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Article 16

Conrad arrives in Cuba on trade visit

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Opening U.S. markets to Cuba could hurt sugar-beet farmers already facing poor prices and hamper struggling sugar production in Cuba, Sen. Kent Conrad says.

Conrad, D-N.D., supports open trade with Cuba and is there this week to meet with government and trade officials.

Conrad said Cuba has closed 70 sugar mills because of poor international prices. He will discuss how trade between the United States and Cuba could be opened in a way that doesn't hurt the sugar market when he meets with Cuban officials who work in the country's sugar industry on Friday.

"It doesn't do them any good, it doesn't do us any good, to further collapse sugar markets," Conrad said Wednesday in a phone interview from Cuba.

North Dakota has ranked third in sugar-beet production, behind Minnesota and Idaho.

Conrad's trip coincides with the **U.S.-Cuba Business Conference**, which included meetings in Mexico and Havana between Cuban officials and representatives of U.S. agricultural, wood, medical and pharmaceutical industries.

Conrad planned to meet with representatives of the trade groups, Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon and Pedro Alvarez, who leads Alimport, the Cuban government's food-buying agency.

Conrad said he expects the conference will lead to more business for North Dakota farmers, who signed \$2 million in deals last year after a trade trip led by Gov. John Hoeven.

Cuba has been the target of a U.S. trade embargo for more than 40 years, although barriers were relaxed in recent years to allow food and medicine sales.

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