U.S. SENATORS INTRODUCE BIPARTISAN BILL TO HELP FARMERS EXPORT TO CUBA

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The U.S. Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and John Boozman (R-AR) introduced the Agricultural Export Expansion Act (S.1447), legislation that would make it easier for American farmers to sell their goods to Cuba by removing restrictions on private financing for U.S. agricultural exports to the island nation.

“These restrictions are arbitrary and serve no purpose other than hurting our farmers and the Cuban people,” said James Williams, President of Engage Cuba. “As U.S. producers across sectors struggle with sluggish markets and Chinese tariffs, it’s time we move this bad policy out of the way of our farmers, who deserve to be able to compete on equal ground for market share in Cuba. We know there’s demand for quality U.S. products, and we should let producers meet that demand.”

Despite the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, U.S. producers have been able to export to the island since 2000. However, remaining restrictions on financial transactions involving Cuba have barred U.S. producers from offering financing to Cuban buyers, severely stunting export potential.

“We’ve heard loud and clear that American farmers and ranchers want the

opportunity to compete and sell their product around the world, including in the Cuban market. Despite our progress in the 2018 Farm Bill, existing trade restrictions with Cuba continue to put our farmers and ranchers at a disadvantage," Senator Bennet said. "This common-sense bill would unlock new market opportunities for Colorado farmers and ranchers who have a tremendous amount to gain from competing in the Cuban market."

"Arkansas farmers need new markets and one solution is sitting less than one hundred miles off our coast. Cuba imports 80 percent of its food, but Americans start out at a disadvantage since private financing is not allowed. Our bill removes this barrier, allowing our agricultural producers to compete, while simultaneously exposing Cubans to American ideals, values and products. It's a small step, but one that can yield big dividends for American farmers and the Cuban people," said Senator Boozman.

Cuba imports about $2 billion in agricultural products annually. However, due to the cash-in-advance requirement, Cuba is left with little choice but to turn instead to international competitors like the European Union, Brazil, and Vietnam. U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba have declined every year since 2009 in terms of dollar amount, market share, and in the variety of products shipped. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that lifting these limits on American farmers through the proposed legislation would save U.S. taxpayers $690 million over 10 years.

Farmers seeking to export to Cuba won some success in the 2018 farm bill with aprovision that allows U.S. agricultural producers to use federal market promotion dollars for agricultural exports to Cuba. A cornerstone of Engage Cuba's legislative advocacy efforts in the last Congress, this was the first law to repeal part of the U.S. embargo on Cuba in nearly 20 years.

The Senate Agricultural Export Expansion Act follows the introduction of its House companion bill H.R. 1898, the Cuba Agricultural Exports Act, in March by Congressman Rick Crawford (R-AR-1) and Congresswoman Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17).