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March 5, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I would like to congratulate you on your recent confirmation as the next United States Secretary of Agriculture. Your track record of promoting sustainable agricultural solutions during the Obama administration is much appreciated in Turkey, and I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the Biden administration to support economic development and increase agricultural trade between the United States and Turkey.

I am the Chairman of the Turkey-U.S. Business Council (TAİK), Turkey's oldest bilateral trade organization. At TAİK, our mission is to promote trade and strengthen economic relations between the United States and Turkey. We work hard to fulfill this goal with our members, who collectively generate more than 70 percent of Turkey's economy. We pursue mutually beneficial opportunities to enhance the U.S.-Turkish bilateral economic partnership, identifying areas of collaboration and working together to reduce barriers to trade between our countries.

Turkey's private sector has become a significant supporter of the U.S. economy, investing billions of dollars of foreign direct investment and creating tens of thousands of jobs in the United States. In turn, the U.S. plays a crucial role in our economy's development and is the second largest source of Turkey's FDI, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs. In 2020, bilateral trade between the United States and Turkey reached \$21.7 billion, nearly doubling in just a decade. In 2019, our two nations made a commitment to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion, and TAİK has mobilized substantial resources in pursuit of this ambitious goal.

Last year, we commissioned a report by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to identify burgeoning sectors that could most strongly benefit from increased economic collaboration between the United States and Turkey. In accordance with the report's findings, TAİK has developed three task forces – Digital, Electronics, and Joint Projects in Africa – to help Turkish companies in those industries successfully cooperate with U.S. economic efforts, including establishing more diverse, resilient supply chains.

Agriculture remains a top priority in Turkey's bilateral engagements with the United States, and we continue to be a steadfast partner of the United States in the industry.

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In 2019, we imported \$1.3 billion in U.S. agricultural products, ranking as the 21st largest international market for such American goods. Last year, Turkey was the fourth largest international importer of U.S. cotton – importing almost 12,000 metric tons of cotton – and we are also a sizable purchaser of American tree nuts, distiller grains, feed, and poultry.

Recently, Turkey has significantly expanded trade with your home state of Iowa, Mr. Secretary. In 2018, Turkey imported nearly \$108 million in goods and services from Iowa, more than double the amount from just three years earlier.

As TAIK, we are strongly interested in further developing the Turkey-U.S. agricultural relationship and boosting Turkey's agricultural imports from the United States. TAIK has engaged with relevant U.S. companies on the subject, and is committed to supporting efforts to work through relevant trade and regulatory barriers so that we can increase purchases of U.S. products like soybeans and grains.

The importance of the long-lasting economic partnership between our two countries has only become more apparent since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Like American businesses, Turkey's private sector has exhibited remarkable resilience in the face of the human suffering and financial threats posed by the virus, and we believe that Turkish and Turkish-American businesses have a big role to play as part of President Biden's Build Back Better program. Large U.S. corporations like Walmart have already shifted supply chains from China to Turkey – they are clear on Turkish partners' value and reliability and serve as models for similar partnerships in the new era.

TAIK, as a representative of Turkey's private sector spanning across industry, is optimistic about working with the Biden administration to forge new trade and business ties, including in the agriculture sector, as both our countries work to create jobs and economic renewal amid pandemic recovery. Potential opportunities to strengthen our bond include reaching a free trade agreement between Turkey and the United States, and establishing a U.S.-Turkey binational commission – with a working group on agriculture – to constructively address successes of and challenges to the wider bilateral relationship.

I very much look forward to working with your team and I hope we will have the opportunity to meet in the near future.

Respectfully,

Mehmet Ali Yalçındağ
Chairman
Turkey-U.S. Business Council (TAİK)

