RICK SCOTT
FLORIDA

United States Senate

ARMED SERVICES
BUDGET
FOREIGN RELATIONS
HOMELAND SECURITY
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
CHAIRMAN

July 24, 2026

The Honorable Julie Callahan
United States Trade Representative
Office of the United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20508

Dear Ambassador Callahan:

I write to bring to your attention an emerging American agricultural industry that warrants protection as the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) conducts its Section 301 investigation of Acts, Policies, and Practices of Certain Economies Relating to Structural Excess Capacity and Production in Manufacturing Sectors. I respectfully urge you to protect domestic agricultural capacity for stevia, a high-value crop with significant promise for farmers in our states and across the country.

While most of the world's stevia is sourced from China, the crop stands out as an emerging agricultural product that is also developed into tabletop sweeteners in our states. In the United States, stevia is grown in Florida, processed in Indiana, and used in homes and businesses by millions of Americans. America can, and should, promote emerging agricultural markets. For stevia, this is as simple as protecting the U.S. market from Chinese excess capacity.

In Florida, stevia presents an especially valuable opportunity. As Florida's agricultural industry continues to be impacted by Citrus Greening, stevia presents a lifeline for farmers who must diversify. For smaller land holders in particular, stevia presents a high-value, high-margin crop that thrives, and an opportunity for those who want to preserve their way of life and their land.

Despite this potential, the emerging U.S. stevia industry is being challenged by Chinese excess capacity and imports priced in ways that do not reflect normal market behavior. As American production scaled up and began to compete, the price of Chinese stevia has fallen from $330 per kilogram in 2020 to $90 per kilogram today, a decline that tracked directly with the emergence of a domestic U.S. supplier. This is the direct result of China's excess agricultural and processing capacity that exists with no transparency into the chemicals used to treat the crop, the origin of the crop or the labor conditions under which it was grown and processed.

China maintains a significant trade surplus regarding stevia and similar sweeteners with the United States as most highly processed stevia extracts are cultivated and refined overseas before being imported into the United States. Each year, roughly 3,500 metric tons of stevia are imported into the United States, nearly all of it from China, along with most other low-calorie sweeteners. With appropriate protections, American farmers have the capacity to meet this demand and to grow well beyond it as consumers increasingly seek a safe, transparent, and natural low-calorie sweetener option that supports farmers, protects consumers, and strengthens public health. This supply chain is achievable, but it cannot be built or sustained without U.S. government intervention to counteract China's structural excess capacity to grow and process this crop.

In addition to excess capacity, there have been significant issues in the past with the use of forced labor to harvest and process stevia in China. U.S. Customs and Border Protection has documented the use of forced labor in the Chinese stevia supply chain. In May 2016, CBP issued a Withhold Release Order on stevia extracts and derivatives produced in China, and in 2020 it collected a $575,000 penalty from an importer for shipments processed with prison labor and issued a formal Finding authorizing their seizure and forfeiture. Strengthening domestic stevia production directly reduces our reliance on a foreign supply chain that has been tainted by forced labor.[1]

I believe there is an opportunity to both protect and foster this emerging agricultural sector, supporting American farmers while reducing our reliance on foreign sources for a critical food ingredient. I respectfully request that the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative review this situation as part of its broader consideration of domestic agriculture, trade dynamics, and supply chain resilience, and particularly within its Section 301 investigation of Acts, Policies, and Practices of Certain Economies Relating to Structural Excess Capacity and Production in Manufacturing Sectors.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Rick Scott
United States Senator

[1] U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "CBP Collects $575,000 from Pure Circle U.S.A. for Stevia Imports Made with Forced Labor," national media release, https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbpcollects-575000-pure-circle-usa-stevia-imports-made-forced-labor; Notice of Finding, 85 Fed. Reg. 66574 (Oct. 20, 2020).