

# *Activists from U.S. State of Illinois Lobby Congress to Loosen Trade Restrictions Against Cuba*

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Wilmette, September 12 (RHC) -- Delegates from the Illinois Cuba Working Group (ICWG) were in Washington, D.C., on Thursday to ask Congress and the Barack Obama Administration to loosen trade restrictions so Illinois farmers and agricultural organizations can provide food to Cuban consumers.

Representing the ICWG were officials from the Illinois Soybean Growers, Cargill, Chicago Foods International, Huron Commodities, Illinois Farm Bureau and Koch Foods.

"We have already seen a decline in our market share due to non-competitive U.S. policies," says Yon Luque, Koch Foods export area manager.

In an April letter to President Barack Obama, the Illinois Cuba Working Group asked for help to "unite bipartisan efforts at the national level to bring the U.S.-Cuba relationship forward."

The ICWG believes that both U.S. and Cuban economies will benefit from exchanges of insight and capital. This has the potential to benefit Illinois small- and medium-sized businesses, along with other U.S. industries, which helps bring jobs to Illinois.

“Change is happening in Cuba and will continue. We are at a pivotal moment in history. Decisions made in the next couple years will affect future generations. We need to be at the table,” says Duane Dahlman, Illinois Soybean Growers marketing committee chair and soybean farmer from Marengo, Illinois. “It’s important for farmers to have access to a market that is so close to us with potential growth.”

In the past year, the Illinois Cuba Working Group has formed strategic relationships in both nations designed to expand Illinois agriculture and food exports to Cuba.

The group's immediate priorities are achievable by amending the Trade Sanction and Reform Act to establish an agricultural trade office in Cuba as a show of commitment and to facilitate/assist with communication and market entry, allow U.S. export promotion and assistance to U.S. agricultural commodities going to Cuba, and permit U.S. food companies the ability to negotiate trade terms with Cuba.

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