

## **Farm Bill Can Aid in International Promotion of U.S. Agricultural Products**

By New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Charles M. Kuperus

Thanks to advances in transportation, communications and technology, international trade is more accessible today than ever before.

While shipping products around the world used to be the sole province of large, multi-national companies with fleets of ships and planes, today's smaller and medium-sized agricultural and food companies have the Internet, shipping services and 24-hour business cycle to aid in their quest to enter the realm of exporters.

As Congress prepares to craft a new Farm Bill, it's worthwhile to have a discussion of the issues involved in accessing world markets and using exports to further increase the viability and profitability of agriculture and its related businesses. New Jersey is committed to working with other states to help shape a Farm Bill that is relevant to all types of farming operations – small and large, those near population centers and those in more rural settings – and which includes flexible programs to provide for increased access to global markets for our producers and processors.

The shrinking of the world through technology helped fuel a 10-percent increase in U.S. agricultural exports last year, totaling \$68.7 billion dollars. With 95 percent of the world's consumers living outside the United States, the markets in Europe, Asia and South America are ripe for U.S. exports to make inroads.

As these foreign markets develop further, opportunities for food exporters, especially those who are innovative and whose products fill "niche" markets, will continue to grow. All of this growth in exports will be aided by the growing number of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) – of which 20 have been created since 2000 – that will offer unprecedented access to international markets.

One example of these opportunities was seen by New Jersey's Certified Clam Co., which attended the 2006 U.S. Food Export Showcase in Chicago. Within an hour of the show's opening, the company had already been approached by a Portuguese representative about exporting clams to that nation. By the show's end, they'd also entered talks with companies from Panama, Turkey, Finland and Iceland.

Our agricultural producers and related food industries can meet these growing export demands because they use the most efficient processes available. Many U.S. companies are leaders in adopting new technologies and in keeping up with ever-changing consumer demands and trends.

Many regions of our country – such as the Northeast – have agricultural and related industries that fit well into this picture. Valued-added products have fueled much of the gains in U.S. exports and help to elevate the value of those exports. For instance, U.S. exports of so-called "consumer-ready foods" increased to a record \$29.3 billion in 2006, an 11.8-percent increase over the previous year.

Another category ripe for exports is seafood. Whether wild-harvested or aquacultured, demand for seafood from U.S. companies is growing. Many of these companies are small, family-owned operations, but all produce a high-value product that contributes greatly to the overall value of exports.

Small companies often have a harder time breaking into the export game than their larger counterparts. That issue can be addressed through organizations such as Food Export USA-Northeast, of which New Jersey is a member. Such organizations use federal, state and industry resources to help small- and mid-sized companies grow sales of agricultural, processed food and seafood products in foreign markets.

These organizations participate in the USDA's Market Access Program (MAP), which helps producers, exporters, companies and trade organizations finance promotional activities for U.S. agricultural products. This program, administered by the Foreign Agricultural Service, includes exporter education, market entry and market promotion.

In the years since its inception in 1974, Food Export USA-Northeast has helped thousands of companies generate hundreds of millions of dollars in export sales. Overall, agricultural exports provide over 900,000 jobs for Americans and make positive contributions to our nation's trade balance.

Clearly, investing in enabling our agricultural producers and food processors to take advantage of growing international markets is worthwhile, and contributes mightily to our nation's economy.

This is why national farm policy should include full funding of the Market Access Program in the 2007 Farm Bill. Agricultural export promotional efforts increase business and employment throughout the U.S. Thus, it is essential that we expand our export promotion efforts.