



September 11, 2009

Ms. Gloria Blue
Executive Secretary
Trade Policy Staff Committee
Office of the United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20508

Re: Request for Comments Concerning Free Trade Agreement with Colombia; Docket No: USTR-2009-0021-

Dear Ms. Blue:

The American Meat Institute (AMI) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding the passage of the U.S.- Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. AMI is the nation's oldest and largest trade association representing packers and processors of beef, pork, lamb, veal, turkey, and processed meat products and AMI member companies account for more than 95 percent of United States output of these products.

AMI supports quick passage of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. As the United States' 10th largest trading partner worldwide in agricultural and livestock products, Colombia is an important market for U.S. beef and beef variety meat exports. In that regard, the U.S.- Colombia TPA not only provides an opportunity to level the playing field, but it also provides a significant opportunity to expand U.S. beef and beef variety meat sales to the Colombian market.

As other countries successfully negotiate similar agreements with Colombia, the U.S.-Colombia TPA will help the U.S. agriculture industry sustain a competitive edge. With 96 percent of the world's population living outside U.S. borders, we as a global competitor must look abroad to generate new market opportunities and expand existing ones with meaningful market access.

In May 2003, on the verge of launching FTA negotiations with the United States, the Colombian government raised its 20 percent applied tariff on U.S. beef to the maximum allowed (bound) tariff of 80 percent (70 percent for some variety meats). Colombia still maintains this tariff level on U.S. beef imports today, making it one of the highest tariffs U.S. beef faces anywhere in the world. Once entered into force, this agreement immediately provides duty free access for high quality U.S. beef; reduces tariffs on all other beef and beef products over 10 years; and for the first time ever, puts the U.S. on a competitive footing with the beef Colombia imports from other

countries. In 2008, the U.S. exported only 461 metric tons of beef and beef variety meats to Colombia worth \$800,000. The 80 percent tariffs make U.S. beef uncompetitive.

Just as important, this agreement provides assurances for a stable export market through plant inspection equivalency. It also fully reopens the Colombian market to U.S. beef by assuring that Colombia adheres to the World Organization for Animal Health guidelines related to BSE. In an official side letter, Colombia made written commitment to resume imports of all U.S. beef and beef products by no later than October 31, 2006, and agreed that all federally inspected U.S. establishments are eligible to export into Colombia. But until the U.S.-Colombia TPA is passed and implemented, U.S. beef exports will continue to face tariffs of up to 80 percent, making it impossible to compete in this growing market.

In addition to immediate duty-free access for U.S. Prime and Choice beef, other beef products within certain tariff rate quotas (TRQs) will enjoy considerable duty-free access on day one of this agreement.

AMI continues to support this trade agreement because the Colombian market holds opportunities to expand our U.S. beef and beef product exports. Once fully implemented the U.S.-Colombia TPA would provide an estimated \$700 million in gains each year for American agriculture.

Given today's declining economic environment, AMI feels strongly that the U.S.-Colombia TPA is a solid opportunity for the U.S. to create jobs, strengthen our economy and access growing new markets for the agriculture industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Patrick Boyle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

J. Patrick Boyle
President and CEO
American Meat Institute