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## **Congress Questions Government's Decision to Import Argentine Beans**

*by LADB Staff*

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The Mexican Congress has asked President Ernesto Zedillo's administration to explain the decision to import 60,000 metric tons of beans from Argentina when domestic supplies are sitting in Mexican warehouses. A directive approved by the standing congressional committee (Comision Permanente), which includes members of all five parties represented in Congress, called the decision "absurd," since Mexico has a five-month supply of beans stored in warehouses. Some legislators said the money spent on the bean imports would have been better used as subsidies for farmers to market their beans.

The committee said Trade Secretary Herminio Blanco and Agriculture Secretary Romarico Arroyo Marroquin have been summoned to appear before Congress to explain the decision. Administration officials had no immediate comment on the committee's directive, although there has been some concern about prolonged drought conditions in some of Mexico's top bean-producing states. In May, the government declared eight states a drought disaster area because of extremely dry conditions in late 1998 and early 1999 (see SourceMex, 1999- 05-26).

Four states Zacatecas, Chihuahua, Durango, and San Luis Potosi are among the country's top bean producers. Zacatecas Gov. Ricardo Monreal has asked the government for a second drought declaration, since the 48 million pesos (US\$5.1. million) the state received in May were insufficient to compensate for deteriorating conditions.

Monreal said rain has been sparse in Zacatecas since the first emergency drought declaration, leaving more than 1.3 million hectares of crops in danger. Zacatecas accounts for almost 30% of all the beans produced in Mexico. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on Aug. 25, reported at 9.31 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: El Economista, 08/19/99 El Universal, 08/19/99, 08/20/99)

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