Farmers want US-China trade spat to end with 'win-win'

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By PAUL WELITZKIN in Des Moines, Iowa |   
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For Rick Hawbaker, who runs a John Deer dealership in Nevada, Iowa, the current trade disagreement between the US and China is like a marital spat.  
"We have been married to China for a while, and we have had a spat. Now it's time to kiss and make up," he said in an interview on April 12.  
Hawbaker is not alone with wanting the "spat" to end. Since more than 30 percent of Iowa's soybeans are sent to China and the Hawkeye state is a major hog producer, a potential trade war that includes two of the state's most important products has created angst among those whose livelihoods depend on the agricultural economy.  
China has slapped a 25 percent tariff on pork and other agriculture products in response to the US imposing tariffs on Chinese aluminum and steel exports. This caused the US to threaten 25 percent tariffs on $50 billion worth of Chinese imports and China responded with a tariff threat on US products including a 25 percent tariff on soybean exports.  
Rick Kimberley is a fifth-generation farmer who grows corn and soybeans on 4,000 acres near Nevada with his son Grant. The Kimberleys made it into headlines in 2012 when they hosted Xi Jinping when he was vice-president of China on their farm.  
"We are hopeful that they (China and the US) can work this out. If the (soybean) tariff lasts that would affect the farm economically and the community," said Rick Kimberley in an interview.  
Kimberley, who is also employed by the Iowa Soybean Association, said a tariff on US soybeans would also probably mean an increase in the price to purchase soybeans from South America for Chinese producers and ultimately Chinese consumers. "So nobody is going to win in this situation," he added.  
If he could talk to US President Donald Trump, Kimberly said he would tell him that he understands there are some issues between the US and China that need to be discussed, but he added that "China is a big market and we have spent years building up the relationship. It's something we don't want to lose."  
And if he could discuss the trade dispute with Xi, Kimberly said he would say that he hopes China and the US can work it out. "We know that is what's best for both China and the US. It's a great relationship and we just want that to continue," he added.  
Kimberly's son Grant said that he would tell Trump that China is extremely important for US agriculture trade. "Let's make sure we do no harm to that and make sure we continue to negotiate," he said. "There is more to gain by working together than if we dig in our heels. I want to make sure that both sides are working together.''  
Hawbaker is the general manger of Van Wall Equipment in a farming community of 6,800 about 38 miles from Des Moines. He oversees a work force of 35 in a $7 million building that opened in 2014.  
Hawbaker said that because China's threat of a soybean tariff has just been a threat up to this point, his dealership hasn't been affected. "In fact, in the last two weeks soybean prices have been rising," he said.  
But he added that "we need the farmer to be able to continue to buy our products so we can buy things like a new couch and TV".  
If he could talk to Trump, Hawbaker said he would encourage him to negotiate, be tough but also try to compromise with China.  
"I understand you are doing what you said you were going to do, but in the end we need a win-win for everybody," said Hawbaker.

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