

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 12, 2005

The Honorable Robert J. Portman  
United States Trade Representative  
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative  
600 17<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20505

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

We write to convey our views about the ongoing market access negotiations of the World Trade Organization (WTO). While we applaud your efforts to put forward meaningful proposals to reduce trade-distorting agricultural subsidies, and your commitment to be mindful of the needs of least-developed countries, we are concerned about the impact some proposals may have on developing countries.

International trade, and implementation of the Doha Development Agenda in particular, could create substantial benefits for the United States and our trading partners. However, in our pursuit to open new markets and opportunities for American producers, we must avoid causing undue harm to nations with economies significantly more vulnerable than ours. As the United States continues to take leadership pushing WTO negotiations forward, we ask you to be mindful and flexible regarding the needs of low- and middle-income developing countries. We learned important lessons from the 2003 WTO Ministerial in Cancun, Mexico about the value of ensuring the interests of developing countries are seriously taken into account during global trade negotiations. Developing country support is vitally necessary to the interests of U.S. trade policy because without it a meaningful conclusion to the current round of WTO trade negotiations may prove elusive.

Given that the agricultural sector is of fundamental importance to developing economies, we must carefully consider the impact of agricultural-related proposals under current consideration in the WTO negotiations. In low-income developing countries, an average of 68 percent of the population makes its living through farming, and even in middle-income developing countries, a quarter of the population depends on farming for their livelihood. In sub-Saharan Africa, small-holder farmers, most of whom are women, comprise 73 percent of the rural population. Special attention should be given to the impact further market access commitments may have on small farms. These considerations keep within the spirit of the commitment made by the US and other WTO

member nations in 2001 at Doha, Qatar to make this round of trade negotiations truly work for poor countries.

We are concerned about the pressure being placed on developing countries to accept proposals to reduce their tariffs on the import of agricultural goods. The proposals being considered could undermine the livelihoods of small farmers and increase social and economic instability in developing countries. Small farmers in poor countries are frequently unable to compete with imported agricultural products, often because imports from developed countries enjoy advantages such as lower input costs, greater economies of scale, and mechanization. Requiring low- and middle-income developing countries to further lower tariffs on certain agriculture products could pose a serious threat to livelihoods of rural people in these nations. This situation is only exacerbated if reductions in developed-country agricultural subsidies are insubstantial.

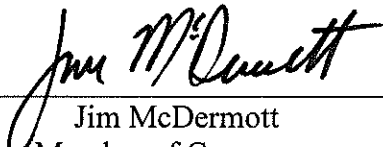
Our concern for the situation facing agriculture sectors in many poor countries compels us to support current efforts made by low- and middle-income governments in the Doha negotiations to achieve special and differential treatment, aimed to shield key economic sectors from the unintended consequences of rapid trade liberalization. We believe these nations should have the flexibility to preserve tariffs and other measures aimed to assist the survival of small farms. Appropriate actions should only intend to safeguard the incomes of small farmers, the food security of the nation, and promote economic and social development.

Trade liberalization provides economic opportunities and benefits but even here, in the most advanced economy in the world, it can yield undesirable, short-term outcomes. The United States can often afford the risks associated with freer trade but they are more acute, and the economic consequences more profound, for lesser-developed economies. Accordingly, we support a meaningful and robust classification of "Special Products", allowing developing countries to apply special import policies for crops cultivated by small-scale farmers. Low- and middle-income developing countries should be able to identify a number of products that meet this definition and exempt them from any further reduction in tariffs or increases in quota. Simultaneously, a serious and effective Special Safeguard Mechanism should be available to developing countries to respond to import surges in products sensitive to small-scale farmers, whether it results from large volumes or extremely low prices.

Furthermore, we believe the United States should explore opportunities outside of the Doha round negotiations to assist small farmers and economic diversification in developing countries. For example, we support exploring the extension and enhancement of preferential trade benefit regimes to include a broader set of agricultural products, phase-out of the tariff rate quota regime, and more workable rules-of-origin. Appropriate conditionality, such as progress improving labor and environmental laws, and good governance should remain a prerequisite to receiving preferential trade benefits.


The United States has an opportunity, in the Doha Round and in other contexts, to create a more efficient, fair, and meaningful international trading system that will benefit rich and poor countries alike. We urge you to seize the opportunities provided by the World Trade Organization negotiations to help secure the interests of the United States, which include constructing thoughtful trade policies to reduce global poverty and improve living standards here, and around the world. We welcome a response that details the administration's position on any of these issues.

Sincerely,



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Jim McDermott  
Member of Congress



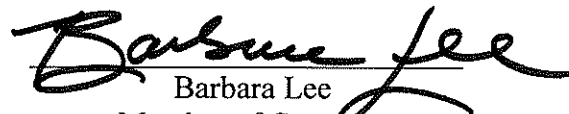
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Donald Payne  
Member of Congress



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Jim McGovern  
Member of Congress



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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress