



GUEST COLUMN FROM SECRETARY HARSDORF: **Maintain focus on trade's importance to agriculture**

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MADISON – Below is a guest column from Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Secretary Sheila Harsdorf:

When listening to the radio or reading the news lately, you have likely heard or seen numerous stories about negotiating trade agreements, possible tariffs and meetings between national leaders. While there is a lot of back and forth debate and speculation, it is critical that as an industry, we remain focused on what is important; free and fair trade. Agricultural exports are critical for not only Wisconsin farmers and agribusinesses, but the entire state and country.

Agriculture is an economic driver in Wisconsin. Each year, Wisconsin agriculture contributes more than \$88 billion to the state's economy. These dollars circulate throughout local communities supporting jobs and businesses. About 415,000 people in the state work in a job related to agriculture. These jobs are on the farm, in processing facilities and at other agribusinesses in rural communities. Every job in agriculture supports an additional nearly 1.5 jobs elsewhere in Wisconsin. Export sales are critical to these jobs and the families they support.

Our state's farmers are some of the best at what they do, producing an abundance of safe, nutritious and quality products efficiently for consumers. A typical U.S. farmer produces enough food to feed 155 people. Wisconsin is a national leader in the production of numerous commodities, including cheese, cranberries and ginseng. Exports support farmers, right here in Wisconsin, on our state's 68,500 farms.

Wisconsin farmers raise dairy cows, livestock, poultry, grains, fruits, vegetables and more. These crops are valuable to the state but must be able to reach the consumers who demand them, whether they are near or far. About 90% of Wisconsin milk is turned into cheese, and about 90% of Wisconsin cheese is sold outside the state's borders. Ninety-five percent of the ginseng root exported from the United States comes from central Wisconsin. Two out of every three rows of soybeans from Wisconsin are sent to other countries. Exports are the key to getting agricultural products from Wisconsin farms to consumers' dinner tables around the world.

Last year, Wisconsin exported \$3.5 billion of agricultural products, an increase of more than 3.6% over the same period in 2016. Wisconsin ranks 12th nationally among U.S. states in the value of our agricultural exports. While Wisconsin's agricultural products are exported to 147 different countries, approximately half of the state's agricultural exports are destined for our neighbors, Canada and Mexico. Our third most valuable export market, is China. In 2017, Wisconsin's agricultural exports to China alone increased more than 27% to almost \$300 million.

Wisconsin agribusinesses transform our agricultural commodities into the value-added products our customers demand. The most valuable agricultural export categories last year were prepared fruits and vegetables and food ingredients. Oil seeds, including soybeans, dairy-related goods and wood products also are in high-demand from our worldwide consumers. In 2017, exports of dairy-related goods increased nearly 20% in just one year.

Agriculture depends on exports. Our farmers are currently enduring an extended period of low commodity prices. For the profitability of our farmers and our state's long-term prosperity, it is crucial for Wisconsin to maintain our current trading partners and continue to expand and increase exports by building new relationships. In the state, we are privileged to be home to excellent research facilities and educational institutions that are known for their technical expertise. Through research and

collaboration, we are developing new products and addressing distribution challenges in order to reach new markets. But trading on a level playing field is key to our success. Our farmers can compete with the best provided we have free, fair and transparent trade policies. Farmers need to know what markets are available to them and what products are most valuable to their customers prior to putting a seed in the ground.

Here at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), we are committed to carrying out Governor Walker's Executive Order #275, the Wisconsin Agriculture Market Development Initiative. Our staff work with Wisconsin farmers and agribusinesses as they work to grow markets locally, regionally and internationally. Through technical assistance, referrals and educational seminars, we work to remove barriers to trade to allow the industry to thrive in the worldwide marketplace.

As agriculturalists, we have a great story to tell. As a state, we have valuable products to sell. We need to continue to focus on the significance of exports to our farmers, their families, agribusinesses and the state's economy. While it is important to modernize agreements, it is also important to keep our focus. Implications of negotiations and retaliation efforts impact all of us, whether we are in agriculture or just appreciate it.

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