

# Despite volatility, optimism reigns at USMEF conference in Indianapolis

Although the U.S. red meat industry faces significant obstacles in the international marketplace, demand remains robust in many key destinations where customers crave the quality and consistency of U.S. pork, beef and lamb. This was the prevailing message delivered by U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) President and CEO Dan Halstrom at the USMEF Strategic Planning Conference, which opened last week in Indianapolis.

**I**ndianapolis (USA). Halstrom noted that pork exports are modestly below last year's record pace, but the gap stems mostly from a period early this year when China's retaliatory tariffs escalated and the U.S. industry faced uncertainty about plant eligibility. Although export data is only available through July due to the government shutdown, pork shipments are on record pace to leading market Mexico, as well as to Central America and Colombia.

Beef exports have been hit harder by barriers in China, where U.S. beef not only faces retaliatory tariffs, but also unwarranted plant delistings and China's failure to renew registrations for the vast majority of U.S. beef plants and cold storage facilities.

Halstrom emphasized that fully reopening the world's largest beef

import market to U.S. beef will require several actions on China's part, and the lockout could extend into next year.

"This is obviously a political card that's being held by the China side," Halstrom said.

"One thing I'm very confident in is that [the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative] is well aware of our position, well aware of what's involved, and very well-informed. I think they'll get it worked out eventually, I just can't tell you when – no one can".

USMEF Chair Steve Hanson, a rancher and cattle feeder from southwestern Nebraska, welcomes USMEF members to Indianapolis.

While ongoing negotiations with several trading partners may lead to new opportunities for U.S. red meat, especially in Southeast

Asia, Halstrom stressed that protecting and defending existing free trade agreements is an urgent priority.

He noted that over the past decade, red meat exports to FTA partner countries have expanded by more than 30%, and exports to these destinations now account for 76% of total shipments.

## USMEF PRESIDENT AND CEO DAN HALSTROM UPDATES MEMBERS ON EXPORT RESULTS AND TRADE OBSTACLES

Invoking the Paul Harvey quote, "In times like these, it helps to recall that there have always been times like these," Halstrom reminded USMEF members that the industry has endured tremendous trade setbacks in the past – citing examples such as widespre-



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USMEF President and CEO Dan Halstrom updates members on export results and trade obstacles



Keynote Speaker Jan Lambregts, head of RaboResearch Global Economics & Markets

ad market closures due to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and plunging consumer confidence and buying power in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

“Remember that we overcame all those obstacles,” Halstrom said. “I believe, with the knowledge in this room, and with continued cooperation and collaboration, we can overcome anything.” Following Halstrom’s remarks, keynote speaker Jan Lambregts, head of RaboResearch Global Economics & Markets, offered a broad overview of the global economic situation and how it has been impacted by various economic policies embra-

ced by the United States, China, the European Union and Russia.

Lambregts delivered insights into recent geopolitical developments and international trade policy through the perspective of a high-stakes poker game. In examining “who holds the cards,” his presentation discussed the macro strategies of the world’s economic and political powers, with a particular emphasis on the complexities of the U.S.-China trade relationship. “I’m not quite sure if you will like this news, but I don’t think there will be a comprehensive deal coming soon between China and the United States”,

Lambregts said. Keynote Speaker Jan Lambregts, head of RaboResearch Global Economics & Markets. “What the U.S. is demanding is access to Chinese markets. What China will never give is access to the Chinese market because that’s not how they’ve been winning in trade during the past 30-40 years.”

Lambregts says that while the U.S. is currently working to isolate China, both countries are playing for time. China has been cut off from high-end semiconductors, which he called “the lifeline of the 21st century,” and needs time to develop its own semiconductor sector. Similarly, the U.S. needs time to build its rare earths capacity, including development of extraction and processing capabilities.

“In the meantime, the U.S. is basically sending all its allies the same message:

What was previously free defense now must be paid for, because we (the U.S.) need to be compensated. And by the way, if you want to trade with China, there are conditions now”, said Lambregts. Lambregts also addressed U.S. financial support for Argentina, which critics argue could harm U.S. exports, particularly of soybeans and other agricultural products. “It was a mismanaged move, I would say,” Lambregts explained. “The Trump administration considers (Argentine President Javier) Milei a U.S. ally, and he wanted Milei to do well in the elections. But this deal had a little bit of a hasty feel to it, and now you see unintended consequences”. ■



The U.S. Meat Export Federation concluded its Strategic Planning Conference with election of its new officers. Chairing USMEF for the 2025-26 term is Jay Theiler, executive vice president of corporate affairs for Agri Beef Company, based in Boise, Idaho



USMEF; Strategic Planning Conference in Indianapolis, USA