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NDA DIRECTOR IBACH PROVIDES UPDATE ON TRI-NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL ACCORD MEETING

LINCOLN - Nebraska Agriculture Director Greg Ibach yesterday wrapped up two days of agricultural trade discussion and negotiation as part of the Tri-National Agricultural Accord in Chicago. Ibach was head of the U.S. delegation at the event, which included agriculture leaders from the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"Canada and Mexico are two of our top trade partners, and our three countries collectively are a key trading region for the world. Because of this, ongoing discussion and collaboration with these partners is essential for Nebraska agriculture export success," Ibach said.

Key issues discussed included several of importance to Nebraska, such as Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), animal health, biotechnology, sugar policy, potatoes, and food safety. A final document called a communiqué, as well as several letters, outlined areas of agreement on specific subjects and areas for action. The documents will be shared with each countries' respective federal agriculture officials. The delegates also identified issues to be worked on in the coming year.

Ibach said the delegates agreed to a joint statement that encourages expeditious action on COOL, once a final decision is published in a case filed with the World Trade Organization by Canada and Mexico against the United States. Ibach also met one-on-one with Canadian Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz on the subject.

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Ibach also noted specific discussion on animal health and biotechnology. The countries encouraged their federal animal health agencies to formalize plans to allow for "regionalization" in the event of an animal health incident.

"With a well-developed plan in place, we can continue trade activities among the countries during an animal health event without harm to the collective North American herd," Ibach said.

Regarding biotechnology, the delegates agreed to work together, with their federal counterparts, on trade policy that recognizes the essential role of genetically modified crops in the world marketplace, Ibach said.

The Tri-National Agricultural Accord dates back to 1984 when efforts to expand the U.S./Canada Free Trade Agreement (FTA) began. In the early 1990s, as work to create a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) began, it was decided to invite Mexico to participate in the Accord. This was the 23rd Accord meeting. In the United States, the Accord is hosted through the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA). NDA is a member of NASDA, and Ibach is the organization's current vice president and also the chair of the body's International Trade and Marketing Committee.

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