

Colorado

CAFTA supporters say it will benefit state

By Jenn Ooton

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GREELEY — Colorado's top agriculture industries — including the \$2.9 billion cattle and \$239 million corn industries — will benefit from an international trade agreement with six Latin American nations, according to officials.

Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which will eventually lift import restrictions and tariffs on \$33.4 billion worth of goods traded between the United States and Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

"I think it's beneficial for most industries," said Bernie Lange, communica-

tions marketing director for Colorado Corn. "It's finally leveling out the playing field of international trade for agriculture.

"It also tells the up-and-coming economic monsters ... (that) American agriculture intends on being competitive. We will remain right on their tails."

U.S. officials signed the agreement a year ago. And even though Bush administration officials have been pushing hard for its adoption since then, hailing the trade agreement as critical to U.S. national security, CAFTA passed Thursday by just two votes.

Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., who represents the 4th Congressional District, was one of 217 who voted for CAFTA.

"As the representative for one of the

country's most agriculturally intense congressional districts, I am pleased to promote Colorado agriculture and join the Colorado Cattlemen Association, Colorado Wheat Growers, Colorado Corn Growers, Dairy Farmers of America, and Colorado Livestock Association and many others in support of CAFTA," Musgrave said in a press release. "Farmers and ranchers in the 4th District rank among the best in the world. Partnering with our neighbors in the hemisphere through this economic package secures our region's future in



Musgrave

the global market."

Terry Fankhauser, executive vice president of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, agrees that CAFTA will help Colorado beef producers compete in the global market. He said CAFTA will help them capitalize on a burgeoning tourism market in the six Latin American countries by selling prime and choice cut beef to restaurants and hotels.

CAFTA initially eliminates tariffs on prime and choice cut beef and phases out duties on other beef products over the next five to 10 years. Currently, duties on U.S. beef exports can be as much as 30 percent.

In 2003, Colorado exported 471,000 metric tons of beef, valued at \$12.4 million, to the CAFTA countries. Those same six countries sent 2.7 million met-

ric tons of beef, valued at \$62 million, into the United States, Fankhauser said.

"We were at a significant disadvantage in trade with those countries," he said.

Leon Corzine, president of the National Corn Growers Association, said CAFTA's approval is a win for all U.S. agriculture because American farmers produce more than the country consumes. That drives down the price of commodities.

CAFTA, according to Corzine, expands the market for American farmers.

"We want to get our income from the marketplace and not from government payments," he said.

Jenn Ooton can be reached at 303-684-5295, or by e-mail at jooton@times-call.com.