



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**  
ANDY GIPSON  
COMMISSIONER

## Column

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**Highlighting Mississippi Products on the World Stage**  
**By: Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson**

We all depend on the American farmer for survival. We are blessed to live in Mississippi with a strong agricultural economy where our farmers produced a record \$9.7 billion in agricultural and forest products last year. While we continue to see an increase in local demand for agricultural products, access to global markets remains important for the growth of our state's largest industry, especially given that 96 percent of the world's population lives outside of the United States. In Mississippi, about one out of every three acres of production is bound for international markets which are critical for Mississippi farmers, ranchers, landowners, and for Mississippi's economy.

Last week, I promoted Mississippi's agricultural, food, and forest products in the Dutch, Scandinavian, and surrounding markets in Europe. It was my honor to represent Mississippi in the first USDA Agribusiness Trade Mission in the Netherlands led by USDA Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs Alexis M. Taylor. We were joined by commissioners and secretaries of agriculture representing three other states, along with U.S. agribusinesses and farm organizations including the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation.

We met with key Dutch government officials and industry groups to discuss expanding economic partnerships between the U.S. and the Netherlands and markets throughout Europe. One highlight was the visit to the Port of Rotterdam, Europe's largest seaport. A variety of agricultural and forest products from Mississippi are shipped through the Port of Rotterdam including sustainable wood pellets for fuel from the Port of Pascagoula. Year-to-date Mississippi shipped more than six times the amount of wood pellets to the Netherlands as the entire year of 2022, due in part to increasing European demand for wood pellet fuel because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Dutch and Northern European importers, retailers, and consumers recognize U.S. agricultural, food, and forest products for quality, reliability, and sustainability. The Netherlands is already an important U.S. trading partner, and I foresee the Netherlands increasing as a trading partner for the State of Mississippi. Some specific products of interest are forest products, sweet potatoes, soybeans, beef, and poultry.

While the Netherlands is a small country, it is the largest importer within the European Union and considered the gateway for U.S. products. The top U.S. agricultural import into the Netherlands is sweet potatoes, and I was thrilled to learn some of the sweet potatoes in their retail markets were grown right here in Mississippi. Mississippi is the third-largest sweet potato producing state in the country, and we have an opportunity to expand that market through exports.

Europe craves sustainable forest products for fuel and construction; but they oppose reduction of forests for development or other agricultural purposes. For us in Mississippi, sustainability is part of the business model. For each tree harvested in Mississippi, we replant at least three trees on average. We have more forested land today than forty years ago. We thin our forests to keep them healthy, and the products from thinning and harvesting our timber do not result in the loss of any forest acres. We're seeing export increases in part due to our sound forest management. In 2022, Mississippi only exported \$1.18 million of total agricultural products (mostly forest products) to the Netherlands. In the first two months of 2023 alone, Mississippi has already exported more than \$6 million of forest products to the Netherlands. We have an overabundance of southern yellow pine and hardwoods in Mississippi and this market will continue expansion.

I look forward to continuing our efforts and strengthening the relationships built during this trade mission for Mississippi's agricultural, food, and forest products. The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is partnering with the Southern US Trade Association (SUSTA) to host an inbound trade mission for forest products in 2024. Vetted, qualified buyers from multiple countries will visit Mississippi to learn about our timber industry and conduct business-to-business meeting with producers. This follows the success of MDAC's 2022 Mississippi Timber International Trade Mission with buyers from Mexico, Dominican Republic, Great Britain, Spain, and Vietnam which resulted in sales of \$7 million the week of the event.

Mississippi's strong, diverse agriculture industry with proximity to ports on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, the Mississippi River, and the Gulf of Mexico create export opportunities for our producers. I encourage our farmers, food companies, and agribusinesses interested in new international markets to contact our office. Through our association with SUSTA, there are opportunities for qualified companies to participate in trade missions, trade shows, and product promotions. Just as we actively promote our products locally through the Genuine MS® program, we will continue to proudly highlight Mississippi's abundant and sustainable agricultural, food, and forest products on the world stage.

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