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Developing Countries Support Renewal of U.S. Sugar Program

WASHINGTON, DC—Sugar industries from developing countries in the Caribbean sent a delegation to Washington this week to meet with key Congressional and Administration officials to protect their interest in continued access to the U.S. sugar market and the value of that access under the U.S. sugar program.

Members of the CBI Sugar Group urged Congress to renew the current sugar program in the 2007 farm bill. The CBI Sugar Group consists of the sugar industries of Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago. The tariff rate quota system (TRQ) in the current sugar program gives 38 developing nations, including these Caribbean countries, a guaranteed share of the U.S. sugar market at prices that are fairer and more predictable than prices on the heavily subsidized world market.

The CBI delegation met, among others, with House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN) and USDA Under Secretary Mark Keenum, as well as with the staffs of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, the House Ways and Means Committee, and the Senate Finance Committee.

The U.S. market is particularly important in the wake of changes to the European sugar market, where prices offered for sugar imports from developing countries have been cut by 36 percent. As a result, sugar industries in numerous developing countries have been staggered, and St. Kitts and Nevis has announced that it will cease sugar production after more than 300 years. Other developing sugar industries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, are studying whether they may have to follow suit.

“Weakening America’s sugar policy could force other developing nations out of the sugar business, costing tens of thousands of jobs in countries where no replacement employment is available,” said Paul Ryberg, President of the ISTC. “Congress should not be misled by those who claim that U.S. sugar policy harms developing countries. The opposite is true.”

The United States is currently the world’s second largest sugar importer, importing approximately 1.65 million tons of sugar a year. The members of the ISTC account for roughly 40 percent of the sugar imported into the U.S.

Two new members have recently joined ISTC - Fiji and Malawi – bringing ISTC's current membership to consist of the private sector sugar industries of 15 developing countries: Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Fiji, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Malawi, Mauritius, the Philippines, St. Kitts and Nevis, Swaziland, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zimbabwe.

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