

138 Food, Ag Groups Urge Senate to Expedite Lighthizer Confirmation

WASHINGTON (April 26, 2017) – A total of 138 food and agriculture trade associations and companies working collectively through the diverse and broad-based U.S. Food and Agriculture Dialogue for Trade today urged the U.S. Senate to expeditiously vote to confirm Robert Lighthizer as U.S. Trade Representative (USTR).

The groups took the action following a 26-0 vote on April 25 by the Senate Finance Committee to recommend Lighthizer's confirmation to the full Senate.

In their letter to the Senate, the organizations cited the central role that the USTR plays under U.S. law in developing and coordinating U.S. international trade policy and leading trade negotiations with other countries. They noted that action on Lighthizer's confirmation is "particularly urgent" given the administration's plans to notify Congress soon of its intent to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The letter, organized as part of the ongoing work of the U.S. Food and Agriculture Dialogue for Trade, emphasized that delays in scheduling a vote on Lighthizer's confirmation risk "imperiling U.S. national interests" by creating a vacuum during which "foreign competitors are ramping up efforts to supplant U.S. leadership and take away U.S. market share while nervous U.S. foreign customers seek out non-U.S. suppliers to meet their import requirements to ensure basic food security for their people."

Confirmation of the USTR is an "essential step" in enabling the U.S. government to put its teams in place to engage in trade negotiations on NAFTA and with Asia-Pacific nations "to further enhance U.S. economic growth and job creation," the groups wrote.

"To enable the United States to reengage on trade to benefit all Americans, including U.S. food and agriculture producers, manufacturers and agribusinesses, it is of utmost importance to confirm (Lighthizer) as USTR immediately," the organizations concluded. Once confirmed, the groups reiterated their desire to work with Lighthizer and other administration officials and Congress to "develop and implement a coherent and effective U.S. trade policy that continues to promote America's food and agriculture producers and exporters."