



FarmPolicy.com Interview with Rep. Adrian Smith
Trade Issues
July 23, 2010

- Q:** This is Keith Good of FarmPolicy.com, and this morning I'm visiting with Representative Adrian Smith, who represents the Third District of Nebraska, and he is joining me by phone from his office this Friday morning in Washington, D.C. Good morning, Congressman.
- A:** Good morning, Keith. Thanks for having me on.
- Q:** My pleasure. U.S. free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea have been languishing for some time in Congress. President Obama recently announced that the Administration would work to resolve outstanding issues with the Korea FTA by the time he visits Korea in November, and the President has recently reiterated his goal of doubling exports in five years. Based on these actions, some have suggested that the Administration is now taking a new tone on trade issues. Do you agree with that assessment, and how do you see the status of these FTA's?
- A:** Well, let me just say that we need to get them passed. I think that would be the best thing for our economy. That would be the best message to send to the world, especially our friends, and not just commercially, but in so many different ways, our friends with Colombia, Panama, South Korea, we should treat as friends. Now, the President spoke in his State of the Union speech last winter, several months ago now, that trade creates jobs and that he would like to move these trade agreements along. I haven't seen a great deal of evidence since then, but I want to remain hopeful.
- And certainly if the President would like to take November to announce to South Korea that there's progress, I would certainly look forward to that. But I think that meanwhile, though, the Colombia trade agreement, and Panama, for example, those should be, actually, an easier lift than the South Korea trade agreement, so time will tell, I guess. But I want to be hopeful. But I'm a little skeptical as to some talk and not enough action to date.
- Q:** Well, it's been noted that other countries are moving forward in the meantime with trade agreements with Colombia and other countries. Is the U.S. going to be in a position of having to play catch up with these countries?
- A:** Absolutely. I mean, Australia, they have a cattle industry there that is certainly willing to trade with South Korea, Argentina and other places in South America. And Canada, I know, has just ironed some things out as well. Time is of the essence, and we could lose some market share if we don't act more quickly.

Q: On a separate trade issue, the U.S. and Mexico have been at odds over a NAFTA provision regarding the movement of Mexican trucks into the U.S. As a result of administrative action last year, Mexican trucks have effectively been banned from operating in the U.S., and Mexico has retaliated by imposing some \$2 billion in tariffs on American products, including key agricultural products such as peanuts, onions, strawberries, and the list goes on. How do you square this development with the Administration's goal of increasing exports?

A: Well, the Administration, I think, should be very careful in its application. I know back before the election, there was this talk of renegotiating NAFTA, and I don't think that's the right thing to do. We want to be good players in this whole debate. We want to make sure that the machinery coming across the border is sufficient and that it's safe for our roads, so as long as they meet the requirements, certainly they should have access there, and now is not the time to play games. Certainly we want to uphold, though, the standards of NAFTA so that we can use that to further promote trade.

I know that trade has increased since the passage of NAFTA, and I know that it gets demagogued quite a bit, but the fact is that trade is on the rise because of that, and we just want to make sure that we constantly look for a more level playing field with trade, because over the years it's gotten out of hand to where it is not a level playing field. So there's a lot of room for improvement, but that also shows great opportunity.

Q: Congressman Adrian Smith, thank you for taking a few minutes with me this morning. I think you might be heading back to Nebraska this weekend, and I wish you a safe trip and a good weekend.

A: Well, thank you, sir. Look forward to next time.

Q: Thank you much. Bye-bye.

A: Take care.

[End of recording.]