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Kansas farmer testifies on Cuban trade in Senate Ag Committee

By **Jordan Hildebrand**

A Kansas farmer was called upon by the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, to testify on the opportunities and challenges for trade with Cuba. Kansas Wheat Commissioner Doug Keesling, Chase, was part of a delegation organized by the U.S. Agriculture Coalition for Cuba (USACC) that visited the Caribbean country in order to explore re-establishing agricultural trade.

The committee is chaired by Pat Roberts from Kansas, the first to chair both the Senate and House of Representative's respective committees on agriculture.

Keesling testified in front of the committee on April 21, 2015, and discussed the potential that he, and the nearly 100 other members of the USACC delegation, saw in Cuban trade.

"We had the opportunity to hear from Cuban government officials and speak with Cuban farmers," said Keesling. "We are certainly



Kansas Wheat Commissioner Doug Keesling recently testified before the Senate Ag Committee about the potential he and the other members of the U.S. Agriculture Coalition for Cuba (USACC) saw in Cuban trade during their visit to the Caribbean country.

interested in selling our products to Cuba, but we were also there to learn and to help break down the wall that has separated the people in our two countries for so long."

Cuba is the largest country in the Caribbean by area and population. Wheat and rice are both staples of the Cuban diet, though only rice is produced domestically. There are 11 million people

on the island, but its population is growing very slowly. The opportunities for increased wheat consumption are limited, unless population growth accelerates or the tourism sector takes off.

It has been estimated that wheat imports from the United States have an upward potential of the entire 30 million bushels currently imported by Cuba. That's because today Cubans buy no wheat from the United States. The state-owned grain buyer, Alimport, buys almost all their wheat from Canada and Europe, even though Cuba is much closer to U.S. gulf ports. That's a \$200 million opportunity that is missed by the U.S. wheat industry every year. Based on USDA Economic Research Service models, those additional exports could put nearly 2,000 people to work, and that's just for wheat.

"Now that Cuba is allowing increased investment by the private sector, we can expect the sophistication of the Cuban flour milling, processing, and retail segments to improve, which could lead to even more imports in the future," Keesling said. "But if current policies continue, those imports will not be

products raised by American farmers."

Keesling testified that for Cuba to become a successful export market for U.S. farmers, regulatory obstacles must be repealed. While under the current embargo, regulations allow for agricultural exports to Cuba, they are full of red tape and expenses for Cuban businesses to deal with. But Cubans aren't going hungry; instead they are purchasing their imports from competitors like Canada and Europe.

"It doesn't make any sense to me that if somebody wants to buy the wheat I grow, they have to jump through all sorts of hoops imposed by our government," said Keesling. "I would suggest that Congress carefully consider if there is a compelling, practical reason to restrict the freedom of Americans to engage in commerce, especially for those who are just trying to sell wholesome, American-grown food."

World record attempt will raise money for youth shooting sports

By **Kari West**

What started with a conversation from a nine-year-old watching a world record attempt on TV ends in a year-long fundraising campaign between Kansas City, Kan., based gun manufacturer CZ-USA and Pheasants Forever. The purpose of this epic publicity stunt is to help raise funds for Pheasants Forever youth shooting programs across the country, and oh yeah, to hopefully set a new Guinness Book world record entry for the most sporting clays shot in an hour.

CZ-USA's pro shooter and shotgun product manager, Dave Miller of Grain Valley, Mo., will attempt to set this record at Heartland Trap & Wobble Skeet in Harrisonville, Mo., on Saturday, May 16. He had offers to host this world class event from several Midwest locations, but decided to

keep it in his home state of Missouri, a tribute to where he was first introduced to sporting clays.

In Miller's eyes, the attempt not only could potentially make history, more importantly it is helping a cause that's near and dear to his heart. When asked why he was doing this, Miller replied, "Because most people can't, and the fact that it's a great way to support youth shooters and raise funds for a great cause."

So, meet the beneficiary: the Pheasants Forever Endowment Foundation. It is the 501(c)3 that will benefit from donations received during this world record attempt campaign. Prior to this partnership and through numerous charitable gifts, Pheasants Forever has raised nearly \$1.2 million. According to John Linquist, Pheasants Forever Shooting Sports National Coordinator, the endowment is trying to raise another \$300,000 to reach their goal, and hopes this event and the CZ-USA gun sale promotions through local chapters will help to raise the balance. The endowment is responsible for providing grants to a variety of youth ammo and conservation projects across the country.

"Our goal is to get kids outside and shooting in a fun, safe, educational environment," Linquist said. "We are hoping this attempt will help to raise the balance of the funds."

The "No Child Left Indoors" initiative is a national movement trying to reach a generation of youth who would rather be indoors playing video games and watching television. The program is trying to reverse the trend of inactivity in



Dave Miller, Grain Valley, Mo., is the shotgun product manager and a pro shooter for CZ-USA, a Kansas City, Kan., gun company. He is attempting to set a new Guinness World Record in Harrisonville, Mo., next month to benefit Pheasants Forever's initiative, No Child Left Indoors. *Photo by Kari West/Custom Creations by K*

today's youth and engage them in outdoor activities while learning about nature and conservation. The program provides information on habitats and conservation and wildlife, and also teaches outdoor skills.

"Our major goal with our programs is to obviously get kids outdoors," Linquist said. Pheasants Forever youth programs, like this, are a conduit to help establish conservation activities and volunteerism. "In a small town in rural America, it takes lots volunteers to be successful. And we want kids to have that foundation from an early age."

Due to the dedication local chapters and nationwide programs such as this, there are currently more than 65,000 youth annually involved in Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever programming.

"Our goal is to reach as many kids as we can, and

teach them as much as we can for the future," Linquist adds. "We are growing a conservation-minded generation who is willing to give back to the rural communities."

During the interview, Miller talked a lot about his passion for shooting and sharing that passion with future generations, so the partnership between the company and the non-profit seems like a logical fit.

"I try very hard to be a good sportsman and a good role model," Miller said. So when this crazy idea came about he said, "If I can find a good reason to do something, then why not try? You only live once."

Miller said that it is very important to be supportive and encourage youth. He wants kids to know that you can do anything you set your mind to.

And his mind is set to make history on May 16. To

set a new Guinness Book world record entry, he only has to hit 3,000 targets, but Miller has set the bar higher. His personal goal for the attempt is 3,500 targets. While many are even questioning if that is possible, Miller will tell you it most definitely is. He proved that in his last practice attempt on March 28 where he smoked 3,208 targets while shooting from the hip with only 60 minutes on the clock.

While there are a lot of self-proclaimed internet records, this is going to truly be an official one. According to Miller, this world record attempt has safety rules in place and an official format that has been agreed upon via a contract with the Guinness Book of World Records, who will have representatives on hand to film and certify the attempt in Harrisonville.

So what does it take to break a world record? It takes a solid plan, creativity and lots of enthusiastic volunteers. More than 55 volunteers are working onsite to make sure things go off without a hitch. Miller will be shooting 30 CZ-USA Model 912/712 shotguns with minor modifications including removal of safety bolts, Nordic Components magazine extensions (holds 16 rounds), grip tape on the fore end and a hand strap. Miller and his team will be using 16 MEC clay throwers with the potential of launching 6,400 targets. With an hour deadline, machines will throw a target one at a time on average of 6/10ths of a second. It takes roughly seven to ten seconds to empty a gun.

With clays flying that fast, it could be hard to keep

up, but with Miller's 27 years of experience in shooting and his extreme focus, he's prepared for the attempt. "It is all about the rhythm and watching the clay come to the gun. I am watching each clay from the thrower. In my mind, it's hit, hit, hit," Miller said. "It does no good if you pull the trigger and nothing breaks."

The practices have been great learning experiences. In order to work out all of the kinks and be prepared for the challenge, Miller planned three practices before the historic attempt. His final scheduled practice is April 18. Each one has presented opportunities for process improvement including him closer to his goal of setting a new world record.

"Dave's been very methodical about this," said Linquist. "He's learning every step of the way what works, and what needs adjusted."

For example, in the first practice, volunteers were manually releasing the targets. Quickly realizing that the timing was not right and that too many clays were being thrown, Miller searched for an electronic product that could be used with the throwers, but one did not exist. So with a little creativity and a background in electronics, Miller developed a homegrown concept that solved the challenge. It comes complete with overrides and a battery back-up in case of power failure.

Miller said that he and his team have calculated and re-calculated the numbers, took into account the what-ifs and tried to address the issues before they arise. It seems as though they have

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