

Colombians Want U.S. Trade Deal, NPPC Delegation Finds

U.S. Pork Producers See Firsthand South American Country's Transformation

WASHINGTON, D.C., Nov. 21, 2008 – Returning today from a two-day trade mission, U.S. pork producers who visited Colombia called on Congress to approve a free trade agreement with the South American nation.

The National Pork Producers Council led the delegation, which met with U.S. embassy officials in Bogota; Colombian Vice Minister of Agriculture Juan Salazar; Colombian Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism Luis Guillermo Plata; the Colombian Pork Producers Association; the country's farm bureau organization; labor union representatives; and flower and coffee growers.

"We are very excited about this agreement because it will provide significant new export opportunities for U.S. pork producers," said NPPC President-elect Don Butler, director of government relations and public affairs for Murphy-Brown LLC, the livestock production subsidiary of Smithfield Foods. "The Colombians are excited about this deal, too, but they are frustrated with the failure of the U.S. Congress to approve it. We urge lawmakers to take up the Colombia FTA and pass it now."

The Colombian National Congress already overwhelmingly approved the trade agreement, which, when approved by the U.S. Congress and fully implemented, will add \$1.63 to the price producers receive for each hog marketed, according to Iowa State University economists.

Some U.S. lawmakers have cited violence against labor unionists in Colombia as a reason for opposing the trade pact, but Butler, one of five pork producers who went on the trade mission, said those concerns are exaggerated.

"We saw firsthand the improvements that have been made in Colombia with regard to violence and its economy," said Butler. "There's been a remarkable transformation. We spoke with labor unionists in Colombia, who strongly support the FTA. The average Colombian is more at risk for violence than labor unionists in Colombia."

NPPC, which leads a coalition of agricultural organizations in support of the trade agreement, points out that more than 99 percent of Colombian food and agriculture products entering the U.S. do so duty-free under the Andean Trade Preferences and Drug Eradication Act. The Colombia FTA would give the same treatment to U.S. goods.

"It's time for U.S. farmers, ranchers and food companies to receive fair and reciprocal trade with Colombia, to be given the same trade benefits that Congress repeatedly has bestowed on our Colombian counterparts," Butler said.

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NPPC is the global voice for the U.S. pork industry, protecting the livelihoods of America's 67,000 pork producers, who abide by ethical principles in caring for their animals, in protecting the environment and public health and in providing safe, wholesome, nutritious pork products to consumers worldwide. For more information, visit www.nppc.org.