

Farmers rally in Pasco to support trade deal. Many hope to rebuild after retaliatory tariffs

BY WENDY CULVERWELL, July 24, 2019 12:59 AM

Farmers for Free Trade makes Pasco stop

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Sunnyside, headlines the Pasco stop of the Farmers for Free Trade national tour promoting the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. By [Bob Brawdy](#)

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Sunnyside, joined farmers and their supporters in Pasco on Monday to encourage Congress to ratify the [United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement](#), aka the new NAFTA.

President Donald Trump, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and then-Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto signed the deal last fall providing for mostly tariff-free trade.

Mexico has ratified the deal, known informally as USMCA. It has been introduced in Canada but no vote has been scheduled in the U.S. House.

Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi convened a committee to review the agreement and sort out concerns about enforcement of labor rules in Mexico and some pharmaceutical issues. The speaker [recently indicated her desire to see it pass](#).

Newhouse ready to vote

Newhouse, R-Sunnyside, praised Pelosi's approach during his Pasco stop, but said Republicans are ready to vote now. He believes it would pass in the Democrat-led house.

Monday's rally in Pasco comes [against a backdrop of concern](#) that if the U.S. fails to ratify the deal, it could take years to strike a new one to the detriment of farmers who rely on foreign markets to sell the apples, potatoes, cherries, wheat, hops and other crops grown here.

"We have a lot of trade battles going on," said Damon Filan, manager of Tri-Cities Grain, whose operation at the confluence of the Snake and Columbia rivers provided a picturesque backdrop for the gathering.

A barge terminal and trains loaded with ag products provided useful optics that drove home the importance of ag to the Mid-Columbia.



Washington exports more than 300 crops and products, making it the most trade-dependent state in the union. File *Tri-City Herald*

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Filan said grain farmers are suffering and need the stability an agreement will provide.

“We don’t like political volatility,” he said.

Trade group hits the road

Time is of the essence, Newhouse agreed.

That’s the kind of support Farmers for Free Trade is trying to build in Congress.

“Our clients depend every day on trade,” said Brian Kuehl, co-executive director for Farmers for Free Trade, a bipartisan nonprofit that formed in 2017 to provide an agricultural view to trade talks.

With Congress on recess, the group took its message on the road.

It dolled up a motorhome with pro-USMCA messages and hit the road. It has covered 15,000 miles in 20 states, persevering through 70-mph winds and tornado threats in the Midwest and a blown tire in Oregon.

Ratifying the agreement with Mexico and Canada will pave the way to strike bilateral agreements with Japan, China and other important partners, supporters say.

Washington exports up to 90 percent of the wheat it produces, said Michelle Henning, executive director of the Association of Washington Wheat Growers, an advocacy organization.

“It’s critical to show we can make trade agreements with our neighbors,” she said.

Advocate say ratifying the complicated deal will help U.S. producers rebuild relationships damaged by tough trade talk and retaliatory tariffs.



The 2,300 farms of Benton and Franklin counties generated more than \$1.6 billion worth of fruit, potatoes, wheat, corn and other agricultural products in 2017. File *Tri-City Herald*

[Jared Balcom](#), who grows potatoes, wheat, corn, grapes and apples, north of Pasco, said most of its process potatoes head to Mexico.

Retaliatory tariffs cut revenue by 40 percent, to \$60 million, he said. European and Canadian producers were only too happy to woo its customers.

Balcom said he’s eager to rebuild the business now that tariffs are dropped.

“We’re going to work hard to get that 40 percent back,” he said.

The 2,300 farms of Benton and Franklin counties generated more than \$1.6 billion worth of fruit, potatoes, wheat, corn and other agricultural products in 2017.

That was about 17 percent of the state’s \$10 billion output that year, according to [2017 Census of Agriculture figures](#) released this spring by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The state exported \$1 billion in agriculture and food related products [to Canada in 2017](#) and \$360 million to Mexico, its first- and fifth-largest partners, respectively.

“(USMCA) is as close to a no brainer as I’ve ever seen,” said Eric Pearson, a Tri-City bank executive and chairman of the Tri-City Development Council (TRIDEC) board of directors.

Wendy Culverwell writes about local government and politics, focusing on how those decisions affect your life. She also covers key business and economic development changes that shape our community. Her restaurant column and health inspection reports are reader favorites. She’s been a news reporter in Washington and Oregon for 25 years.

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