

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. agricultural exports reached \$60 billion in 1996 up 50 percent since 1990. This increase was made possible by aggressive expansion efforts in overseas markets

"But we cannot stand still," said Alex Jackson, USFGC director of trade relations. "While other countries are negotiating new trade agreements to reduce tariffs, abolish subsidies and offer trade benefits into the next millennium, the United States is lagging behind. That is where fast track comes in."

Agriculture still suffers from the highest level of trade distortions in the world economy. If the United States doesn't continue to participate in forming new trade pacts and writing future trade rules, then producers, processors and exporters are going to be at a competitive disadvantage in the upcoming millennium. Fast track is needed so the United States can address high tariffs, unfair trade practices and subsidies, and pursue opportunities for market-opening trade agree-

ments in Latin America, Asia and elsewhere.

If fast track authority was approved, it would give the United States the credibility it needs to negotiate tough trade deals. "Our partners would then know that any agreement made wouldn't be altered by Congress after the fact," said Jackson. "Congress would vote on the final agreement, but not be able to modify it, and that is the key."

Most countries will not negotiate with the United States unless the President has fast track authority. Every President since Nixon has had fast track authority, but since it expired three years ago, the United States has missed out on more than 20 separate negotiated trade agreements, denying important economic opportunities to businesses and workers alike.

"What we have to remember here is the key issue is trade and we are playing catch-up to agreements we didn't write," said Bill Archer, chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means. Countries all over

the world are negotiating agreements to create regional trading blocs that will grant preferential trading rights to that bloc's members.

The Andean Community countries (formerly the Andean Pact) are negotiating with MERCOSUR to create a commercial integration agreement with zero tariffs on some products and reduced tariffs on others.

"They are calling this agreement the South American Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)," said Jackson. "To gain access to these countries, the United States must enter into negotiations with these trading blocs, but we will be left short without the power of fast track."

In April 1998, negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) will begin at the second Summit of the Americas in Santiago, Chile. Meanwhile, WTO members agreed to begin negotiations on the next phase of agricultural trade liberalization at the end of 1999. These negotiations are the best chance U.S. agriculture has to reduce tariffs, open



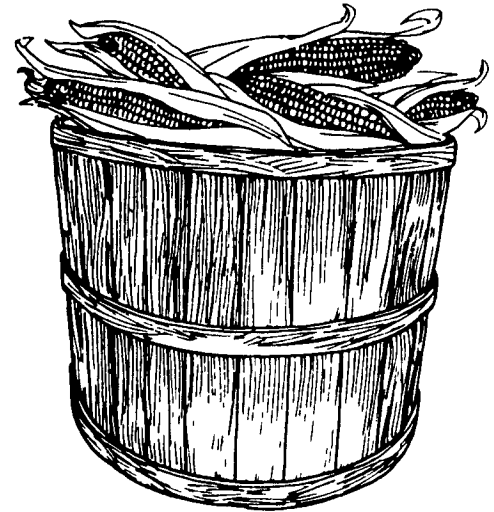
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new markets and delete unfair practices.

"This is the time to act," Jackson said, "Support begins at the grass-roots level. We are asking people to let their

elected officials know about the importance of fast track and why it needs to be approved now. Without it, U.S. agriculture will be at a serious disadvantage."



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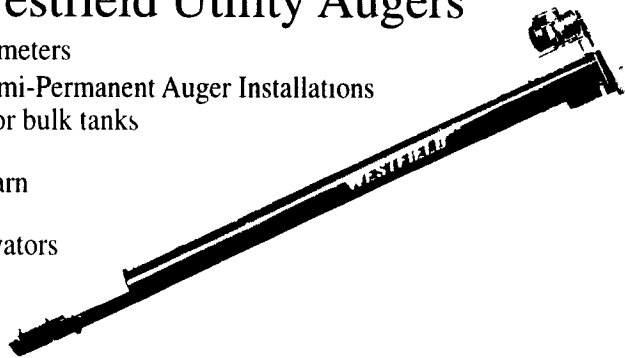
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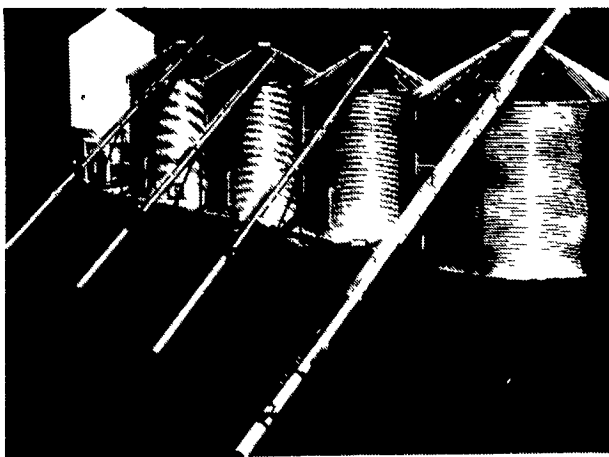
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