

*Letter from Former Secretaries of Agriculture  
To Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate*

To Members of Congress:

In the near future you will be voting on several new bilateral free trade agreements, one of which is the Peru Trade Promotion Agreement (PTPA). As you are no doubt aware, the vast majority of U.S. farmers and ranchers support this Agreement. They recognize that it is the only mechanism by which the playing field in our agricultural trade relationship with Peru can truly be leveled.

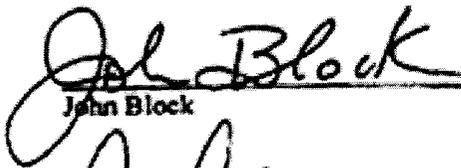
As former secretaries of agriculture, we fully understand the importance of this and other trade agreements to the economic health of American agriculture. Despite occasional bumps in the road, trade has been crucial to the prosperity of rural America for several decades. Our food and agricultural exports have grown to all-time records, due, almost entirely, to prior trade agreements. Indeed, it is difficult to name an agricultural product our farmers sell in the world market that has not benefited from earlier trade agreements. The U.S. cannot stand by complacently, however, while our competitors are negotiating preferential trade deals around the globe, or we will soon see an erosion of our hard-won access to key markets.

As former cabinet members, we also understand the larger geopolitical issues at stake for our nation. The United States must not turn its back on the opportunity the PTPA and the other trade agreements offer to strengthen economic and political ties with Peru and other countries in the Hemisphere. The Peruvian government has already ratified the Agreement, after complying with several changes requested by Congress, and its rejection now would deal a major blow to U.S. standing in Peru, and in the region.

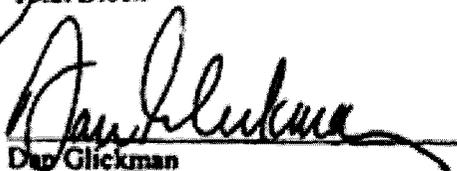
Certainly, we could not support an agreement that did not benefit U.S. interests. The PTPA, once implemented, will achieve a more balanced bilateral relationship in the agricultural sector. Currently, 98 percent of Peru's agricultural exports benefit from tariff-free access to the U.S. market. Most U.S. farm and food exports to Peru, on the other hand, are subject to high tariffs and other non-tariff restrictions.

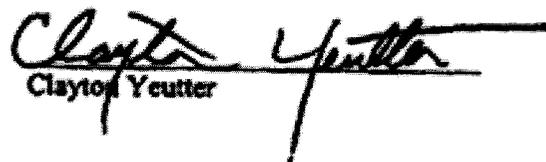
Nor could we support an agreement that would devastate Peru's agriculture. The PTPA recognizes the need for special transition measures for sensitive Peruvian products. While over two-thirds of Peru's tariffs on farm imports from the U.S. will be eliminated immediately upon entry into force of the Agreement, Peru will be able to retain and gradually phase down tariffs on import-sensitive products over 15 years and, in some cases, over 17 years. Thus, the Agreement should not result in a surge of imports at the expense of Peruvian producers.

We strongly support the Peru Trade Promotion Agreement and urge you to vote in favor of its implementing legislation.

  
John Block

  
Bob Bergland

  
Dan Glickman

  
Clayton Yeutter