

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 24, 2012

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus:

As ardent supporters of free trade and expanding opportunities for American business, workers, and farmers, we are often eager to see our trade negotiators spend their time and energy exploring new opportunities for free trade agreements. For decades the United States was a leader in forming international agreements to expand trade. However, much of the world has passed us by in expanding their opportunities through free trade agreements.

We welcomed the news last year that our trade negotiators were discussing the possibility of a trade agreement with the European Union (EU). However, it is not without some trepidation we express support for these working group discussions due to the fact this administration is currently operating without trade promotion authority. As you are well aware, not only does trade promotion authority authorize a “fast-track” for trade agreements, it also allows Congress to clearly set out priorities for trade negotiations and a framework by which our trade negotiators are required to follow.

Since we have not been afforded the opportunity to set our trade priorities through debate and passage of trade promotion authority legislation, we want to express one of our main priorities for any trade agreement this administration pursues – the lowering of trade barriers for American agricultural products. As the Obama administration continues to discuss the possibility of trade agreement negotiations with the EU, our trade negotiators must push for the lowering of barriers EU member states have raised against American agricultural products.

In November, a broad cross-section of agriculture groups sent a letter to Ambassador Kirk expressing support for a trade agreement with the EU and that the agreement contain a comprehensive approach to reducing barriers for agricultural products. As their letter referenced, U.S. farmers face a wide range of barriers from EU nations, from unjustifiable restrictions on production methods for pork, beef, and poultry, to restrictions on GMO crops and seed.

Our trade negotiators must demand of EU officials that barriers to U.S. agricultural products be addressed in any potential trade agreement. To that end, we request you call a hearing of the Senate Finance Committee and invite our trade negotiators to testify regarding their working-group efforts with the EU. It is important we know where the discussions with the EU stand, and what exactly has been discussed regarding barriers to agricultural products, so we can determine for ourselves whether the administration is adequately addressing this key trade priority. We thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Chuck Grassley

Pat Roberts

John Thune

Michael B. Enzi