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IN FOCUS

Farm Bill Primer: Trade and Export Promotion Programs

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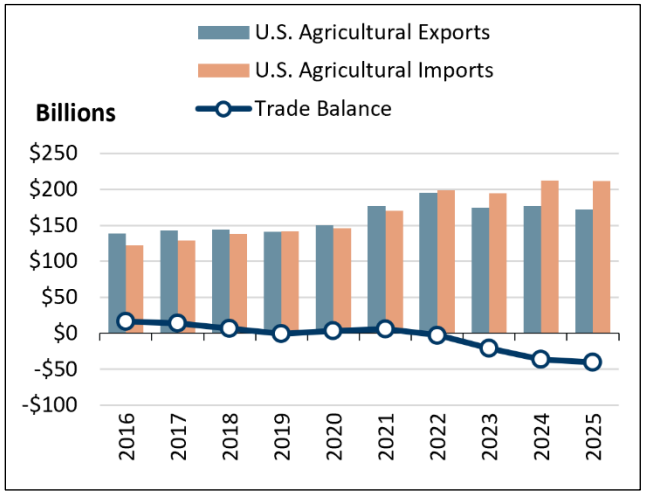
Agricultural exports are significant to farmers and the U.S. economy. With the productivity of U.S. agriculture growing faster than domestic demand, farmers and agriculturally oriented firms rely on export markets to sustain prices and revenue. The trade title of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 farm bill; P.L. 115-334) authorized export market development programs and export credit guarantee programs from FY2019 to FY2023 to expand foreign markets for U.S. farmers and food manufacturers. Subsequent legislation extended the authorizations through FY2026 (P.L. 119-37). These market expansion programs derive their statutory authorities from the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-501), as amended. The trade title of the 2018 farm bill also includes international food assistance programs and international technical assistance and exchange programs and provisions, which are not addressed in this CRS In Focus.

Trade Situation Overview

In 2025, U.S. food and agricultural exports totaled $171.5 billion, and U.S. imports totaled $211.9 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of $40.5 billion (**Figure 1**) according to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) data. Bulk commodities, such as corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton, and rice, are the leading U.S. farm exports. Leading consumer-oriented exports include tree nuts, dairy, meat and poultry, fruits, and vegetables. In 2025, about 50% of U.S. agricultural exports were destined for the top four U.S. export markets: Mexico, Canada, the European Union, and Japan.

Figure 1. Value of U.S. Agricultural Trade, 2016-2025

Figure is interactive in the HTML version of this report



Source: Source: CRS, from USDA's Global Agricultural Trade System data. Data are not adjusted for inflation. Trade balance constructed as imports subtracted from exports.

The U.S. agricultural trade surplus peaked at $40.1 billion in 2011. It has since fallen and was a trade deficit in 2019 and between 2022 and 2025. Many attribute the rise in U.S. food and agricultural imports to increasing domestic demand for imported, consumer-oriented goods such as fruits, vegetables, alcoholic beverages, beef, and coffee products.

Trade Provisions in the Farm Bill

The trade title of a farm bill generally contains reauthorizations and amendments for agricultural export programs and other trade-related provisions.

Export Market Development Programs

Export promotion programs are authorized under a single Agricultural Trade Promotion and Facilitation (ATPF) umbrella program administered by USDA. Programs are authorized to receive mandatory funding of $255 million annually through FY2026, as extended (7 U.S.C. §5623, P.L. 119-37).

- **Market Access Program (MAP)** provides cost-sharing of overseas marketing and promotional activities that help build commercial markets for U.S. agricultural exports (no less than $200 million per year).
- **Foreign Market Development (FMD) Cooperator Program** funds projects that address long-term opportunities to reduce foreign import constraints or expand export growth opportunities (no less than $34.5 million per year).
- **E. (Kika) de la Garza Emerging Markets Program** provides cost-sharing for technical assistance to support generic U.S. agricultural exports (no more than $8 million per year).
- **Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops** funds projects addressing sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and technical trade barriers to U.S. specialty crop exports ($9 million per year).
- **Priority Trade Fund** supports activities to access, develop, maintain, and expand markets for U.S. agricultural exports ($3.5 million per year).

The farm bill authorizes USDA to fund MAP and FMD activities in Cuba, which otherwise would be prohibited (7 U.S.C. §5623(f)(4)).

Export Credit Guarantee Programs

The farm bill authorizes $1 billion in export credit guarantees annually through FY2026, as extended, for exports to emerging markets (7 U.S.C. §5622 note, P.L. 119-37). Additionally, $5.5 billion is available annually with no funding expiration date (7 U.S.C. §5641(b)). Export credit guarantees are carried out under two programs.

- **GSM-102 Program** provides credit guarantees to finance commercial U.S. agricultural exports mainly to developing countries.
- **Facility Guarantee Program** provides payment guarantees to improve or establish agriculture-related facilities in emerging markets.

Under these programs, the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) provides payment guarantees on commercial financing and assumes the risk of default on payments by the foreign purchasers on loans to facilitate U.S. exports.

Other Export-Related Provisions

The farm bill authorizes appropriations for the Biotechnology and Agricultural Trade Program with discretionary funding of $2 million through FY2026, as extended (7 U.S.C. §5679, P.L. 119-37). The program funds grants for public- and private-sector projects that address nontariff regulatory barriers (e.g., SPS) to U.S. agricultural exports.

Administrative Actions

For FY2024 and FY2025, USDA allocated $300 million annually for a new export promotion program called the Regional Agricultural Promotion Program (RAPP). In November 2025, USDA announced $285 million in funding availability for the America First Trade Promotion Program (AFTPP), a new export promotion program that runs through FY2028 and operates under RAPP regulations (7 C.F.R. §1489). AFTPP and RAPP are authorized and funded by the CCC Charter Act (15 U.S.C. §714c(f)).

USDA uses the same CCC authority to fund the Quality Samples Program (QSP), which promotes U.S. agricultural products. QSP is annually funded at $2.5 million.

FY2025 Budget Reconciliation Law

Starting in FY2027, the FY2025 budget reconciliation law (P.L. 119-21) provides USDA $285 million annually from mandatory CCC funding for a supplemental agricultural trade promotion program indefinitely (7 U.S.C. §5623a).

Issues and Options

As Congress considers a next farm bill and issues related to U.S. agricultural trade promotion, it may evaluate, reauthorize, modify, or end existing programs or establish new programs and initiatives. Congress may also evaluate U.S. agricultural trade policy and objectives.

Export Promotion Programs. Critics of export promotion programs claim the programs provide federal support for activities that private firms could otherwise fund. Supporters claim the programs keep U.S. agricultural products competitive overseas, diversify market opportunities, help generate additional farm income, and increase farm and food sector jobs. Some U.S. agricultural trade and producer groups have sought increased funding for export promotion and market development programs.

Trade Policy. Some U.S. government officials and industry stakeholders have expressed interest in addressing certain policies of U.S. trading partners that may be impeding U.S. agricultural exports; others seek to address foreign export and import competition. The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative's (USTR's) annual *National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers* for 2026 highlights a range of tariff and nontariff trade barriers.

Overview of 119th Congress Farm Bill Trade Titles

In the 119th Congress, the trade titles of House-passed H.R. 7567 and Senate committee-reported S. 5526, the 2026 farm bills that both chambers have worked on, address some of the issues mentioned above. Several provisions in these farm bills incorporate aspects of stand-alone bills on export promotion and agricultural trade policy (e.g., H.R. 1086, H.R. 2322/S. 1119, and H.R. 5620).

Both bills would nearly double mandatory CCC funding for ATPF programs beginning in FY2027 for a total of $500 million in the House version and $515 million in the Senate committee version. ATPF funding would increase to $533 million in subsequent years in both versions. Both bills would create an FMD subprogram that would address infrastructure deficiencies in foreign markets that could damage U.S. agricultural exports. The bills would also repeal the trade promotion program established by P.L. 119-21 and repeal a provision prohibiting MAP from assisting the U.S. mink industry (7 U.S.C. §5623 note).

The proposed farm bills have provisions for USDA and USTR to negotiate with foreign governments to ensure the right to use common names for U.S. agricultural and food products in foreign markets that might otherwise be prohibited due to geographical indication protections. The House version would establish an interagency agricultural trade enforcement task force to identify agricultural trade barriers that are "vulnerable to dispute settlement" under trade agreements and to enforce trade agreement violations, with a particular focus on India's agricultural subsidies. Both bills would create an interagency working group to monitor and assess trade-related information on seasonal and perishable fruits and vegetables and coordinate on trade actions and investigations.

The trade titles in both bills also have reporting requirements. For example, both bills require a report from the Government Accountability Office about policy options for USDA to support the competitiveness of U.S. seafood producers. The House version requires two distinct reports from USDA and USTR about the effects from changes or revocation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement and changes to the U.S. tariff-rate quotas on Argentine beef imports. The Senate committee-reported version requires USDA, in coordination with USTR and the U.S. Trade Commission, to submit a report about U.S. agricultural competitiveness.

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