

Sugar beet growers launch education effort

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By [Carol Stender](#)

Agri News staff writer

MOORHEAD, Minn. -- The sugars industry and growers want to educate people in the Midwest about their livelihood. To do so they've formed the Midwest Fair Trade Coalition, a joint effort of American Crystal Sugar, Red River Valley Sugar Beet Growers Association and Minn-Dak Farmers Cooperative.

The event was held on the Moorhead-area farm of Mark Nyquist. The event featured farmers, plant workers and Minnesota Rep. Collin Peterson, North Dakota Rep. Earl Pomeroy and senators Byron Dorgan and Kent Conrad.

Dorgan cited a North Dakota State University study on Central American sugar that shows that Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic have 2 million metric tons of excess sugar available annually for export.

"If just half of that finds its way to the United States -- which is virtually certain -- U.S. sugar prices would be driven down 30 to 40 percent," he said. "You have to ask yourself what the people who negotiated this thing were thinking. It couldn't have been the well-being of American family farmers. CAFTA is an agreement that will, in my judgment, lead straight to the destruction of a vibrant U.S. industry and the decimation of family farms and local economies throughout the region."

Peterson said he wants any trade discussions concerning sugar brought to the World Trade Organization and not mentioned in more regional trade discussions. He wants Europe brought to the table so the United States can better protect its interests. There aren't enough votes to pass CAFTA on the House side, and it won't come before Congress before the election, he said.

"I am hopeful that we can stop this agreement," Peterson said.

He's talking almost daily to the John Kerry campaign but says he won't campaign for presidential candidate until he agrees to support the sugar industry and opposes CAFTA.

"What I want is assurance is that if he ends up in the White House and he re-negotiates CAFTA, that he negotiates it without sugar," he said.

CAFTA could be the tip of the iceberg, Conrad said.

"After CAFTA, this administration has got unfair deals lined up with South Africa, Thailand, Panama and the Andean nations, and each one is going to take a little more away from our economic security right here in the Red River Valley," Conrad said. "For the life of me, I cannot figure out why this White House thinks we should embrace the sugar producers in Central America, South Africa and Thailand, and put our sugar folks here in the Red River Valley out of business."