

Port Attends Conference on Trade with Cuba

In late January and early February, the Port of Galveston was a sponsor for the U.S. Agricultural/Wood Products Sales to Cuba Conference held in Cancun, Mexico. Captain John G. Peterlin III, Senior Managing Director of Marketing Services, represented the Port of Galveston at the conference and at an Agricultural Product Trade Assessment Trip to Cuba organized in cooperation with Americans for Humanitarian Aid with Cuba.

“There is a present and a future large market for agricultural trade with Cuba,” stated Peterlin. “The Port of Galveston wants to position itself to handle cargoes grown in the U.S. and shipped to Cuba. The Port already has a relationship with our tenant ADM/Farmland who recently sold grain to the state-owned company that buys grain and food products for Cuba.

“Right now agricultural commodities are one of the few products licensed by the U.S. government for sale to Cuba,” added Peterlin. “The goal of our recent effort is to raise the awareness of the Port of Galveston with the Cuban government and the state-owned companies that purchase food and grain for consumption in their country.”

The conference was heavily attended with over 180 participants including sixteen members of the Cuban delegation. Among the delegates were the Minister of Foreign Trade, the Director of the Cuban North American Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Ambassador and Chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, D.C., the Director of Cuba’s North American Ministry of Foreign Relations, the President of ALIMPORT (the Cuban state-owned company responsible for the purchase and importation of all food and agricultural products) and the Director of the Cuban Port Association, Cuban Ministry of Transportation. Also among the attendees were several members of the U.S. Congress, two from the House of Representatives and one from the Senate, along with several senior congressional staffers from both Houses of Congress and former Senator Paul Simon of Illinois, now Director of the Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University. Kansas Lt. Governor Gary Sherrer also attended and acted as a panel speaker.

This conference was the first time that members of the U.S. Congress, Senior Cuban officials and members of the U.S. agricultural community had been able to come together in one place to address the issue of U.S. – Cuban trade.

The Port of Galveston was one of only eighteen sponsors for this significant conference and one of only two ports that took a sponsorship role.

“The conference was also sponsored by the Texas Farm Bureau. We were one of only two ports sponsoring the event. There were no other ports in the state of Texas that availed themselves of this opportunity,” concluded Peterlin. “As trade begins to open between our two countries, we hope to expand upon the relationships that we are now building.”

According to an October 2001 study undertaken by Texas A&M University under contract with The Cuba Policy Foundation, the State of Texas ranks fifth on the list of states most likely to benefit most from the opening of trade between the U.S. and Cuba. Exports from the

agricultural, fishery and forest products sectors forecast at over \$53 million and employment projections reach over 1,400 new jobs in the state related to that trade.