

Colorado Agriculture Looks to Cuban Market with Hope



Denver, January 9 (RHC)-- A shift in the political tide with Cuba has piqued the interest of U.S. farmers and ranchers, intrigued by the possibility of expanding export opportunities just 90 miles south of the Gulf Coast, reported Kayla Young from the Windsor Now news journal on Friday.

Larry Lande, owner of Northern Feed and Bean in Lucerne, has his eye on the longterm possibilities for Colorado's pinto bean growers on the largely black bean-dominated market.

While conditions in Cuba still have a long way to go, Lande said the presidential announcement on restoring diplomatic relations has sparked hope that one day Cuba could provide another robust market for Weld County beans in Latin America, alongside the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

"It's not going to happen overnight. It will take a little time, but I think it's going to lead to a possible market again for beans, and it's a good-sized market. We could just as well be selling to Cuba as anywhere else," he said, explaining that 50 percent to 60 percent of Weld County's dry beans go to export, primarily to Latin America.

Before serious exports depart from Colorado for Cuban shores, however, producers will need to wait for much larger improvements to the political landscape, said Tom Lipetzky, director of marketing programs and strategic initiatives for the Colorado Department of Agriculture.

While agricultural and medical exports to Cuba have been permitted to some extent since 2000, political and financial barriers have persisted in preventing stronger trade relations with the Caribbean nation.

Exports to Cuba dipped to their lowest point in a decade in 2014, coming in at \$253.6 million in value from January to October, according to data from the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council in New York. In 2004, total exports to Cuba peaked at \$392 million.

The ability to develop robust trade will largely depend on the willingness of Congress to lift the still-standing embargo and to evaluate restrictive trade standards that limit Cuba to cash-only sales, paid in full before shipment, Lipetzky said.

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