

## **Stimulate jobs for North Carolina: End the embargo against Cuba**

North Carolina's unemployment rate remains stubbornly above 9%. In such times, our politicians must pursue all economic options to put people back to work. The embargo against Cuba denies NC businesses and farmers access to a major, proximate market and denies NC consumers access to highly desirable imports. Only 727 nautical miles separate our port at Wilmington from Havana, Cuba. Havana lies only about 900 air miles from Raleigh. Given the proximity as well as the diversity of our state economy, we are natural trading partners with Cuba.

Despite the embargo, US exports to Cuba in 2011 reached \$363 million, leaving enormous room to market expansion. The island's 11 million people need food, industrial products, and infrastructural improvements, all areas ripe for NC involvement. NC exported some \$2.7 billion in products in 2011; we could do much more! Cuba needs many of our most important exports. Many of NC's top 25 exports would find a ready market in Cuba.

**Industrial:** Chemical wood pulp, soda, cotton and synthetic yarns, medicines, tractor trailers, auto parts [diesel and standard], semi-conductors, optical fibers, electric plugs and sockets, and acrylic polymers.

**Agricultural:** Cuba has always been a net importer of food. North Carolina pork and chicken, both top 25 exports, figure prominently in the Cuban diet. Cuba could also use our grains, soybeans, corn (animal and human consumption), and foodstuffs, including protein-rich peanuts, winter wheat, wine, livestock and dairy products (turkey, beef, eggs, milk and milk products).

Many other NC foodstuffs could also be exported, including sweet potatoes, cucumbers (fresh market and for pickles), lima beans, turnip greens, collard greens, mustard greens, strawberries, bell peppers, blueberries, peppers, snap beans, cabbage, eggplant, watermelons, pecans, peaches, squash, apples, sweet corn, tomatoes, and grapes. In terms of aquaculture, fresh or frozen NC trout, catfish, blue crabs, clams, flounder, crayfish, and shrimp would add welcome variety to the Cuban diet. Menhaden serve as an important source of fish oil, fishmeal, and other products.

NC expertise and materials in the fields of computers and technology, automotive parts, agronomy, medicine, construction, and many other fields would also be in high demand, owing to Cuba's need to upgrade its aged infrastructure. Given their mutual expertise with tobacco, NC and Cuban producers would find many areas of cooperation. Cuba has developed considerable expertise in organic farming, permaculture, medical research, and appropriate technologies that could benefit NC where labs and equipment could speed collaborative research.

Currently Taiwan, Russia, Italy, India, United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia rank among NC's top 25 trading partners. Shipping costs alone make Cuba a more desirable and profitable destination.

In return for its exports, NC could import delicious organically grown fruits, including bananas, papaya, mango, and plantains. Cuba produces many nutritious fruits largely unknown in the US, such as mamoncillos, brown níspero, mamey, cherimoya, guanábana, granadas (small pomegranates), ciruela china (star fruit), and caimito (star apple). I visited Cuba in June with a

delegation sponsored by Witness for Peace. We did indeed witness great needs and creative efforts at food production there.

Cuba is a major nickel exporter, a valuable industrial raw material. Other Cuban exports include cobalt, sugar, tobacco, fish, medical products, citrus, and very good coffee. Freed from the embargo, the Cuban economy could rapidly diversify and expand, given its status as the largest island of the Caribbean. The embargo seriously handicaps North Carolina's ability to compete in today's global marketplace and is deters job growth in the state.

One might object to trade with Cuba on the basis that it is not a democratic state. Fifty years of embargo has failed to bring about regime change in Cuba. Consider the political shortcomings and checkered history of many of our current trading partners. Trade and broader engagement have long been demonstrated as more effective at promoting democratic change than rigid isolation. Such engagement facilitated the fall of the Soviet Union and is also the logic behind our normalized relations with Vietnam, where tens of thousands of American lives were lost. Obsolete and ineffective political shackles should not impede today's economic production. North Carolina cannot afford to put narrow, archaic ideology ahead of jobs and economic development.

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**Information sources:**

- <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/state/data/nc.html>
- <http://www.ncagr.gov/stats/general/commodities.htm>
- [http://www.netstate.com/economy/nc\\_economy.htm](http://www.netstate.com/economy/nc_economy.htm)
- <http://www.businessnc.com/articles/2009-02/>
- <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/product/enduse/exports/c2390.html>
- <http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/load/tropicalfruits/msg0617170818069.html?>



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