

Operation of the USMCA Hearing

Oral Comments for Soren Bjorn | December 3, 2025

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding our experiences since the implementation of the USMCA. My name is Soren Bjorn, and I am the CEO of Driscoll's, a 100-year-old family-owned fresh berry company headquartered in Watsonville, California. We work with hundreds of independent farmers across the United States, Mexico, and Canada to grow, pick, pack, and deliver fresh strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries to families across North America.

Today, I want to speak directly to the real-world benefits USMCA delivers to American consumers, American berry farmers, and the agricultural workforce across our continent.

First, the benefit to US consumers is clear and profound.

Thirty years ago, fresh berries were a summer luxury. Today, thanks to USMCA and North American cooperation, American families enjoy affordable, high-quality berries all year round. USDA data shows that per capita strawberry consumption has soared from 1.4 pounds in 1990 to 9.2 pounds in 2024. This isn't just a statistic—it's a story of better nutrition, more choice, and stable prices for millions of Americans. US berry imports, most of which are counter-seasonal, don't undermine domestic growers; they expand the market, ensuring that berries are available in winter and summer alike, and giving consumers access to healthy foods whenever they want them.

Second, USMCA has been a catalyst for growth and opportunity for American berry farmers.

Predictable, duty-free, and rules-based trade gives farmers the confidence to invest, innovate, and expand. Since 2020, US berry production has increased by 140%. In Florida alone, winter strawberry acreage grew from 9,900 acres in 2020 to 16,200 acres in 2024. This growth is not just for the domestic market—American strawberry growers exported over 350 million pounds of fresh strawberries last year, mostly to Canada and Mexico, and with duty-free access on berries, we expect demand for American berries to Canada and Mexico to grow about 9% every year for the next 5 years. USMCA has created a contiguous, complementary market where American farmers can thrive, not just survive.

Third, USMCA provides the framework to raise standards for all agricultural workers.

Labor obligations are a core, enforceable part of USMCA. All three countries have committed to establishing and enforcing laws and practices governing minimum wages, hours of work, and occupational safety and health. In Mexico, minimum wages are set to increase by 12% annually through 2030, and new laws require anti-harassment training in agricultural fields. Driscoll's publicly discloses our Global Labor standards which are consistent around the world regardless of where we grow.

Of course wages are different among the three parties to the USMCA, just like they vary significantly across industries within each of the USMCA participants. In agriculture, wages are a large percentage of the costs of production, but they are not the only driver. It is important to recognize that non-harvest costs—such as crop establishment and compliance—are often higher in Mexico than in the United States. Through the principles outlined in USMCA, Mexico has made real progress on labor. Over the last

five years several laws have been passed to strengthen worker rights and improve employee conditions. Enforcement, however, is key; and we support continued government oversight and incentives to ensure that every worker, in every country, is treated fairly.

Finally, USMCA's improvements in sanitary and phytosanitary standards have strengthened food safety and market access.

Regulatory alignment, transparency in certification, and technical consultations have built mutual trust among regulators and within the industry to ensure that fresh, safe berries reach consumers quickly. USMCA provides a mechanism for the three countries to collaborate on sound scientific methods to address issues as they arise. This regional approach to safety benefits everyone — growers, retailers, and families.

One of the greatest successes of USMCA is how strong rules-based trade allows for the free and fast trade of highly perishable horticultural products, something that is often a major challenge in other trade relationships. As you consider the future of USMCA, I urge you to recognize its role to create a regional food block supporting American consumers, empowering American farmers, and raising standards for all.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to policies that ensure Americans have access to healthy, delicious fruits all year long.