

NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL COUNCIL
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Carmen Suro-Bredie,
Chairman, Trade Policy Staff Committee
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
Washington, D.C.

Request for Comments Concerning Proposed Free Trade Agreement with Republic of Korea

The Northwest Horticultural Council (NHC) submits the following comments to assist in developing negotiating priorities for the proposed U.S.–Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement.

The NHC has two objectives it would like to see the U.S. obtain prior to the implementation of a U.S.–South Korea FTA: 1) That upon implementation of the agreement South Korea grant immediate duty free access to U.S. apples (HTSUS 0808.10.00), pears (HTSUS 0808.20), and cherries (HTSUS 0809.20.00); and 2) That the two countries negotiate reasonable phytosanitary access to South Korea for U.S. apples and pears.

Korea's tariff rate on apples and pears is 45%. The tariff rate on sweet cherries is 24%. Korean producers already enjoy duty-free access to the U.S. market for apples and cherries and only a miniscule tariff on pears.

Exports of Pacific Northwest sweet cherries to Korea have increased over 500% (volume basis) since 2002. In 2005 our region exported \$2.4 million of sweet cherries to South Korea. Eliminating the 24% tariff rate (equates to approximately \$0.75 to \$0.90/lb.) on cherries would be economically significant for the export of this high value fruit.

Of most importance to producers of apples and pears is phytosanitary access. U.S. apples and pears are not allowed entry into South Korea due to unduly restrictive concerns regarding plant pests and disease (e.g., codling moth and fire blight). The NHC believes that the risk from pests of concern to South Korea can be successfully mitigated and commercial shipments of fruit would not pose a problem to that nation's plant health. If the U.S. and Korea attempt to make progress on phytosanitary access issues for select agricultural commodities during these proposed negotiations then we request that our apples and pears be considered on this priority list. A free trade agreement with South Korea is of little use to our apple and pear producers if the U.S. is unable to obtain meaningful access for its fruit.

Sincerely,

NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL COUNCIL

Mark Powers
Vice President

cc. NHC Trustees & Member Secretaries
NHC FTC
Kent Sisson, USDA/FAS/H&TF
Pat Sheikh, USDA/FAS/ITP
Jim Murphy, USTR