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For immediate release

N.D.-Colombia Trade Mission Opens Door for Exporters

BISMARCK – Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring says North Dakota’s first trade mission to Colombia in four years shows promise for a long and profitable trade relationship.

“This is the beginning of a new effort to establish a strong trading relationship with the goal of becoming a main supplier of quality products to Colombia,” said Goehring, who returned Sunday, with the North Dakota delegation. “We were able to identify a number of new trade opportunities.”

The North Dakota delegation included Case New Holland, ECHO Bear Cat, JM Grain, Lura Enterprises, Northharvest Bean Growers, RDO Equipment, and representatives of the North Dakota Trade Office (NDTO), the North Dakota Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Commercial Service.

The delegation met with potential buyers in Colombia’s two largest cities, the capital, Bogotá, and Medellin. Companies visited numerous Colombian buyers and distributors selected by Bogotá-based offices of the U.S. Commercial Service, the USDA Foreign Ag Service and Food Export Midwest, including meetings with Colombia’s largest food importers and manufacturers, Nutresa and Exito Group.

“We came out with what I see to be a very desirable distributor for this market,” said David McIntyre of ECHO Bear Cat. “This trade mission certainly opened doors for us.”

“Since the spring of 2012, the U.S. Commercial Service in North Dakota and Bogota, Colombia worked to identify and recruit North Dakota exporters for this trade mission. Our Bogotá staff visited North Dakota twice to conduct one-on-one meetings with companies, which helped pave the way for this Trade Mission and the successes that resulted from over 30 one-on-one matchmaking meetings during the Mission,” said Cameron Werker, Senior Commercial Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota, Colombia. “We welcome all North Dakota exporters with an eye on expanding their international sales to contact our office in North Dakota to further discuss opportunities in Colombia. Colombia is open for business.”

Three participating small businesses, ECHO Bear Cat, JM Grain and Lura Enterprises, were able to use funds from the recently-launched STEP ND program, funded by the Small Business Administration (SBA) and facilitated by NDTO, to offset costs for the mission.

“The goal the Colombia Trade Mission, and all North Dakota trade missions, is to use our expertise to find serious buyers and distributors for North Dakota companies while eliminating many of the difficulties involved in successful international business trips,” said Dean Gorder, executive director of NDTO. “We want to create a situation where companies can spend their time making sales in-country instead of dealing with international barriers. The Colombia Trade Mission was the perfect example of this.”

Trade mission leaders said a major advantage for North Dakota is that no tariff rate quotas have yet been filled under the new U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

“For example, there is currently a un-met need in Colombia for up to 15,600 tons of dry edible beans that can be exported from the U.S. to Colombia with no duty,” Goehring said. “For commercial companies, there has been a significant tariff reduction on equipment typically exported to Colombia. These types of opportunities exist in a number of industries, and Colombians are open to working with North Dakota to fulfill their needs.”

In addition to the newly implemented FTA, North Dakota has a large trade advantage over Colombia’s current trading partner, Argentina, in that it takes 14-15 days to ship product from Argentina ports to Colombian ports and it only takes four to five days from US southern ports to arrive in Colombia.

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