



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 14, 2011

Will This Unconstitutional Wealth Transfer Be Wiped Off the MAP?

If you have a product you would like to export but you don't want to pay to advertise the product in foreign countries, don't sweat it. Just get taxpayers to foot the bill instead. That, in a nutshell, describes the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Market Access Program, an annual redistribution of \$200 million from average citizens to fat cats such as Sunkist, Welch's, and Blue Diamond for the purpose of promoting exports of their products.

At a time when the U.S. national debt tops \$14 trillion and even President Barack Obama has been forced to [make a show of cutting spending](#), MAP is in the crosshairs of both parties, according to [a report in the New York Times](#). The Obama administration has proposed a 20 percent cut in the program, while the conservative Republican Study Committee in the House of Representatives has recommended [eliminating it completely](#).

However, as the *Times* points out, repeatedly, the Market Access Program has defied presidential and Congressional budget-cutting efforts as the industry has rallied lawmakers from agricultural states. In addition, the \$100 million the programs beneficiaries have spent on lobbying over the past decade, along with their \$84 million in campaign contributions over the same time period, have undoubtedly played a role in keeping MAP off the chopping block.

As recently as last year, in fact, Reps. Scott Garrett (R-N.J.) and Patrick Murphy (D-Pa.) introduced legislation to [scrap the MAP](#). Their bill [never got out of committee](#).

[According to the USDA's website](#), MAP disburses taxpayers money to help U.S. producers, exporters, private companies, and other trade organizations finance promotional activities for U.S. agricultural products. Activities financed include consumer promotions, market research, technical assistance, and trade servicing. The *Times* reports that among those consumer promotions are a manual for pet owners in Japan and a class at a Mexican culinary school to teach aspiring chefs how to cook rice for Mexican consumers, along with an Indian reality show called *Lets Design*, in which aspiring designers create fashionable outfits using cotton, with substantial prizes for the winner. The purpose of the reality show is to increase demand for cotton in India, a country that produces far more cotton than it can use, on the dubious theory that when the Indian demand for cotton eventually outpaces domestic production, American growers will be poised to swoop in and make a killing.





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MAP funds do not go directly to businesses but to cooperatives and trade associations such as Sunkist or the Cotton Council International, which created *Lets Design*. These associations are often quite well off themselves; and their members, including big corporations like Archer Daniels Midland and Monsanto, benefit from their advertising and promotions.

But even if the money has helped lots of people around the country in small towns and rural communities (as a pro-MAP lobbyist told the *Times*), not just well-to-do corporations, and even if the U.S. government were not drowning in debt, there is still one reason above all to scrap the MAP: its unconstitutional. Nowhere in the Constitution is the federal government authorized to spend taxpayer dollars on export promotions. Let those companies who have products to export pay for their own advertising instead of forcing others to pony up the dough.

Although the program has survived challenges before, with high-ranking members of both political parties now eyeing the savings to be had from cutting it, perhaps this time MAP will finally fold.



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