September 5, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
United States Senate  
109 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Conaway  
United States House of Representatives  
2430 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senate  
731 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
United States House of Representatives  
2204 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson,

Thank you for the progress you have made toward passing the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018.

On behalf of the undersigned businesses and associations, we applaud the Senate’s inclusion of Senator Heitkamp’s amendment to allow farmers the ability to use USDA market promotion dollars in Cuba. We urge you to support American agriculture by advancing legislation that will make Cuba a viable market for our products.

Net farm income in 2018 has hit a 12-year low, falling further than during the Great Recession of last decade. This economic strain is felt by everyone in the industry, particularly the thousands of small, family-owned farms in the American heartland. Given this year’s 6.7 percent market decline, we cannot overstate the importance of trade and opening new international markets.

Your support in removing outdated financing barriers on agricultural sales to our island neighbor could significantly strengthen an industry that supports 17 million jobs across the United States, while providing the Cuban people with high-quality, American-grown food. Cuba imports nearly 80 percent of its food to feed a population of 11 million people and upwards of 3 million tourists annually. This requires about $1.8 billion in annual agriculture imports, the majority of which come from the European Union, Latin America, and Vietnam. Hardworking U.S. farmers can and should be Cuba’s number one supplier of commodities like rice, poultry, dairy, soy, wheat, and corn.

Senator Heitkamp’s amendment is part of the Agricultural Export Expansion Act/Cuba Agricultural Exports Act (S.275/HR.525) which would allow U.S. farmers to expand agricultural exports to Cuba by removing restrictions on private financing on food exports to the island. We also support this larger legislative effort, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates would save $690 million over 10 years.
It is imperative that U.S. agribusiness find ways to offset recent losses caused by falling domestic demand, higher prices, and uncertainty in formerly reliable trade relationships. As a broad cross-section of rural America, we urge you to help American farmers and our associated industries by preserving Senator Heitkamp’s amendment in the Agricultural Improvement Act.

We thank you for your hard work and for the progress that both chambers have made in this legislative session, and we look forward to working with Congress and the Administration to sign this legislation into law.

Sincerely,

Hon. Gerald Dial, Alabama Senate (AL)
Grey Redditt, President, Society Mobile - La Habana (AL)
Agricultural Council of Arkansas (AR)
Mark Isbell, Rice Farmer (AR)
Bradley Mannis, Mannco Fertilizer (AR)
Independent Professional Seed Association (AR)
Producers Rice Mill, Inc (AR)
Winrock International (AR)
Elaine Berman, Metro State University of Denver (CO)
Stephen Berman, University of Colorado School of Medicine and Colorado School of Public Health (CO)
Oswald Family Ranch on Rush Creek (CO)
Maria Garcia Berry, CRL Associates (CO)
Center for Democracy in the Americas (DC)
Engage Cuba (DC)
Latin America Working Group (LAWG) (DC)
Washington Office on Latin America (DC)
Jorge Pedraza, LSB Industries (FL)
Cuba Educational Travel (FL)
Dimy Doresca, University of Iowa (IA)
Iowa Corn Growers Association (IA)
Hon. Matt Erpelding, Assistant Minority Leader, Idaho House of Representatives (ID)
KC SmartPort (KS)
Kansas Soybean Association (KS)
Brian Linin, Former Chairman, Kansas Wheat Commission (KS)
Jonathan Blue, Blue Equity (KY)
Catholic Charities of Louisville, Inc. (KY)
Kentucky Poultry Association (KY)
Kevin Berken, Chairman, Louisiana Rice Promotion Council (LA)
International Cuba Society (LA)
Cuba Trade and Travel (LA)
Haynie & Associates (LA)
At the Threshold, LTD (LA)
Kennedy Rice (LA)
CHS Inc. (MN)
Minnesota Grain and Feed Association (MN)
Mississippi Poultry Association (MS)
Vicki Huddleston, U.S. Ambassador, Retired (NM)
Rio Grande Foundation (NM)
Toledo Sister Cities International (OH)
Ohio Corn & Wheat (OH)
Hon. Scott Schertzer, Mayor, City of Marion (OH)
Deno De Ciantis, Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership (PA)
Pamela A. DeLissio, Pennsylvania House of Representatives (PA)
Hon. Michael Diven, Former Member, Pennsylvania House of Representatives (PA)
Hon. Jim Ferlo, Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership (PA)
Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry (PA)
Pittsburgh Airport Area Chamber of Commerce (PA)
Ronald Jardini, Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership (PA)
Donna Oberlander, Pennsylvania House of Representatives (PA)
Hon. Joe Scarnati, President Pro Tempore, Pennsylvania Senate (PA)
Lisa Valenti, Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership (PA)
Judy Wojanis, Chippy LLC (PA)
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PA)
Hon. Stacy Widelitz, Vice-Mayor, City of Oak Hill (TN)
The Chevalier Law Firm (TX)
City of Houston (TX)
Texas Poultry Association (TX)
Texas Rice Producers Legislative Group (TX)
Glaize Apples (VA)
Van Wood, Virginia Commonwealth University (VA)
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VA)