September 23, 2020

The Honorable Robert Lighthizer  
U.S. Trade Representative  
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative  
600 17th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Lighthizer,

The undersigned organizations appreciate the value and benefits of the United States involvement in the World Trade Organization (WTO). We support effective reform in this critical international body to enhance the ability of American agriculture to access foreign markets.

There is no doubt that the Uruguay Round, along with many other rounds, provided a more stable world trading environment for U.S. agriculture.

In the WTO’s first two decades overall trade in goods has nearly quadrupled, while WTO members’ import tariffs have declined by an average of 15 percent. Over half of world trade is now tariff-free. The WTO affords U.S. agriculture producers and exporters most-favored nation (MFN) treatment in 163 countries, representing over 80 percent of the global economy. The WTO provides rules to guard against arbitrary use of technical regulations or standards to block imports, such as actions associated with sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures that lack a clear basis in science and are protectionist in intent.

With more than twenty percent of overall agricultural production in the United States destined for foreign markets, U.S. agriculture is heavily dependent on exports. The existing WTO rules and the day-to-day work of its committees and secretariat to provide transparency and accountability from its Members remains critical to future export growth, for America’s farmers and ranchers, and the millions of American jobs – most of them off-the-farm – that are linked to and dependent upon U.S. agriculture.

While the WTO has been beneficial for U.S. agriculture, its rules have not kept pace with changes in the global economy, and improvement is needed to hold members accountable and improve the organizations’ governance. We appreciate and support efforts to provide needed reforms.

The present transition in WTO leadership is strongly linked to the success of WTO reform, and the opportunity to reinvigorate its negotiating function. Choosing a Director General with the ability to facilitate these reforms should be an overriding consideration in the selection of the next WTO Director General. We note other essential traits and leadership abilities critical to the evolution and success of the WTO moving forward:

• Proactive leadership of the WTO and advocate for rules-based trading system;
• Vision for WTO reform and resiliency in the future;
• Adept at navigating across disparate member country positions and demonstrated ability to build coalitions;
• Balance of political and management experience and acumen;
• Ability to explore creative solutions and flexible thinking; and
• An appreciation of the complexities of agriculture and food trade structures and global supply chains.

Today’s economic adversity in rural America underscores the importance of constructive engagement in needed WTO reform. The implementation of U.S. supported agreements through the WTO remains necessary to achieve progress on a wide variety of international agricultural trade concerns. American agriculture’s future continues to lie in expanding access to foreign markets and eliminating barriers to our exports.

Continued U.S. membership and active participation will help ensure that necessary reforms are undertaken, and that the WTO will continue to play an important and effective role in economic development of the United States and our trading partners. As long as exports are important to U.S. agriculture, WTO membership will be essential as well.

Sincerely,

American Dairy Products Institute
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Potato Trade Alliance
American Seed Trade Association
American Soybean Association
Animal Health Institute
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
BelGioioso Cheese, Inc.
Biotechnology Innovation Organization
Cargill
Commercial Creamery Co
Corn Refiners Association
Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative
Farmers for Free Trade
FMI - the Food Industry Association
Foremost Farms USA
Fresh Produce Association of the Americas
Hop Growers of America
International Dairy Foods Association
International Ingredient Corporation
KCoe Isom, LLP
Leather & Hide Council of America
National Aquaculture Association
National Association of Egg Farmers

National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Growers Association
National Confectioners Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Grain and Feed Association
National Milk Producers Federation
National Oilseed Processors Association
National Pasta Association
National Potato Council
National Retail Federation
National Sunflower Association
National Turkey Federation
Nebraska Grain and Feed Association
North American Export Grain Association Inc
North American Meat Institute
North American Millers' Association
North American Renderers Association
Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance
Northwest Horticultural Council
Northwest Horticultural Council
Produce Marketing Association
Roquette
Sartori Company          U.S. Wheat Associates
Sweetener Users Association      United Fresh Produce Association
Syngenta            US Dry Bean Council
The Hershey Company       USA Rice Federation
U.S. Apple Association      WineAmerica
U.S. Canola Association      World Perspectives, Inc.
U.S. Dairy Export Council

Cc:    Honorable Chuck Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
       Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member, Senate Finance Committee
       Honorable Richard Neal, Chairman, House Ways and Means Committee
       Honorable Kevin Brady, Ranking Member, House Ways and Means Committee
       Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
       Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
       Honorable Collin Peterson, Chairman, House Agriculture Committee
       Honorable K. Michael Conaway, Ranking Member, House Agriculture Committee