

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Says Cuba Trade Could Grow by Hundreds of Millions



Washington, January 30 (RHC) -- U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack predicts U.S. trade with Cuba could rebound from its current \$300 million to close to \$500 million with Florida among the states capitalizing the most.

An article by the Tampa Bay Times said Vilsack also urged the U.S. Congress to go beyond the loosened trade restrictions recently ordered by President Barack Obama. Specifically, he called for Congress to allow his department to promote trade in Cuba as well as other international markets where it is hamstrung.

"Today I can't use a single dollar of my trade promotion (budget) for our trade with Cuba," Vilsack told the *Tampa Bay Times*. "It's 11 million people, a \$1.7 billion market, and we really ought to be dominating that market."

Instead, he said, due to ongoing economic sanctions on Havana, the U.S. has lost ground to Europe and South America.

Florida ports, he said, can capitalize two ways: as a direct shipper of fruits and

vegetables and as a conduit for products brought in from other states.

Short of trade promotions, just the loosened restrictions that went into effect in January will make a difference, Vilsack said. For one, no longer will goods have to be paid for in advance which was a major disadvantage for Cuba, he said. In the past, Cubans had to go through a third party to receive many American products; now they can deal directly with U.S. banks.



Radio Habana Cuba