

*Letter from Former Secretaries of Agriculture  
To Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate  
On the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

February 8, 2011

To Members of Congress:

In the near future you will be voting on legislation to implement the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA). We strongly support this agreement, and we urge you to vote in favor of its implementation. U.S. farmers and ranchers and the businesses that support them – food processors, transporters and exporters – will all benefit from this agreement.

As former secretaries of Agriculture, we fully understand the importance of this and other trade agreements to the economic health of American agriculture. Our farmers and ranchers produce more than domestic consumption, and international trade has been crucial to the prosperity of rural America for several decades. Our food and agricultural exports have grown to all-time records in recent years, made possible through the market access achievements of prior trade agreements. It is difficult to name an agricultural product our farmers sell in the world market that has not benefited from trade agreements.

The KORUS FTA will offer enormous new opportunities for our products in a market that is large and growing. Currently, only about \$14 million in U.S. agricultural goods enter Korea duty-free. The KORUS FTA would immediately increase that to \$3 billion, and as a result, U.S. exports to Korea will increase rapidly. Our exports will continue to benefit from staged tariff reductions and duty-free tariff rate quotas. The products that will benefit are too numerous to list, but they include most of our agricultural sector from virtually every state.

American farmers can compete with anyone in the world on a level playing field. But they will not be able to compete in Korea in the future without the KORUS FTA. The playing field will favor the many countries that have completed or are negotiating free trade deals of their own with Korea. These include Chile, India, the 10-country ASEAN group, the 27 nations of the European Union, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and China. We have already seen our market share in Korea decline. According to USDA, the U.S. currently accounts for 30 percent of Korea's agricultural imports, but that is down from almost 45 percent in the mid-1990s. That trend can be reversed and, indeed, can only be reversed, through the KORUS FTA.

As former cabinet members, we recognize the larger economic and geopolitical issues at stake for our nation. The United States must not turn its back on the global market. Trade liberalization is taking place worldwide through the hundreds of bilateral and regional agreements recently negotiated or under way. The question is whether our

nation will participate in that growth in trade or whether we will continue to sit on the sidelines.

We applauded the President's call last year to double U.S. exports in five years. Achieving that goal would create many thousands of U.S. jobs. It is an enormous challenge, but it is doable. However, if we fail to negotiate the removal of continued high – and increasingly discriminatory – trade barriers, it will certainly be impossible.

For these reasons, we believe it is imperative that the KORUS FTA be implemented as soon as possible and urge you to vote to approve the enabling legislation.

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