

Canada Pork International... Canadian Pork Council... Canadian Grain and Oilseed Exporters Association... Canola Council of Canada... Canadian Oilseed Processors Association... Canadian Wheat Board... Cavendish Farms... Pulse Canada... Canadian Federation of Agriculture

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COALITION OF AGRICULTURE GROUPS WELCOME TRADE MINISTER'S AGGRESSIVE APPROACH

Winnipeg - A coalition of Canadian agriculture groups is flagging the urgent need for Canada to forge more trade deals directly with nations that import Canadian commodities.

The coalition -- which includes the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Canada Pork International, the Canadian Pork Council, the Canadian Grain and Oilseed Exporters Association, the Canola Council of Canada, the Canadian Oilseed Processors Association, the Canadian Wheat Board, Cavendish Farms and Pulse Canada -- welcomed recent statements by federal trade minister David Emerson acknowledging the importance of ramping up negotiations for bilateral agreements.

Emerson has announced that the federal government plans to accelerate efforts to clinch new trade deals. He warned that Canada has rested on its resource laurels and fallen behind in the global race to sign trade deals with other countries. He said the key to long-term growth is securing preferential access, which the United States and other countries are scooping up all over the globe.

"We are very pleased to see Minister Emerson signaling his intent to add resources and raise the priority of Canada's negotiations for bilateral trade agreements," said Pulse Canada CEO Gordon Bacon.

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Adrian Measner, president and CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board, said Emerson's comments were good news. "Canada's commodity exporters are in a very difficult situation," he said. "It is critical that the government move as quickly as possible to ensure we don't lose ground."

In March, the coalition sent a joint letter to Emerson, urging attention to this matter and warning that Canada's competitiveness in key markets is being eroded by aggressive moves by competing nations, particularly the United States, in signing bilateral trade deals. It mirrored a plea sent to former trade minister Jim Peterson last year.

Clare Schlegel, president of the Canadian Pork Council, said the minister's approach is right on track with what the agriculture coalition has been saying.

"Nobody's trying to downplay the importance of the World Trade Organization(WTO), but we have been falling behind on bilaterals, which will directly affect our producers and our industries," Schlegel said.

The coalition believes strategic bilateral trade agreements are a complement to, and not a substitute for multilateral negotiations through the WTO.

The coalition has identified a priority list of five key countries or regions that require special attention to protect Canada's trading relationship - China, Japan, the Andean Community (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela), India and Morocco.

The U.S has recently concluded free trade agreements with Peru and Colombia that will immediately impact Canadian wheat, barley, pea, lentil and pork exports. A free trade agreement between the U.S. and Morocco that took effect this year gives American durum and lentil exports preferential access to the Moroccan market.

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"We simply can't afford to lose preferential market access for our export commodities," said Bob Friesen, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

Canada's competitors are also negotiating trade agreements with China, Japan and India, which are established and growing markets for Canadian agricultural products.

Barbara Isman, president of the Canola Council of Canada, also believes bilateral agreements are a key component of Canada's trade agenda.

"From our perspective, the World Trade Organization negotiations are fundamental, but that does not mean that Canada can afford to fall behind on bilaterals while our competitors look to secure preferential access in key markets like China, Japan and India," she said.

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