for U.S. international trade capabilities that will impact the ability of American producers to remain competitive in the global market.

The U.S. food and agriculture sector has an economic output over \$8.6 trillion.² U.S. farmers export about 20 percent of what they produce, demonstrating the critical role trade plays in ensuring global food security. **We are troubled by the most recent U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Outlook for U.S. Agricultural Trade*,³ report which projects agricultural exports in fiscal year (FY) 2024 at \$169.5 billion. The forecast also indicates an agricultural trade deficit of \$30 billion, nearly double the \$16.7 billion trade deficit last year, impacting local farm economies and U.S. leadership in global agriculture trade.**

The official USDA projection detailed the trade losses as, “primarily driven by reductions in grain and feed, as well as livestock, poultry, and dairy exports.” These included: overall grain and feed exports reductions to \$37.5 billion; livestock, poultry, and dairy exports decreases to \$36.3 billion due to “declines across most products”; and horticulture exports remaining flat. The report indicated overall U.S. agricultural imports increased to \$200 billion, far exceeding U.S. farm exports.

The vital importance of international agriculture trade cannot be overstated, as over 95% of the world's consumers live outside the United States. As a global leader in innovative practices that enable us to feed a growing world population, America has traditionally sold more food and agricultural products to other countries than it imported. Just a decade ago, our nation posted an ag trade surplus of over \$30 billion⁴ – now we are facing the inverse, an agricultural trade deficit of \$30 billion.

¹ Department of Agriculture, Trade Statistics 1959-2020.

² Feeding the Economy: *U.S. Food and Ag Industries, Economic Impact in the United States*, 2023 Report

³ Department of Agriculture, *Outlook for U.S. Agricultural Trade: November 2023*

⁴ Joint Economic Committee: *The Economic Contributions of America Farmers and the Importance of Agriculture Exports, 2013*

We remain concerned that the recent farm trade deficit trend may be attributable in some regard to the proactive trade policies of our economic competitors. This could unfortunately leave the U.S. behind in global trade pacts. As such, our nation must be vigorous in efforts to pursue additional market access and expand exports through new trade agreements.

Echoing the concerns of a broad cross section of more than 30 major U.S. agriculture entities⁵ who called on the Administration through the President's Export Council⁶ to expand export market opportunities for U.S. food and agriculture. Recommended strategies to establish a robust agricultural trade agenda include:

- *Eliminating tariff and non-tariff trade barriers to enhance the ability of American producers to gain export markets access and recommitting to comprehensive trade agreements.*
- *Expanding domestic trade promotion programs for traditional and specialty crops to build and maintain overseas market opportunities.*
- *Enforcing existing U.S. free trade agreements such as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and others, including continuing to explore all options for gaining equitable access to Canada's dairy markets and using every tool available to ensure Mexico reverses its nation's unscientific biotech corn policies.*
- *Taking steps to reform the World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute resolution process to increase market access for U.S. agriculture goods and effectively hold our partners accountable to trade commitments.*

U.S. agriculture is foundational to the American economy, directly supporting nearly 23 million jobs⁷. We urge your strong support and swift action to bolster U.S. food and agriculture trade opportunities and expand market access for farmers and ranchers in new and key markets.

As our nation's farm organizations have voiced, "*With renewed direction, focus and energy in these areas, not only will the economic health of the U.S. food and agriculture sector and communities across the country be shored up, but global food security around the world will be buttressed.*"⁸ Thank you, and we stand ready to assist in strengthening America's leadership role in global agricultural trade.

Sincerely,



Max L. Miller
Member of Congress



Angie Craig
Member of Congress

⁵ November 27, 2023 *Letter by 35 agriculture organizations to the President's Export Council*

⁶ November 29, 2023 *Letter from the President's Export Council to President Biden.*

⁷ Feeding the Economy: 2023 Report

⁸ November 27, 2023 *ibid*



John S. Duarte
Member of Congress



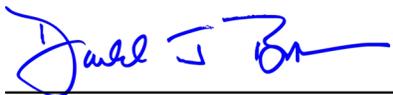
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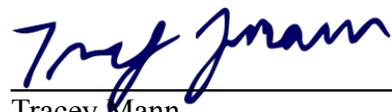
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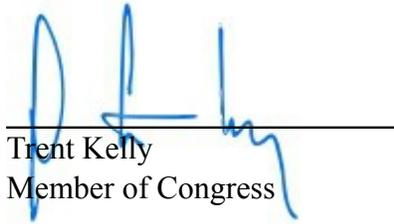
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