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Ag Groups Fear Trade Losses

Farm Groups Urge Trump Cabinet to Reconsider Tariff Strategy

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By Chris Clayton, DTN Ag Policy Editor

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Cargo being prepared to load at the Port of Savannah, Georgia. President Donald Trump will detail new import tariffs on Wednesday. The U.S. Trade Representative's Office also released a report looking at import barriers to U.S. trade globally. (DTN file photo by Chris Clayton)

OMAHA (DTN) -- Major agricultural groups have written four Cabinet secretaries in the Trump administration raising their concerns about trade retaliation as President Donald Trump prepares for a White House event Wednesday to detail his tariff agenda.

The letter from farm groups draws a fine line of supporting the president's trade goals while fearing the worst ramifications for the ag economy.

"We appreciate the President's focus on achieving fairer trade for United States producers, workers and industry," the farm groups wrote.

That was followed by declaring how critical exports are to the agricultural sector. "More than 20% of U.S. farm income is based on agricultural exports, and it is much higher for many commodities."

The letter comes as Trump is preparing to release more extensive tariff plans set to be announced Wednesday at an event in the White House Rose Garden. The Washington Post and Wall Street Journal have reported the president could set a 20% global tariff on all imports.

LOBBYING FOR TARIFF EXEMPTIONS

Agricultural groups have been lobbying for tariff exemptions on imports -- much like the president did to lower the proposed tariff on potash from Canada. The agricultural sector also will watch to see how markets react and whether the Trump administration is prepared to offer aid in the case of retaliatory tariffs.

Agricultural exports topped \$176 billion in 2024, down from a record high of \$196 billion in 2022. Mexico, Canada and China accounted for roughly \$83 billion in agricultural sales combined. The agricultural groups in their letter expressed concern that tariffs on those countries would lead to trade retaliation and add to financial hardships for farmers and agribusinesses.

"We support the administration's goal of increasing domestic security and ensuring fair trade with other nations, but additional tariffs on these nations' imports run the risk of significant retaliatory measures against U.S. agricultural exports, which have already been implemented by Canada and China."

The letter added, "The impacts on American farmers and ranchers, growers, associated businesses and rural communities are critical when determining potential trade actions."

CALLING FOR NEGOTIATIONS, TRADE AGREEMENTS

Rather than tariffs, the agricultural groups called for negotiations and trade agreements. They support reviewing the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) in 2026 and called for trade talks with the United Kingdom, India and other countries that could expand market access for U.S. products.

"The administration's agricultural trade agenda must focus on maintaining existing markets, avoiding punitive tariffs that put farmers, ranchers and growers on the front lines of retaliation and an aggressive strategy that expands market access for U.S. agricultural products," the farm groups stated. "By eliminating and reducing foreign tariff and non-tariff trade barriers, American producers will gain export market opportunities, leading to a stronger and wealthier America."

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Groups representing ag retailers, corn, soybeans, pork, dairy, wheat, cotton, produce, fertilizer and crop inputs signed on to the letter along with general farm organizations. They sent the letter to Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

NATIONAL TRADE ESTIMATE REPORT RELEASED

The U.S. Trade Representative's Office has released its 2025 National Trade Estimate Report, a 400-page review of import barriers across nearly 50 countries and the European Union.

Though not limited to agriculture, the report covers various industries -- including autos, pharmaceuticals, and emerging issues like digital assets and AI. It also outlines concerns over countries' most-favored nation tariffs and specific line items.

One major concern is the unpredictability of tariff schedules. For example, Brazil has high but inconsistent tariffs, raising uncertainty for U.S. exporters.

In agriculture, "dairy" appears 86 times -- 24 of those referring to Canada -- while "beef" appears 96 times.

CANADA

Canada's supply management programs for dairy, poultry and eggs drew criticism. Under USMCA, some products have tariff-rate quotas, but once exceeded, U.S. goods face steep tariffs (e.g., 245% on cheese, 298% on butter).

Canada's creation of new milk classes and restrictions under its Seeds Act were also cited as barriers, with the U.S. calling the seed registration process slow and burdensome.

CHINA

The report highlighted China's shortfalls under the 2020 Phase One Agreement, despite \$38 billion in U.S. agricultural exports in 2022. China has not fully met commitments on biotech support or tariff-rate quotas for key crops.

The report also critiques China's broader industrial policy goals in tech sectors -- including biotech and farm machinery -- viewed as creating unfair competition.

MEXICO

Glyphosate was a key issue. Mexico has begun phasing out the herbicide and reduced import quotas last July.

The report also flagged Mexico's biotech crop restrictions and its agreement with the EU on geographical indicators, which complicate U.S. cheese exports.

EUROPEAN UNION

EU regulations on chemicals, deforestation and sustainability raise U.S. concerns. The U.S. is tracking 30 delayed agricultural biotech applications for corn, soy, rapeseed and cotton -- with approvals averaging four years.

The EU's renewable energy directive may hinder U.S. exports of biofuels and wood pellets, worth more than \$700 million in 2024.

Other sticking points include pesticide residue limits, certification for live cattle, hormone bans in beef, and the EU's "Farm to Fork" strategy, which aims to reduce ag inputs.

INDIA

India maintains some of the world's highest ag tariffs, ranging from 45% on vegetable oils to 150% on alcohol.

In addition, India imposes non-tariff barriers, particularly on livestock. WTO disputes have led to limited tariff reductions for products like poultry, blueberries and cranberries.

India also restricts ethanol imports despite blending targets; the country continues broad subsidies and a price support system for at least 25 crops.

The full report can be found at <https://ustr.gov/...>


Also see "Rollins Touts Biofuel Policies to Boost Corn Demand as USDA Preps for Trade War" here: <https://www.dtnpf.com/...>

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