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**BAUCUS PROMOTES FREE TRADE AGREEMENT, INCREASED TRADE
AT MEETINGS WITH COLOMBIAN TRADE, AGRICULTURAL LEADERS**

Finance Chair Says Colombia FTA Will Boost U.S. Exports, Create U.S. Jobs

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today met with Juan Camilo Restrepo, Colombia’s Minister of Agriculture, as well as Sergio Diaz Granados, Colombia’s Minister of Trade, to promote the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and find ways to increase trade between the two countries. Baucus is traveling to Colombia and Brazil this week, along with more than a dozen Montana ranchers, farmers and business people, to identify ways to boost U.S. exports to the two countries and create the jobs America’s economy needs to continue economic recovery.

“Increased demand in Colombia and across the globe means more ranching, farming and manufacturing jobs at home – and that’s why the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia is so important,” said Baucus. **“Since programs already exist for Colombian products to come to America duty-free, we need the Colombia FTA to level the playing field for ranchers, farmers and businesses in Montana and across the country. Our meetings with the Colombian Trade and Agriculture Ministers have been quite productive and I’m confident these officials want to work with us to resolve outstanding issues so we can pass the Colombia FTA as soon as possible. These meetings were also an opportunity to convey my commitment to renewing the Andean Trade Preference Program, which provides greater opportunities for the Colombian people and increases economic growth for both our countries.”**

Baucus has been a leader in Senate efforts to pass the Colombia FTA to expand access to the Colombian market for ranchers, farmers and businesses in the U.S. More than 10,000 U.S. companies, most of which are small businesses, export to Colombia and would benefit from increased access to the market.

Since programs exist to permit most Colombian exports to come to the United States duty-free, the FTA would level the playing field for ranchers, farmers and businesses in Montana and across the U.S. The Colombian FTA is particularly critical to U.S. agricultural producers. Historically, Colombia has been a top export market for U.S. wheat producers, but despite its advantages, the United States risks losing the entire Colombian wheat market to Argentina and Canada if it does not soon implement the pending FTA. The U.S. share of the Colombian wheat market has already dropped from 73 percent in 2008 to 43 percent in 2010. The Colombia FTA would also benefit U.S. manufacturing firms by immediately eliminating duties on 80 percent of exports to Colombia.

Baucus has also been a leader in Senate efforts to renew the Andean Trade Preference Program, which encourages Andean countries, including Colombia, to diversify their economies and shift away from illicit drug production by giving their goods duty-free treatment in the U.S. market. In 2010, more than \$14.4 billion in imports entered the U.S. market duty free under ATPA. ATPA renewal is particularly timely and important in helping Colombia confront the devastating flooding that has affected many regions of the country. More than 300 Colombians have died in this devastating flooding, millions of homes have been damaged and hundreds of thousands Colombians have been left homeless. Baucus plans to tour the flood-affected areas during his trip and again renew his commitment to extend the Andean trade program.

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