

# *U.S. Agricultural Leaders Connect with Cuba*

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Havana, February 28 (RHC) -- A delegation of 75 top U.S. agriculture leaders organized by Minnesota-based Cargill Inc. arrive in Cuba this weekend on a trade mission to explore the potential for increased business between the two countries, the Star Tribune reported.

Leaders said the trip will be a “learning journey” to understand what Cuba may need from U.S. farmers, including corn, soybeans and rice, and what products the United States might receive from Cuba, when new conditions are favorable for the strengthening of trade.

“It’s really about just having a good exchange with them on the state of the agricultural economy in Cuba,” said Devry Boughner Vorwerk, director of international business relations at Cargill, which has taken a lead in lobbying the U.S. Congress to lift economic sanctions on Cuba.

Vorwerk and others started the U.S. Agriculture Coalition for Cuba early this year, weeks after President Obama announced he would pursue normal trade and diplomatic relations with Cuba following more than 50 years of restrictions.

The trip will begin with an orientation on Sunday, and a set of meetings with Cuban government import officials and others on Monday. The delegation will split into six smaller groups on Tuesday to visit Cuban farmers and agricultural cooperatives, Vorwerk said, to learn about their production capabilities,

challenges and innovations. Wednesday will be a wrap-up day that includes discussions of the larger issues ahead.

The delegation includes two former U.S. agriculture secretaries, the governor of Missouri and leaders of several national crops, livestock and export associations.

Cuba has received U.S. agricultural exports on a limited basis since 2001, under a complicated payment system that requires prepaid cash or letters of credit handled by banks in third countries.

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