



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

# Opinion Column

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## **Celebrating Mississippi's Agricultural Trade: Feeding the World and Supporting Local Communities**

By Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson

Agriculture is the backbone of Mississippi's economy and the lifeblood of many of our small, rural communities. Our farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses produce a vast array of food and forestry products. They are not just providing food, fiber, shelter and fuel for consumption in the U.S.; they are providing these life sustaining necessities to consumers across the world. Mississippi exports a wide range of agricultural commodities and value-added products abroad. Last year, more than \$1 billion of agricultural and forestry products were exported from the state of Mississippi to 90 countries.

I believe this is worthy of celebrating, and this week, we are taking time to celebrate agriculture trade and raise awareness of its significance. Thanks to Governor Reeves for proclaiming March 19, 2025, as Agriculture Trade Day in Mississippi. Agriculture Trade Day was initiated to recognize the importance of agricultural trade and the contributions Mississippi's ag exports make to the state's economy.

Agriculture is a global industry. One of every three acres of production is bound for international markets. Our farmers rely on access to international markets for diversified market opportunities to reduce risks of domestic market fluctuations, to remain competitive in the global marketplace, and to maintain prices impacted by supply and demand, all while contributing to global food security.

While domestic markets are essential markets for farmers and ranchers, we must continue to look abroad to explore and expand market opportunities. Nearly 96 percent of the world's consumers live outside of the U.S., and to our advantage, U.S. products are known world-wide for their quality and for being safe due to the strenuous food safety protocols U.S. food producers must meet.

Whether it's transporting Mississippi utility poles to Mexico or cotton to Pakistan, the value of each shipment far exceeds the dollar amount of the transported goods. A host of people are involved in getting a product to its destination along with the farmers and producers – scientists, processors, shippers, trucking companies and retailers. More trade opportunities equate to more job opportunities. USDA estimates that every \$1 billion of exports creates 7,550 jobs.

Mississippi's prime location and proximity to ports on the Gulf of America, the Mississippi River and the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, as well as access to rail, air and highways gives us an advantage for shipping our top agricultural exports including cotton, forest products, poultry meat and products, feeds and fodders and seafood products across the world to our top trading partners, which are Vietnam, Mexico, Pakistan, Canada, Japan and China. We also send products to many South American, European and Middle Eastern countries and Australia.

While we continue to see an increase in local demand for agricultural products, access to global markets remains important for the growth of agriculture. The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) is dedicated to exploring and expanding markets for our agricultural products. Establishing trade relationships is key in doing business in international markets. I have participated in several trade missions including official USDA Agribusiness Trade Missions to India and the Netherlands to learn about new potential markets and to promote Mississippi products such as poultry, pecans, blueberries, sweet potatoes and forestry products. Next month, I will be traveling to Panama for an official trade mission with other Commissioners, Secretaries and Directors of Agriculture through the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

MDAC collaborates with the Southern U.S. Trade Association (SUSTA) to help farmers and small agribusinesses promote their value-added food and agricultural products to foreign markets through trade shows, trade missions and other export assistance. Through our collaboration with SUSTA, we have opened new markets for our second largest agriculture sector, forestry. MDAC has hosted three international inbound trade missions, bringing buyers from nine countries to Mississippi to learn more about the wood products available from Mississippi and to meet with our wood product providers. These missions generated an estimated \$12 million in sales shortly following the missions.

I encourage our farmers and producers, food companies and agribusinesses interested in new international markets to contact our office. Opportunities are available for qualified companies to participate in trade missions, trade shows and product promotions through SUSTA. Just as we actively promote our products locally through the Genuine MS® program, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is proud to promote Mississippi's abundant and sustainable agricultural, food and forest products.

We are proud to highlight Mississippi Ag Trade Day and the hard work of our farmers and producers. Let's continue to support and invest in the industry that keeps Mississippi growing!

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**Photo Attached:**

