

# U.S. ag secretary touts trade agreement at Washington Co. workshop

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SHARPSBURG — An agricultural workshop hosted Monday by U.S. Rep. John Delaney and attended by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack provided an opportunity for local farmers to discuss their concerns with local, state and federal agencies.

The workshop also provided an opportunity for Delaney and Vilsack to foster support for the recently negotiated Trans-Pacific Partnership, a pending, and controversial, trade agreement among 12 Pacific rim nations, including the United States.

Vilsack told the more than 200 people who packed the multipurpose building at the Washington County Agricultural Education Center near Sharpsburg that the partnership will result in "tremendous opportunity" for the nation's farmers by opening markets for agricultural products to more than 500 million new consumers in the other countries involved.

That number is projected to mushroom to 3.5 billion consumers in 15 years.

The partnership will "inject American agricultural products into the Asian economy," and could create 1 million American jobs, Vilsack said.

The partnership goes beyond agriculture, and while it has been negotiated and championed by the Obama administration, it is opposed by a mixed bag of Republican conservatives, organized labor and Democratic presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton.

Some of the nation's largest labor unions fear it will drain jobs from the United States, citing previous trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, that they claim sent American jobs overseas.

"It won't be an easy lift" to get the agreement ratified, Vilsack said.

"It takes courage to stand for trade," he said, noting the proposal's opponents are "very vocal."



## Agricultural workshop

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, left, gestures while speaking Wednesday afternoon at an agricultural workshop at the Washington County Agricultural Education Center hosted by U.S. Rep. John Delaney, D-6.

But Vilsack insisted "trade is a good thing for agriculture," noting that 30 percent of agricultural-product sales are directly related to exports. Nations involved in the agreement represent 40 percent of the world's economy, he said.

Delaney said added agricultural exports could mean nearly 6,000 jobs in Maryland.

Vilsack said new opportunities in agribusiness already are available, citing a recent U.S. Department of Agriculture study that found 60,000 positions could be created, but only 37,000 young people are prepared. Those positions include marketing, communications and other agribusiness jobs in addition to farming.

Delaney said agriculture remains the top business both in his congressional district — which includes all of Western Maryland — and in the state, but while he said state leaders recognize its importance, they haven't always given it the attention it merits.

Vilsack and Delaney said technology will become more important to agriculture.

"We have the opportunity to embrace technology to understand the difference between each acre of land," Vilsack said, noting that technology will allow farming to become more precise, lower costs, and increase productivity and profitability.