

# *U.S. Congress Agriculture Committee for Expanded Exports to Cuba*

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Washington, September 15 (RHC) -- The House Agriculture Committee held a hearing Wednesday on possible ways to expand U.S. agricultural sales to Cuba. Much of the discussion centered on the so-called Cuba Agricultural Exports Act, which allows Cuba to buy agricultural products in the U.S. but imposes unfair financing restrictions, which have limited the purchases.

U.S. wheat growers have been vocal in their rejection of the cash-in-advance payments that Cuba is forced to make and which the farmers complain limit a growth in agricultural exports to Cuba. The current financing restrictions require Cuban buyers of U.S. agricultural products to pay cash in advance or finance the transaction through third-country banking institutions. And no Cuban vessels can be used to transport the cargo.

The American Farm Bureau issued a statement in support of decreasing trade barriers with the island nation 90 miles from the Florida coast.

"U.S. agriculture is at a global disadvantage as we watch foreign competitors continue to take away our market share," said the Bureau in a media statement. "There is no better time than now to provide

American farmers and agribusinesses the tools they need to expand agricultural exports to Cuba and help our industry survive this difficult economic environment.”

“These restrictions put U.S. wheat farmers at a global disadvantage as other foreign competitors usurp market shares, offering more favorable credit terms,” said National Wheat Growers Association President Gordon Stoner, who noted that the Association will continue to work through the US Congress in promoting wheat growers’ right to fair Cuba market access.

Agriculture Committee chairman K. Michael Conaway said while the history between the U.S. and Cuba is “long and complicated,” lifting the financing restrictions on Cuba regarding agricultural sales could improve the daily lives of Cubans while also helping American agricultural producers, who are experiencing, he said, one of the greatest downturns in the agricultural economy since the Great Depression.

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