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[Agriculture Secretaries Urge Prompt Passage of Fast Track - November 3, 1997] [loose]

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AGRICULTURE SECRETARIES URGE PROMPT PASSAGE OF FAST TRACK
"American Agriculture Needs to be at the Table in 1999"...

WASHINGTON, Nov. 3 - Eight former secretaries of agriculture serving U.S. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton today urged the Clinton Administration and congressional agricultural leaders to take action to assure prompt passage of fast track legislation.

"Fast track is critical to American agriculture being able to compete and prosper in the years ahead," they said.

"American agriculture competitively produces, handles, processes, services, trades and transports food and fiber that the world wants to buy. Agricultural trade has contributed significantly to U.S. farm income, created jobs and strengthen American economic and political interests. For those reasons, agricultural trade has been a top priority for every administration in recent memory."

Citing the benefits of trade liberalization made possible by previous fast track authorities, the former secretaries noted U.S. agricultural exports surged another \$20 billion in value with the implementation of NAFTA and GATT, hitting a record high \$60.3 billion in 1996. "Our food and agricultural system is now poised to make additional export gains from upcoming trade negotiations," they said.

With economic growth and rising food demand, people all over the world will need to rely to a greater degree on world markets, the secretaries said, "but there is no guarantee that agricultural products grown in the United States may reach them. To assure that, we need to make additional progress lowering trade barriers, eliminating unfair trading practices and constraining domestic subsidies that distort trade. Fast track is the key to unlocking those opportunities."

The secretaries said fast track authorities should be used to level the playing field for U.S. farmers and processors, to help resolve outstanding trade disputes and strengthen the rules of international commerce. They also urged that fast track "should be used as it was in the past — to exercise U.S. leadership in trade."

Copies of the letters to Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman and Congressional leaders are attached.

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November 3, 1997

**The Honorable Dan Glickman
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250**

Dear Mr. Secretary:

No matter one's political perspective, the U.S. food and agricultural system is one of the nation's greatest success stories. American agriculture competitively produces, handles, processes, services, trades and transports food and fiber that the world wants to buy. Agricultural trade has contributed significantly to U.S. farm income, created jobs and strengthened American economic and political interests. For those reasons, agricultural trade has been a top priority for every administration in recent memory.

Having served as the Secretaries of Agriculture to Presidents of both political parties, we have witnessed how U.S. agriculture has benefited from trade liberalization made possible by previous fast-track authorities. With the implementation of NAFTA and GATT, U.S. agricultural exports surged another \$20 billion in value, hitting an all-time high of \$60.3 billion in 1996. U.S. agriculture also has enjoyed a consistent trade surplus, which last year climbed to \$27 billion.

Our food and agricultural system now is poised to make additional export gains from upcoming trade negotiations. Many developing countries are experiencing economic growth which means rising incomes for their citizens. Food demand is expanding as people upgrade their diets. These consumers will need to rely to a greater degree than ever on world markets, but there is no guarantee that agricultural products grown in the United States may reach them. To assure that, we need to make additional progress lowering trade barriers, eliminating unfair trading practices and constraining domestic subsidies that distort trade.

Fast track is the key to unlocking those opportunities. It is the avenue for our negotiators to level the playing field for U.S. farmers and processors to compete. The authorities it conveys can and should be used to help resolve outstanding trade disputes and strengthen the rules of international commerce. Moreover, it should be used as it was in the past -- to exercise U.S. leadership in trade.

American agriculture needs to be at the table for the 1999 agriculture talks in the World Trade Organization to continue the progress made in the Uruguay Round. In addition, we need to be active in upcoming bilateral negotiations with countries like Chile and for the regional Free Trade Agreement of the Americas and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation talks.

Very simply, fast track is critical to American agriculture being able to compete and prosper in the years ahead. That is why more than 60 agricultural organizations have committed themselves to work for fast track, and why we as former Secretaries of Agriculture support them and you in this effort.

We are urging Congress to promptly pass this urgently needed legislation and the administration to work strenuously at the negotiating table for continued progress in trade.

Sincerely,

**/s/ Orville Freeman
Secretary of Agriculture
Kennedy and Johnson Administrations**

**/s/ Clifford Harden
Secretary of Agriculture
Nixon Administration**

**/s/ Earl Butz
Secretary of Agriculture
Nixon and Ford Administrations**

**/s/ Bob Bergland
Secretary of Agriculture
Carter Administration**

**/s/ John R. Block
Secretary of Agriculture
Reagan Administration**

**/s/ Richard P. Lyng
Secretary of Agriculture
Reagan Administration**

**/s/ Clayton Yeutter
Secretary of Agriculture
Bush Administration**

**/s/ Mike Espy
Secretary of Agriculture
Clinton Administration**

cc: Charlene Barshefsky, U.S. Trade Representative

November 3, 1997

The Honorable Richard Lugar
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bob Smith
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Stenholm
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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