

# USRPA President Visits Venezuela

## Country May Emerge Among Top U.S. Rice Destinations

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### HOUSTON, TEXAS

**U**S Rice Producers President and CEO Dwight Roberts just returned from a trip to Caracas, Venezuela, a country that he

"With 23 million to 25 million people, they consume 95,000 tons of rice monthly. This is a huge increase over the last five to six years. Industry representatives have told me rice consumption has increased 49 percent since 2001. Production there has increased some 30 per-



Senior officials Sergio Caldera, Director of Commerce and Logistics (left), Dwight Roberts, President and CEO of the U.S. Rice Producers, (center) and Marcos Torres, President of Corporacion CASA, Venezuela government and food agency who imports rice from the U.S.

termed "an important market for U.S. rice." To get a better understanding of their marketplace, he visited with Chavez's food agencies, the milling association and the producer leadership, their supermarkets and government agencies.

"It looks like they will emerge one of the top destinations for U.S. Rice in the Western Hemisphere," he said. "Venezuela's per capita consumption has gone up fairly aggressively over the last couple of years. They have had some production issues. There also has been some sales of Venezuelan rice to Columbia and that has contributed to a deficit in Venezuela.

"The big part of it is there has been a substantial increase in consumption in past years," Roberts reported. "They are more than double the U.S. consumption level."

Venezuela has imported some 53,000 tons of U.S. rice so far this year, the largest volume since 2004. Additional sales are being negotiated at this time.

"I expect they will import 200,000 tons, if not more, of U.S. rice this calendar year," he said.

cent, but it's still not keeping up. As a member of OPEC, they have higher incomes. We know what the price of oil is. Higher incomes play a role in their consumption."

Roberts said it's hard to find white milled rice in the supermarket. They had brown rice and some rice mixes, but not the white rice for Venezuelans to eat.

Government policy has played a role in the marketplace in Venezuela.

"A lot of countries around the world, including those in the Western Hemisphere, have attempted to contain food prices and prevent additional shortages with changes in government policies and the Venezuelan government is doing the same," Roberts added.

Official estimates are that Venezuela will have to import 240,000 tons of rice for this calendar year.

"That would put Venezuela in the top 10, or even the top five for U.S. rice, for long grain rice, for sure," he said. Presently Mexico is the number one importer of U.S. rice and Haiti is in second place. Δ