

Associated Press

Panama, U.S. Make Trade Talks Progress

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Panama and the United States made further progress in their fifth round of free trade talks on Thursday on the issues of [intellectual property](#), rules of origin and sanitary standards.

The two sides "came closer in their [proposals](#)," said Panama's negotiator, Estif Aparicio. "There has been significant progress and (some chapters) are virtual wrapped up."

The current round of talks will end Friday, but it remains unclear whether agreement will be reached on what has been the most sensitive issue of [negotiations](#): removing barriers to agricultural trade.

Earlier this year, the United States wrapped up talks for a free trade agreement with Central America and the Dominican Republic.

Negotiations with Panama began under former President Mireya Moscoso. New President Martin Torrijos, who took office Sept. 1, has said "much prudence and caution were required" on the issue because of the economic power of the United States.

Panama wants more access to the U.S. agricultural and industrial market, but fears opening fully its market to U.S. food products, saying Panamanian farmers can't compete with U.S. subsidies.

The United States is Panama's main trading partner and the destination for half of the country's more than \$800 million in exports.