Cuba will purchase U.S. dried peas; potential for ND farmers

By ANDREA JOHNSON
Valley Editor

The U.S. dry pea industry has found a toehold in Cuba's expanding ag trade with the United States.

Allimport – an importing company operated by the Cuban government – announced on March 6 their intentions to purchase 20,000 metric tons (733,000 bushels) of U.S. dry peas as well as 1,000 metric tons of U.S. apples.

The dry peas are valued at approximately $4 million, while the apples have a value of $500,000. The Cuban shipment represents approximately 11 percent of U.S. dry pea production. Delivery to Cuba is slated for May.

The shipment could include both yellow and green peas and will likely come from companies located in the state of Washington.

Congressman George Nethercutt, R-Wash., wrote the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA) of 2000, which authorized the direct commercial (on a cash basis) export of food and ag products from the United States to Cuba.


The peas and apples are the first purchases of agricultural products from the state of Washington since Allimport commenced purchases from United States-based companies in November 2001 under TSRA.

"The purchases from Washington have to do with Rep. Nethercutt. He was the father of TSRA so the Cuban government is clearly seeking to reward his efforts, and that means buy as much as possible from the state of Washington," said John S. Kavulich II, U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council president.

U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council is the largest nonpartisan business organization within the United States focusing upon the Republic of Cuba. The organization is a private, not-for-profit corporation that does not take positions with respect to United States-Cuba political relations.

The dry peas will likely be purchased from up to 10 processors and exporters located in Washington, but will likely be obtained from both Washington and Idaho.

"The reason that some of the peas might be sourced from Idaho as well as Washington simply has to do with quantities," said Kavulich. "That is still flowing – it is still being put together and there may end up being some from North Dakota." The sale of dry peas to Cuba will affect North Dakota dry pea growers, who produced on 86,000 acres approximately 3 million bushels of peas, approximately 40 percent of the U.S. supply in 2001.

"This will definitely help our producers now and in the future. Getting an initial sale into Cuba is huge for North Dakota and U.S. pea producers," said Eric Bartsch, North Dakota Dry Pea and Lentil Council administrator.

U.S. dry pea producers are enjoying good prices this season. Yellow peas are worth $3.80-4/bushel, while green peas are selling for $3.50-3.80/bushel. This sale to Cuba should only help prices.

"Any amount that leaves the United States affects our growers," said Bartsch. "It increases the value and the price anytime you can move product. We're hoping this can open up further trade with North Dakota and Cuba.

More people in Cuba could see more agricultural products from the U.S. in the future. An announced shipment of yellow and green peas to Cuba could benefit North Dakota farmers in the future if the two countries continue to work toward trade involving agricultural products.

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