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Subject: February - 2025 USA Report

USDA & USTR Cabinet Level Leadership:

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA):

Brooke Rollins - Secretary of Agriculture:

Secretary Rollins was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on February 13 by a vote of 72-28. The USDA official website describes and quotes the new Secretary as follows:

Brooke Leslie Rollins is originally from Glen Rose, Texas. Most recently, Rollins served as the Founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer of the America First Policy Institute (AFPI). During President Trump's first administration, she was the Director of the Domestic Policy Council and Assistant to the President for Strategic Initiatives in the White House. She also previously served as Director of the Office of American Innovation. In these roles, she developed and managed the transformational domestic policy agenda of the Trump Administration, leading to historic achievements for the American people. Rollins graduated with honors from Texas A&M University with a degree in agricultural development and was the first female to be elected student body president. After earning her Juris Doctor with honors at the University of Texas School of Law, she served as Governor Rick Perry's policy director before running the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) for 15 years. At TPPF, Rollins elevated a small policy organization to a national force and redefined the possibilities for a state-based think tank — setting the model and to baseball games, cattle shows, piano lessons, and Aggie football games.

"It is the honor of a lifetime to serve as the nation's thirty-third Secretary of Agriculture — and a privilege beyond description to have the trust of President Donald J. Trump, and the opportunity to advance his agenda. I am thrilled to lead the United States Department of Agriculture and to serve the people of this country. Every day, I will fight for American farmers, ranchers, and the agriculture community. Together, we have an historic opportunity to revitalize rural America and to ensure that U.S. Agriculture remains the best in the world for generations to come."

Stephen Vaden as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture (vice Xochitl Torres-Small): Mr. Vaden is awaiting confirmation by the U.S. Senate. He holds a law degree from Yale University and a bachelor's degree from Vanderbilt University. He currently serves as a judge on the U.S. Court of International Trade, a position he has held since December 2020. He was also USDA's General Counsel during President Trump's first term where he helped reorganize and relocate a number of USDA agencies outside of

Washington, D.C. Prior to his government service he worked at the prominent law firm of Jones Day and Patton Boggs in Washington, D.C. His position also requires U.S. Senate confirmation.

Luke Lindberg as USDA Undersecretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA & vice-Alexis Taylor): Mr. Lindberg has not yet been confirmed. During Trump's first term Mr. Lindberg served as Chief of Staff and Chief Strategy Officer at the Export-Import Bank. He is currently the President & CEO of South Dakota Trade and a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of District Export Councils. Senate Majority Leader John Thune (Republican-South Dakota) is Lindberg's father-in-law. He will be responsible for managing the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS).

Dudley Hoskins as Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP & vice-Jennifer Moffitt): Mr. Hoskins is waiting to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate but currently serves as counsel on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and previously spent four years at USDA during Trump's first term as the Chief of Staff for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, and senior advisor to the secretary. Mr. Hoskins will oversee the Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

U.S. Trade Representative (USTR):

Greer Jamison as USTR Ambassador:

On February 26, the U.S. Senate confirmed Mr. Jamison by a vote of 56-43. Ambassador Jamison is a University of Virginia law school graduate and served as the chief of staff to President Trump's first-term U.S. trade representative, Robert Lighthizer. USTR Jamison released the following official press release:

"It is my honor to be confirmed by the Senate to serve as President Trump's US Trade Representative," said Ambassador Greer. "President Trump recognizes the role unfair trade practices have played in offshoring American jobs and harming our national security. Under President Trump's leadership, I will work strategically to address unfair trade practices, open new markets, tackle our record trade deficit, and restore America's ability to become a country of producers. I look forward to building off the many successes from President Trump's first term to lead USTR in executing a robust trade agenda that puts America First."

USTR Chief Agricultural Negotiator (vice-Doug McKalip): No candidate has been nominated to date.

U.S. Department of State:

Marco Rubio as the Secretary of State:

Secretary Rubio was confirmed as Secretary by the U.S. Senate on January 21 as the 72nd Secretary of State. The U.S. Department of State website published the following biography:

Secretary Marco Rubio was born in Miami, Florida in 1971. He is the son of Cuban immigrants who left Cuba in pursuit of the American Dream. His father worked as a banquet bartender, while his mother split time as a stay-at-home mom and hotel maid. From an early age, Rubio learned the importance of faith, family, community, and dignified work.

Rubio is passionate about the American Dream because he has lived it himself. He was drawn to public service in large part because of conversations with his grandfather, who witnesses how communism destroyed his homeland. After meeting and marrying his wife Jeanette, he served as a City Commissioner in West Miami and as Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives. In 2010, he won a seat in the U.S. Senate. He served as U.S. Senator until 2025.

During his tenure in the U.S. Senate, Rubio was committed to serving the people of Florida and ensuring America remained a strong, resilient nation for generations to come. He was a Senior Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Vice Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, a member of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, as well as the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

Rubio wrote and passed the *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act*, which represents the greatest turning point in U.S.-China relations in decades. He also co-led the *Hong Kong Relations Act*, and the *VERDAD Act*. During the first Trump Administration, he worked with the President to hold members of the Cuban regime accountable, including the dictatorship's military holding company. He also created the Paycheck Protection Program, which helped save millions of small businesses in America when the COVID pandemic hit.

In November 2024, President Trump nominated Rubio to serve as America's Secretary of State. Secretary Rubio was the first cabinet member who was confirmed in the second Trump Administration. He received a historic unanimous vote of 99-0 in the U.S. Senate.

U.S. Ambassador to South Africa (vice-Dr. Reuben Brigety): No candidate has been nominated to date, but early rumors indicate that Mr. Joel Pollak is the early favorite. He was born in Johannesburg and migrated to the United States where he graduated with honors from Harvard Law School after gaining initial degrees from the University of Cape Town and Harvard College. He previously ran for a Congressional seat from the State of Illinois and is now a Senior Editor for Breitbart News.

U.S. Ambassador to Botswana: Ambassador Howard Van Vranken: Ambassador Van Vranken remains in his position with no indication that the new Administration will replace him.

South Africa Government in the U.S.:

South Africa Ambassador to the U.S.-Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool: New Ambassador Rasool was appointed by President Ramaphosa in January 2025 and presented his credentials to former President Biden on January 13 before the former president left office on January 20. Ambassador Rasool is now serving his 2nd tour in the U.S. after previously representing South Africa from 2010-2015 in Washington, D.C.

Communication with USDA - Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS):

South Africa Citrus Black Spot (CBS) Rule: No progress to report from USDA where the CBS rule is still intrinsically tied to improved access for U.S. pork and poultry.

U.S. Pork & Poultry Linkage: I communicated with the APHIS/Veterinary Services (VS), Sanitary & Phytosanitary (SPS) trade staff to determine if there had been any subsequent follow-up and progress

made from the animal health bilateral discussions with DALRRD after their meeting last September in South Africa. APHIS reported the following:

- Resolution: DALRDD resolved U.S. porcine semen access.
- New Issue: DALRDD requested new access for South Africa live horses to U.S. (African Horse Sickness). Discussions then were driven by the APHIS regulatory requirements and DALRRD regulatory programs in place to zone/protect AHS free areas within the country. Both sides agreed to continue a technical dialogue and exchange disease status/mitigation information in order to move this issue forward.
- No Resolution: U.S. pork (Porcine Respiratory & Reproductive Syndrome/PRRS): Discussions centered on disease risk pathways and the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) international standard for safe trade of pork products in relation to PRRS.
- No Resolution: U.S. poultry (High Pathogenic Avian Influenza/HPAI): Discussions focused on the 2015 APHIS-DALRRD Poultry Protocol or Agreement. APHIS explained the challenging HPAI situation in the U.S. and eradication mitigations and other safeguards in place to maintain safe trade including following recognized WOAH international standards.
- APHIS reported that they have provided DALRRD with requested pork and poultry disease/surveillance data/reports during the last 6 months without a response.
- APHIS did not report any outstanding phytosanitary issues with U.S. dairy exports to South Africa.

For additional background or context, the following U.S. pork, poultry, and dairy export information was provided in last month's CGA report. That data was compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau via \$USD value/MT quantities during the last 4 years:

U.S. Pork	U.S. Poultry	U.S Dairy
2021: \$21K/7.3 MT	2021: \$75 Million/45,669.0 MT	2021: \$19.8 Million/10,276.3 MT
2022: \$59K/33.8 MT	2022: \$44 Million/80,219.0 MT	2022: \$21.4 Million/11,068.0 MT
2023: \$614K/211.5 MT	2023: \$40 Million/+75,000.0 MT	2023: \$6.4 Million/3,878.6 MT
2024: \$372K/213.3 MT	2024: \$19.8 Million/245,212.0 MT	2024: \$9.5 Million/4,708.9 MT

Botswana Citrus Market Access – Draft Pest Risk Assessment (PRA): Communicated with APHIS technical staff regarding the regulatory approval status for Botswana citrus. Staff stated that APHIS had received 17 comments during the public comment period which had been open for 90-days from October 3, 2024 – January 03, 2025. The staff then reported that APHIS is continuing to consolidate and prepare responses to the comments submitted. In general terms, the comments followed the normal pattern or categories as follows:

- Comments against the Draft PRA: Commenters disagreed with the PRA that it did not cover all pests and/or that the potential risk of introduction from the pests listed in draft PRA were a threat to U.S. citrus.

- Comments against Imports: Commenters raised concerns concerning the economic impact posed by the growing number of countries allowed to export to the U.S. citrus and the additional pressures placed on domestic farmers.
- Comments in Support of New Market Access: Comments are that pest risk can be mitigated with negligible risk including other factors such as the off-season harvest/sales when the U.S. is not producing citrus, including cost/health benefits provided to the U.S. consumer.

Staff could not comment on a general timeline for the “next steps” regarding the approval/publication of the rule. It was also noted that APHIS would have to wait for new USDA political leadership to be confirmed and their guidance concerning USDA trade priorities.

There is a high level of uncertainty and doubt within USDA where morale and fear has been noted where approximately 200 new or probationary hires were fired within APHIS during the week of February 16. Many within the Federal Government believe that this purge may only be the 1st ‘wave’ with additional reductions in personnel to take place.

President Trump Issues Executive Order on February 7 Freezing All Aid to South Africa:

The President issued an Executive Order entitled, “Addressing Egregious Actions of the Republic of South Africa” which restricts all funding to South Africa approaching approximately \$440 million, including more than \$270 million just from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). As reported in all the mainstream media in the U.S. and abroad, USAID is now being dismantled completely by the Administration. In regard to South Africa specifically, the Administration has specified the following:

- South Africa domestic legislation designated as the “Expropriation Act 13” which enables the government to expropriate property of ethnic minority Afrikaner’s agricultural land without compensation.
- South Africa’s foreign policy decisions during the past year that accuse Israel and not Hamas of genocide via the International Court of Justice and a closer alliance with Iran.

USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Releases February 2025 Report- U.S. Citrus Forecast for 2024/25 Season:

On February 11, the latest NASS report was published with production continuing a downward trend in Florida while the other citrus producing states are holding steady. All Florida citrus varieties are projected to drop during the remainder of the year including a huge reduction in the all-Orange category from last year. Valencia’s fruit size is below average for the rest of the harvest season. As of January 28/29, 95% of the non-Valencia oranges from the early-mid season rows have been harvested. The highlights are as follows:

Florida:

All-Orange: Florida all-orange production was down another 4% from January at 11.5 million boxes but some 36% from last season’s harvest at 17.96 million. Note that in October 15 million boxes were forecast.

Non-Valencia Production: Down another 10% from the January forecast at 4.5 million boxes. In 2023/24, 6.76 million boxes were produced.

Valencia Production: Remains unchanged from January and December at 7 million boxes but down 22% from the early seasonal forecast of 9 million boxes. During the 2023/24 season, 11.2 million boxes were produced.

All Grapefruit Production: Down 8% from January with 1.1 million boxes forecast. 1.79 million boxes were produced last season.

Lemon Production: Unchanged from January with 600,00 boxes forecast.

Tangerine & Mandarin Production: Up 17% from January with an increase from 300,000 boxes in January to 350,000 in February but still, a 22% drop from last season. 450,000 boxes were produced during the 2023/24 season.

California:

Non-Valencia Production: No change at 39 million boxes from the December & January forecasts.

Valencia Production: No change from January at 8.4 million boxes forecast. 9.3 million boxes were produced in 2023/24.

All-Orange Production: No change from January at 47.7 million boxes. This is an increase from last season when 47.5 million boxes were produced during 2023/24.

All-Grapefruit Production: No change from January at 3.7 million boxes but a slight drop from the 4.2 million box forecast in December.

Lemon Production: No change at 26 million from the December forecast. 24.6 million boxes were produced during the 2023/24 season.

Tangerine & Mandarin Production: No change at 25 million boxes produced from the December & January forecast.

Texas:

Non-Valencia Production: No change at 600,000 boxes from January. 690,000 boxes were produced during the 2023/24 season.

Valencia Production: No change at 300,000 boxes from January but a large drop from 450,000 boxes projected in December.

All-Orange Production: Unchanged at 900,000 boxes from January. 1.1 million boxes were produced in 2023/24.

All Grapefruit Production: Unchanged at 2.5 million boxes from January. Note 2.4 million boxes were produced during 2023/24.

Arizona:

Lemon Production: No change at 900,000 boxes from the January and December forecasts. 950,000 boxes were produced last year.

U.S. Congressmen from Florida Reintroduce the “Citrus Protection Act” to Ban Chinese Citrus Exports to Protect Florida Citrus Industry:

Two U.S. House of Representative members from Florida reintroduced legislation to protect the Florida citrus industry from Chinese competition. The bill states that China will flood the U.S. markets with citrus where Florida farmers cannot fairly compete and that the Chinese crop is laden with pests that will also further damage domestic production. The bill was originally introduced for the first time by the other Florida congressmen in 2020 and then once again in 2023, where it failed to pass.

The Congressmen added that citrus is a major contributor to the state's \$1.2 trillion dollar economy generating \$8.8 billion in 2023. Florida has some 44,000 farms and ranches covering over 9.7 million acres.

First detection of South African citrus thrips, *Scirtothrips aurantii* (Thysanoptera: Thripidae) in the Netherlands:

The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority notified the European Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) that during import inspections, adult South African citrus thrips were found to be infesting fringe flower (*Jasminum multipartitum*, *Loropetalum* sp.), bottlebrush (*Melaleuca lutea*), Japanese holly (*Ilex crenata*), and *Podocarpus* sp. plants in a retail greenhouse in the Netherlands. The detections occurred on November 2024. This is the first detection of the South Africa citrus thrips in the Netherlands and phytosanitary measures have been implemented.

Scirtothrips aurantii infests economically important plants, including *Rosa* sp., *Citrus* spp., apple (*Malus domestica*), avocado (*Persea americana*), stone fruit (*Prunus* spp.), and grape (*Vitis vinifera*). The South Africa citrus thrips has been reported from parts of Africa, Yemen, and Australia and has also been detected and is under eradication in Portugal and Spain.

References:

1. NVWA. 2024. Pest report: Finding of *Scirtothrips aurantii* and *Scirtothrips dorsalis* on ornamental plants in a greenhouse at a retail nursery in the Netherlands. Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA). December 17, 2024. Last accessed February 13, 2024, from <https://english.nvwa.nl/topics/pest-reporting/pest-reports#anker-4-pest-reports-insects>.
2. EPPO. 2025. First finding of *Scirtothrips aurantii* and new finding of *Scirtothrips dorsalis* in the Netherlands. European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO). January 1, 2025. Last accessed February 13, 2025, from <https://gd.eppo.int/reporting/article-8015>.