

Agricultural Secretary Vilsack: Farm Exports Are Creating Jobs and Growing the Rural Economy

Written by USDA Communications
Wednesday, 13 June 2012 08:24

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DES MOINES, Iowa, June 12, 2012—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today met with business and community leaders to discuss how continuing demand for American food and agricultural products abroad has led to the three best consecutive years for U.S. farm exports in our nation's history. Vilsack said the success of American agriculture is a positive economic story that is creating jobs in rural America and benefitting people around the world. Vilsack also highlighted a [report](#) released this week by the White House Rural Council and the U.S. Department of Agriculture which notes progress that has been made in the agricultural economy and details steps the Obama Administration has taken to help strengthen the farm economy and support jobs in rural America.

"In 2010, President Obama committed to doubling U.S. exports in five years, and just two years later, we are on pace to meet that goal," said Vilsack. "Meanwhile, people around the world continue to demand U.S. food and agricultural products, boosting American businesses and supporting our rural communities. To ensure these successes continue, USDA has aggressively worked to expand export opportunities and reduce barriers to trade. Less restrictions abroad, stronger trade deals for U.S. agriculture, and greater export assistance for U.S. businesses supports more than 1 million Americans jobs in industries from packing and shipping, to food processing, to transportation. This is an American-made success story worth sharing with our friends, family and neighbors."

Speaking to business leaders in Iowa, one of the nation's most productive agricultural economies, Vilsack pointed to the state's low unemployment rate of 5.1 percent as proof of agriculture's success story. Last year, Iowa exported a record \$7 billion in agricultural products, which supported nearly 60,000 jobs on and off the farm. Thus far in 2012, the state's farm exports show a 15-percent gain over last year's record total.

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Vilsack also highlighted a joint report released this week by the White House Rural Council and USDA, which notes how the President's National Export Initiative has opened new markets for U.S. agricultural products and services and contributed to a historic level of agricultural exports. Other highlights from the report include:

- Innovation: Innovation in U.S. agriculture has kept America's farms among the most productive in the world. U.S. farm sector income reached a nominal record of \$98.1 billion in 2011. Adjusting for general inflation, real farm income in 2011 recorded its 3rd highest level in the last 50 years.
- Clean Energy: The Administration has pursued policies that promote domestic energy alternatives like biofuels, bioenergy, and wind power to provide new opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and forest managers. Pursuit of an all-of-the-above clean energy and energy efficiency strategy saved Americans a projected 6.5 billion kWh - enough energy to power over 590,000 homes for a year - and nearly doubled the amount of installed wind energy generation in the U.S. over the past three years from about 25,000 MW in 2008 to 47,000 MW in 2011.
- New Industries: The Administration has supported new industry diversification within the agricultural economy. The retail value of the organic industry grew to \$31.4 billion in 2011, up from \$21.1 billion in 2008. The number of operations certified organic grew by 1,109 - or more than 6% - between 2009 and 2011.
- Community Investment: The rural economy has been strengthened by investments in over 6,250 new community facilities. Additionally, over the last three years, 12,000 USDA grants and loans have been issued to assist over 50,000 rural small businesses.

Just a few weeks ago, [USDA forecast 2012 farm exports](#) to reach the second highest level on record, after 2011, making the past three years the strongest collective performance in our nation's history. Today, only 1 percent of U.S. companies export, and yet 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside the borders of the United States, creating significant opportunities for U.S. food and agriculture.

Responding to that demand since 2009, U.S. farmers and ranchers have delivered three of the four highest levels of U.S. agricultural exports in American history. In fiscal year 2012, the latest forecast sees \$134.5 billion in U.S. farm exports, the second highest level ever and \$3.5 billion greater than the previous forecast. And Vilsack said he expects new trade agreements with South Korea, Panama and the European Union to deliver even greater returns for U.S. businesses.

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Vilsack said USDA is committed to expanding export opportunities for all producers. When asked about outcomes of USDA's March trade mission to China—the department's largest trade mission to date—he highlighted that the delegation included 39 U.S. companies, representatives from six state departments of agriculture, and achieved nearly \$2 million in immediate sales.

In terms of new agreements beyond South Korea and Columbia, Vilsack pointed out a recent, major partnership with the potential for substantial returns: the United States and European Union equivalency arrangement for organic agricultural goods. The U.S. and EU are the world's largest producers of organics, said Vilsack, and estimates show the market for U.S. organics sales to the EU could grow substantially within the first few years of this arrangement. Moreover, the arrangement will provide expanded market access, reduce duplicative requirements and reduce certification costs while protecting organic integrity.

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