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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

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December 8, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express serious concerns about the direction of global agricultural trade negotiations in Geneva. We continue to support a successful completion of the Doha Round of World Trade Organization negotiations, begun in 2001, but only if it achieves the principal objectives of the United States and the ambitious goals of the original ministerial declaration for agriculture, which “aimed at substantial improvements in market access; reductions of, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies; and substantial reductions in trade-distorting domestic support.” A sound and balanced agreement should contribute significantly to global economic recovery, growth, and development.

The potential modalities framework now under consideration by negotiators in Geneva is not sound or balanced from the perspective of U.S. agriculture. Other countries have not responded adequately to the offers on domestic agricultural support already put on the table by our negotiators in recent months. The latest proposed agricultural modalities language issued by Ambassador Falconer and the compromise proposed by Director General Lamy on July 25 both provide for substantial loopholes which would severely limit promised access to foreign markets for key U.S. products. More importantly, key developing country trading partners have demanded even further concessions from the United States without responding on market access.

We believe that the calendar should not drive the negotiations. An agreement that lacks the necessary balance will fail to win support in the Congress. The commitments expressed at the G-20 summit and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum cannot drive the process if others are unwilling to engage in balanced discussions producing ambitious results. Neither U.S. negotiators nor Congress are obligated to accept and approve an agreement that is unsound, unbalanced, or incompatible with U.S. objectives.

Absent substantial improvements in the July framework, any modalities agreement will not benefit U.S. agriculture and will not have our support. That is not in the interests of the United States, the WTO, or the global economy. We urge you to reject the calls now being made for further U.S. concessions and instead insist that our trading partners meet their obligation to match our level of ambition by making offers that will produce *very substantial market access gains* for U.S. agriculture.

Tom Harkin

Sen. Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry

Saxby Chambliss

Sen. Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Republican Member
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