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AFBF Calls for Lifting Cuba Travel Ban

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 31, 2009—American Farm Bureau Federation President Bob Stallman joined congressional members today on Capitol Hill to advocate the removal of travel restrictions to Cuba. Stallman spoke in support of S. 428, sponsored by Sens. Byron Dorgan (D- N.D.), Michael Enzi (R-Wyo.), Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), which opens Cuba to travel by U.S. citizens and gives the U.S. president authority to restrict travel to Cuba only in times of war or imminent danger.

“This legislation is an important step in easing trade restrictions on Cuba,” Stallman said. “Allowing unrestricted travel to Cuba will increase U.S. agricultural sales and boost tourism.”

U.S. agricultural sales to Cuba have been on average \$400 million annually since 2000, with top commodity sales including poultry, wheat, soybeans, rice and dairy. With passage of S. 428, AFBF expects sales to increase.

In addition, language in the omnibus appropriations bill further aids U.S. agriculture by allowing travel on a general license for those making agricultural sales to Cuba rather than the specific license currently needed. This would ease delays that significantly impact the ability to transact commercial sales with Cuba, which in some cases, have been lost to U.S. competitors because of the restriction.

Other priorities for AFBF in regard to Cuba include commercially defining “cash payments in advance” as intended by Congress in the 2000 Trade Sanctions and

Reform Act; allowing the country to directly wire payment to U.S. banks instead of going through a third-country bank as it does now; and issuing visas for Cuban inspectors to travel to the U.S. to meet with suppliers, inspect facilities and verify procedures and standards associated with the sale of U.S. food and agricultural exports to Cuba.