

Top federal ag official to discuss pending trade deals at Tulare's World Ag Expo

By Robert Rodriguez

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Travis Hoge of Fremont, Nebraska, with the business Showtime, sprays down a large spray rig Friday morning as part of prep for the World Ag Expo. Showtime makes the farm show circuit prepping ag machinery. The Ag Expo is Feb. 10-12. JOHN WALKER — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

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- World Ag Expo

The World Ag Expo in Tulare opens its three-day run Tuesday. The trade show is the largest of its kind in the world and features the latest in farm equipment and technology.

This year 1,501 exhibitors will be at the show and an estimated 100,000 visitors are expected to attend. The expo is held every year at the International Agri-Center, 4500 S. Laspina St., just east of Highway 99 in Tulare.

The show's hours are Tuesday and Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For more information visit the expo's website: www.worldagexpo.com

A top federal agriculture official will be at the World Ag Expo Tuesday to encourage support for two proposed trade agreements that could expand markets for Valley farmers.

Phil Karsting, administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service, will provide expo visitors with an update on two trade proposals that involve lowering tariffs and getting rid of other barriers to open new markets. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) involves Asian countries including Japan and Vietnam, while European countries are part of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The agreements must be approved by Congress. Both regions are vital to Valley farmers.

"To be honest, these agreements are huge," said Mechel Paggi, director of the Center for Agricultural Business at Fresno State. "The opportunity exists to open some doors."

Paggi will be appearing on the panel with Karsting and Charles V. Barclay, former foreign service officer with the U.S. Department of State.

Paggi said California, an agricultural powerhouse, stands poised to benefit from attracting new customers for its products. California is the nation's top agricultural exporter, sending \$18.8 billion worth of farm goods overseas in 2012.

Already, San Joaquin Valley tree nuts, citrus, grapes and dairy products are exported throughout the world. Asia is a major importer of the Valley's nuts and dairy products. Europe is a major market for the Valley's grapes. But as farmers continue to plant nut trees, securing new markets will be critical.

USDA figures show that the U.S. has seen record agricultural exports over the past five years. Agricultural exports alone reached a record \$140.9 billion in 2013 and supported nearly 1 million jobs in the U.S last fiscal year. Last year, exports were expected to reach another record at \$149.5 billion.

"With 2015 being a pivotal year for U.S. farm trade, it is imperative to understand the outcomes of trade negotiations will impact the agriculture industry as a whole," Karsting said in a prepared release.

Karsting will speak at 1 p.m. in the Expo Seminar Center on the corner of Expo Lane and R Street on the show grounds. The seminar is part of the State Center Community College District, Center for International Trade Development's trade symposium.

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