

1/30/2007 Groups Urge Congress, the Administration to Develop a New Approach to U.S.-Cuba Policy

USA*Engage Press Release

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Business and Agriculture Groups Urge Congress and the Administration to Develop a New Approach to U.S.-Cuba Policy

USA*Engage Hosts Capitol Hill Policy Discussion with Members of Congress to Press for Change

Washington, D.C. - USA*Engage, in conjunction with the National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC), hosted a policy discussion and reception late Monday for the Commodity Roundtable on Capitol Hill with members of Congress and staff to press for changes in U.S.-Cuba policy. Chief among the concerns raised during the discussion about current policy toward Cuba was the impact of the U.S.-Cuba embargo on the agricultural sector of the U.S. economy.

"There is growing momentum and broad support for a new approach toward U.S.-Cuba policy among members of the U.S. business and agriculture communities, as well as key policymakers," said USA*Engage Director Jake Colvin. "The United States is at a critical juncture and we should pursue a smarter strategy that will eventually open the doors of trade and diplomacy."

"This meeting of commodity and agriculture organizations showed the continued, broad support within the agriculture community for improving agriculture trade with Cuba, which represents a key market for a number of U.S. produced

commodities. It was once a number one market for U.S rice exports," said Paul T. Combs, Chairman of USA Rice Producers Group of the USA Rice Federation, said. "We are encouraged by the prospects for making incremental change in the current Congress to address some of the onerous provisions that continue to complicate our efforts to sell agriculture products to Cuba."

During the policy discussion, Representatives Sam Farr (D-CA), Jeff Flake (R-AZ), Jerry Moran (R-KS), and Vic Snyder (D-AR) delivered remarks about the prospects for change in the 110th Congress, signaling hope for progress.

"This is an opportune time to encourage change in trade policies toward Cuba," Representative Jerry Moran said. "Cuba is an important market for U.S. agriculture, as well as for manufacturers and distributors of food products. But the actions of our own government have created a climate of uncertainty and have inhibited the sale of agricultural commodities and food. Our uncertain trade policies are sending the signal to Cuba that it is easier to purchase its products elsewhere. Unilateral sanctions only hurt our economy."

"The time is right to turn the obvious interest here into action," Colvin concluded.

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USA*Engage (www.usaengage.org) is a coalition of small and large businesses, agriculture groups and trade associations working to seek alternatives to the proliferation of unilateral U.S. foreign policy sanctions and to promote the benefits of U.S. engagement abroad. Established in 1997 and organized under the National Foreign Trade Council, USA*Engage leads a campaign to inform policy-makers, opinion-leaders, and the public about the counterproductive nature of unilateral sanctions, the importance of exports and overseas investment for American competitiveness and jobs, and the role of American companies in promoting human rights and democracy. The National Foreign Trade Council (www.nftc.org) is a leading business organization advocating an open, rules-based global trading system. Founded in 1914 by a broad-based group of American companies, the NFTC now serves hundreds of member companies through its offices in Washington and New York.

