

Top Canadian official says FTA deal with the EU is imminent

Canada's ambassador to the EU says he is confident a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU will be signed this year.

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By Martin Banks - 24th January 2011

Speaking in Brussels on Monday, Ross Hornby said that "rapid progress" had been made in negotiations between the two sides since talks on an FTA started in 2009.

The start of duty-free access to the EU for Canadian beef producers last November was the "first step" towards a fully-fledged FTA, said Hornby.

He was speaking at an event to mark successfully-completed negotiations to give Canada beef producers duty free access to the EU market.

This is estimated to be worth more than €7.3m annually for Canada.

Hornby said, "I am extremely pleased that Canada for the first time in 21 years has been able to regain access to the EU markets.

"I expect our producers will take full advantage of this.

"I am equally pleased to see the rapid progress in the FTA talks and I hope that 2011 will be a big year for concluding these negotiations."

The two sides concluded the latest FTA talks, the sixth round of discussions, in Brussels last week. The next round of negotiations are due to take place in Canada in April.

A Canadian official said that the main remaining obstacles to a deal appeared to be "government procurement, services and intellectual property rights".

Hornby said Canada was "committed to achieving an ambitious outcome" to the talks, adding that the EU is one of Canada's largest international markets for Canadian agriculture, fish and seafood exports.

In 2009, he said, Canadian agricultural exports to the EU were valued at €1.8m.

The EU is the second largest export market for Canada while Canada is the EU's fourth biggest.

Speaking at the same event, Gerry Ritz, Canada's agriculture minister, said that under the deal struck in November, some of Canada's "finest products", including beef, would now enter the EU market.

He said Canada was a "secure and dependable" source of "high quality" agricultural products. In 2009, Canada, he said, exported €26.8bn in food and agricultural products to 197 countries.