Republican Senators urge Ford to help nation's sugar industry

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WASHINGTON — President Ford received a letter Monday from a dozen Republican senators, including his vice presidential running mate, Robert Dole, urging him to take action "immediately" to shore up America's sugar industry.

The signers said they were "appealing to you for corrective action within the limited authority available to you."

Concern about the sharp dip in sugar prices — below the cost of production for most growers — has caused general alarm and calls for action in Congress. Growers in all states producing cane and beet sugar are suffering from the steadily declining prices.

The letter called on Ford to:
- Increase the sugar import tariff from 62.5 cents to $1.87 1/2 per pound, as allowed under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.
- Reduce the sugar import quota limit.
- Remove sugar from the list of commodities eligible for duty-free import under the Generalized System of Preferences for lesser-developed countries. The senators said that they "understand that such duty-free imports may amount to 20 per cent of U.S. sugar imports this year."

In separate action, Sen. Hiram L. Fong of Hawaii sent telegrams to the Senate Finance and House Agriculture committees calling for prompt hearings to find short-term solutions before Congress adjourns. Fong said he doubted that the actions the President can take are enough.

Last week, Rep. Bob Bergland, D-Minn., a member of the House Agriculture Committee, introduced the Sugar Assurance Act of 1976 calling for a price floor based on average cost of production for domestic beet sugar producers. The bill would also provide that foreign sugar brought here at below the base domestic price would be subject to a duty of .975 per cent of the difference.


Sugar beets are grown in all of the states they represent except Hawaii, and Texas produces both cane and beet sugar.

"As you know, prices paid to farmers who produce beets and sugar have fallen drastically. Sugar beet growers this year will receive only $21 a ton versus $45 last year, and a comparable price drop has affected sugar cane growers," the senators said.

"Present prices are far below the cost of production for both beet and cane farmers. Unless sugar farmers have assurance of a fair return, they will have no incentive to continue sugar production, and our country could lose its domestic sugar supply," they said.