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NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

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GRAIN INVESTIGATION HEARINGS BEGIN

WASHINGTON, D.C.--"The most important question these hearings must answer," Senator Bob Dole said today, "is how do we best maintain and strengthen confidence in the quality of U.S. grain exports so as to protect producers against any market losses. What steps should we take to assure continued delivery of the quality of grain that our foreign customers desire?"

Senator Dole made these remarks as hearings to study current grain export policies and procedures, requested by Dole and Senator Hubert Humphrey, began in the Subcommittee on Foreign Agriculture Policy. Investigations by the Agriculture Committee and the Department of Agriculture and the possible need for more comprehensive legislation will all be discussed in the hearings.

The Kansas Senator said investigations have already shown that recently publicized abuses do not have a long history. "Abuses of this type and magnitude did not even exist until the past two or three years when our export volume greatly increased and the value of the commodities doubled and tripled. This combination of increased volume and value has undoubtedly attracted more illegal activities as evidenced by current indictments and convictions and the reported increase in complaints," Dole said.

"Since discovery of the inadequacies of grain inspection procedures, the Department of Agriculture has taken many positive steps," Dole said, "particularly in improved export inspections, storage inspections, mechanical sampling and record keeping. It has also been learned that effective regulations authorized by the Grain Standards Act of 1968 were, unfortunately, never fully implemented. Steps are now being taken to correct this."

Dole said the hearings, investigations and new legislation could serve to enhance overseas markets. "The United States export markets for grain have expanded because of our reputation of delivering high quality grain. While the recent reports of corruption have caused some foreign buyers to be overly cautious in booking future shipments, our investigations should help in clearing up any doubts. We know that high quality grain leaves Kansas -- and our State exports three out of every four bushels it produces. Action here will assure our foreign customers that they receive the same high quality grain in precisely the same weight, quantity and degree of cleanliness they paid for."

Legislation proposed by Dole and Humphrey was also discussed during today's hearing. The bill would provide stricter penalties and additional, one-year emergency authority for the Secretary of Agriculture to protect export markets. He would also be authorized to hire additional personnel to perform original inspection and re-inspection under new standards and procedures for loading grain. The bill would permanently change the law to make bribery of an inspector a felony.