Trump’s sweeping tariffs policy puts Minnesota farmers in bull’s-eye

www.minnpost.com/news/top-story/2025/04/trumps-sweeping-tariffs-policy-puts-minnesota-farmers-in-bulls-eye/

By Ana Radelat April 3, 2025

President Donald Trump signs two executive orders that will lead to reciprocal tariffs against other countries that charge tariffs on US goods. The signing ceremony took place in the Rose Garden of the White House on April 2, 2025. Credit: Andrew Leyden/ZUMA Press Wire via Reuters

Independent news needs you.

MinnPost's reporting is free every single day, but it isn't free to produce. **Join 4,800 members with a donation right now.**

SUPPORT MINNPOST

Greater Minnesota Newsletter | Everything you need to know about what's happening across Greater Minnesota. Delivered to your inbox Tuesday afternoons.

WASHINGTON – As President Trump rolled out his ambitious new trade policy on Wednesday, a day he has touted as "Liberation Day," Minnesota farmers like Bob Worth, who were hurt by Trump's tariffs before, are anxious about another backlash.

While economists say all Americans will feel the impact of the tariffs, which will result in higher prices for hundreds of imported goods — from lumber from Canada to wide screen televisions from China and appliances made in Mexico — U.S. farmers are expected to feel most of the pain.

That's because the nations that face the new tariffs on their exports will retaliate, placing new tariffs on U.S. goods.

Related: How Trump's trade war could impact US electricity prices — and state climate plans

---

And U.S. farmers are top exporters, producing more food than Americans can consume and relying on foreign markets to sell that surplus.

Worth, who with his son John farms 2,200 acres in soybeans and corn near Lake Benton, said "we are all worried." A board member of the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association who hosts a radio talk show about agriculture every Tuesday morning, Worth said soybean farmers in the state export about 60% of the beans they grow and can't afford a trade war.

In his short time in office, Trump has placed 25% tariffs on all steel imports and 10% on aluminum imports. He has also placed 25% tariffs on most goods from Canada and Mexico and a whopping 45% tariff on those from China.

On Wednesday, Trump said he would impose a 10% tariff on more than 100 countries, as well as additional "reciprocal tariffs" on dozens of other countries he said had treated the United States unfairly. Trump cited national security reasons for his tariffs, which included a blanket 20% levy on products from European Union nations, saying imbalances of trade provoked the action.

"Jobs and factories will be coming roaring back into our country," Trump said as he announced the sweeping new round of tariffs in the Rose Garden to an audience of cabinet members, GOP congressional leaders and union officials.

Latest from across Greater Minnesota

Many Minnesotans already live miles from the nearest grocery store. What happens if it closes?

US Steel permit requests reignite debate over wild rice sulfate limits

Cities test limits of Minnesota cannabis law, exposing legal gray areas

Worth has been through this before. During his first term, Trump imposed tariffs on China that provoked Beijing to impose retaliatory duties on soybeans, corn, wheat and other American imports.

“It hurt us then and it will hurt us now,” Worth said of the impact of tariffs on Minnesota farmers.

Related: Distressed property: Minnesota housing providers struggle to keep up with costs, forcing closure of some buildings

When Trump first imposed his tariffs in 2018, China turned to another country, Brazil, to purchase soybeans and farmers like Worth lost a valuable market.

He said he hoped these new Trump tariffs will be short-lived.

“If it goes on for just a month, fine,” Worth said. “But if it goes on for over a year like it did last time, it’s going to affect a lot of farmers.

The new trade war will break out just as farmers are experiencing a downturn in commodity prices and a sharp increase in the cost of fertilizer, equipment and chemicals, many of which come from China.

Gary Wertish, president of the Minnesota Farmers Union, said Trump's tariff policy "is a disappointment for farmers who haven't recovered from his first term."

Wertish, who owns a farm that grows corn and soybeans near Renville, said attempts to bolster American manufacturing were laudable, but to launch a trade war on both U.S. allies and foes is not an effective way to reach that goal.

"He's trying to take us back 70 or 80 years when we didn't depend on other countries, but we're so intertwined now," Wertish said. "This is taking us into dangerous territory."

Wertish predicted supply chain disruptions and the bankruptcies of many farmers.

When Trump's tariffs roiled American farm country in 2018 and 2019, his administration fashioned a rescue package out of money from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation fund that gave Worth and other U.S. farmers hardship payments.

Worth said the money "wasn't comparable to our losses, but it helped a lot."

In all, the Commodity Credit Corporation paid out $28 billion to help farmers impacted by the 2018-2019 trade war.

Related: Trump's tariffs will strain families, states

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins has said the Trump administration is considering emergency payments to farmers again. But the price tag this time is likely to be much higher since the imposition of U.S. tariffs will be much more widespread and retaliation is expected to inflict much more harm to American agriculture.

Carlisle Ford Runge, a professor of economics and law at the University of Minnesota, said that in the last 150 years, "Minnesota has emerged as having a clear global advantage as far as agricultural production."

"The absurdity of this Trump trade policy is to fly in the face of that competitive advantage by posing a disadvantage to Minnesota farmers," he said, adding that the opinions were his, not the university's.

Runge also said Trump's tariffs plan, which will result in retaliatory tariffs on imported goods and a new taxpayer funded bailout for U.S. farmers "is a preposterous way to make trade policy.

Bob Worth grows soybeans and corn near Lake Benton in Lincoln County. Credit: Courtesy of Bob Worth

‘A glass half full’

Sam Ziegler, president of GreenSeam, a nonprofit based in Mankato that aims to boost the fortunes of the state’s agriculture industry, said he hopes the president’s plan does not roil the state’s farm economy but isn’t sure it won’t have a harmful effect.

“There’s a bigger picture that I can’t see,” Ziegler said of the president’s plans. “But I’m a ‘glass half full’ guy and I hope there is something positive there. The supply chain in Minnesota is very efficient and we can compete if there is a level playing field.”

Most economists, however, say Trump’s tariff policy is risky, threatening to plunge the U.S. economy into a recession and shred relationships with allies.

And Ziegler said many Minnesota farmers, like Worth, said the compensation they received for the damage inflicted on them by Trump’s tariffs during the president’s first term failed to cover their losses.

Ziegler, however, is absolutely certain one Trump policy has hurt Minnesota agriculture — a proposal that Chinese-built ships and other vessels entering the United States be charged up to $1.5 million to enter a U.S. port. Those fees would likely be passed on to U.S. exporters, including Minnesota's farmers.

"Those fees are going to come out of somebody's pockets," Ziegler said. "How do we export the products we grow here if we have to pay higher fees for the shipping?"

The American Farm Bureau Federation said bulk agricultural exports, particularly grains and oilseeds, are especially threatened by the new fees. According to the farm bureau, in 2024 the U.S. exported over 106 million metric tons of bulk U.S. agricultural products.

Important imports like fertilizer, machinery and specialty crop supplies would also be impacted if carriers pass fee increases on to the consumer, the farm bureau said.

Always Minnesotan, always free.