

CAFTA and Food: To Eat or to Export?

Porfirio supports his family in Nicaragua by growing beans to eat and sell. He spends most of his day tending to his beans as well as working with his wife to maintain their house and raise all five of their children. If a new "free trade" agreement called CAFTA passes, Porfirio fears that he will not be able to get a decent price for his beans. The cheapest beans at the market in Managua are imported from the US where the average farmer receives \$21,000 a year in subsidies from the government. It is impossible for Porfirio's beans to compete against corporate agribusiness. After producing beans and feeding his family his entire life, Porfirio has been told that the best way for him to compete in the free market (under CAFTA) is to produce sesame, an export crop. His success will be dependent on the whims of the international market. When international sesame prices fall, Porfirio will not be able to sell his sesame. He will have no money to buy food for his family, and his family can't survive eating sesame. He may have to sell his land and become one more unemployed person desperately looking for work in the cities or migrating to a wealthy country. (Witness for Peace)

As a necessary element to human survival, food is a human right. Small, local family farms are the bedrock of traditional rural communities and global food security. Yet large agribusinesses are rewriting the rules of the global agricultural economy, using "free trade" agreements to turn food into a commodity for profit rather than a human right.

In the ten years of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), farmers' incomes in Canada, Mexico and the U.S. have plummeted and millions of small farmers have lost their land, while agribusiness corporations have reaped huge profits. But in spite of its obvious failures, new trade agreements are being written to expand NAFTA-style corporate free trade.

In 2004, the governments of the U.S., Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic signed the U.S.-D.R.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). If the U.S. Congress approves CAFTA, it would impose NAFTA-style agricultural policies on Central America.

Effects of "Free Trade" Agricultural Policies

The stated theory of free-trade proponents is that free trade will increase food production and therefore solve hunger. But hunger is not caused by a lack of food, but rather by the bad system of production and distribution of food. In reality, globalization of the food system represents an unprecedented hijacking of the global food supply for corporate profit.

Loss of Small Farm Income

The devastation of Mexican corn farmers due to NAFTA most sharply exemplifies the horrifying effects of these policies. After NAFTA eliminated Mexican quotas for corn, artificially-cheap U.S. corn flooded the market. The price of Mexican corn fell 70 percent. Millions of small family corn farmers have been left without a source of income, and have been forced to abandon their communities in search of a way to feed their families. The bedrock of traditional Mexican rural life, corn farming families, have been torn apart by NAFTA.

Loss of Food Sovereignty

Under free trade regimes, countries are prohibited to use traditional methods of encouraging self-sufficiency in food production. The result has been an increased dependence on

imported staples that have to be bought on the global market instead of grown locally. Since many people can't afford to buy imported food, hunger rampages rural communities.

Loss of Land and Increase in Migration

Under NAFTA, over one and a half million Mexican farmers have lost their sources of income, forcing them to abandon their farms. This has created a massive farmers' migration to big cities and other countries in search of jobs. Annually now 500,000 Mexicans per year attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Under CAFTA, Central American corn, rice, and bean farmers all stand to be driven off their land by cheap imports. In Guatemala alone, experts predict that CAFTA will result in the loss of 45,000 to 120,000 agricultural jobs.

Corporate Control of Plants and Seeds

Central America's incredible biodiversity is threatened by CAFTA, which allows corporations to patent seeds and life forms. Once traditional seeds are patented by corporations, subsistence farmers cannot afford the cost of purchasing new seeds each year. And plant-derived medicines used by local populations can be patented by a transnational corporation for profit, making them inaccessible to local communities.

The Spread of Genetically Modified Organisms

CAFTA grants rights to multinational corporations producing genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Scientists have argued that the spread of GMOs drastically reduces biodiversity as a result of the contamination of conventional crops by pollen from those containing GMOs, and threatens human health.

Erosion of Democracy

To comply with NAFTA, the Mexican government actually had to change their Constitution to allow foreign ownership of land. This allowed lands owned collectively by farming communities to be sold off. This move led to the uprising of the Indigenous people of Chiapas in the Zapatista rebellion on January 1, 1994 – the very day NAFTA took effect. The Zapatistas view NAFTA as a death knell for Indigenous people.

Farmers across Mexico protested the implementation of the final phase-in of NAFTA agricultural policies on January 1, 2003. A movement called "The Countryside Can't Take Anymore!" has



worked to educate the world about the failed promises of “free trade” in Mexico. And hundreds of thousands of farmers in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua have mobilized against CAFTA and the FTAA in recent years.

Food is a Human Right: Towards a Policy of Food Sovereignty

Farmers worldwide are demanding an entirely different approach to agriculture and trade, one that prioritizes food sovereignty and the preservation of rural livelihoods. Via Campesina, the global movement of family farmers, has led the way in advocating Food as a Human Right. Global food sovereignty would include:

1. Agriculture out of the WTO. Food is a human right and should not be treated the same as any other commodity. Governments must set national policies that encourage food sovereignty—local and diverse production of food to guarantee adequate and accessible nutrition for all citizens.

2. Stop Dumping. Developed countries should restore farm programs that place price floors under commodity prices and establish supply management and food security reserves to prevent cheap commodities from being dumped on global markets.

3. Reinstate Qualitative Restrictions. Developing countries should be encouraged to produce food for their domestic market, including placing restrictions on imports as well as giving domestic subsidies to support household-subsistence farming.

4. Promote Fair Trade. Cash crops like coffee, cocoa, sugar, and bananas represent the largest source of income for developing countries. The Fair Trade system guarantees fair prices and community empowerment, based on cooperative economics, farmer decision-making, and decreased power of purchasing monopolies.

5. Reinstate Global Commodity Agreements. These agreements, which regulate supply and demand to keep prices within a steady range, promote stability and sustainability within rural communities. Action to reverse the trend in falling commodity prices is essential to halting increased poverty in rural communities.

6. No Patents on Life. Seeds, plants, animals, and their components—the fabric of life—should be exempt from patenting.

Agricultural policy must preserve the rights of Indigenous farmers to utilize their cultural knowledge and collective use of resources.

7. No GMOs. Government should have the right to guarantee high quality and safe food for consumers and the environment. GMOs have yet to be proven safe. Utilizing the pre-cautionary principle, any trade agreement should ban the trade of genetically-modified substances.

8. Promote Real Land Reform. Any global agreement must prioritize the fair and adequate redistribution of lands that have been concentrated from colonial times in the hands of an elite few, to remedy the needs of millions of landless peasants around the world.

9. Enforce Labor Laws for Farm Workers. Global agreements must include provisions for the enforcement of a living wage for agricultural producers, and enforce the International Labor Organization’s labor rights, including the right to organize freely and form a union; the right to strike; the right to adequate health and safety protections; freedom from discrimination in the workplace; and the elimination of forced overtime.

10. Create Policies Supportive of Small Farmers and Sustainable Agriculture. International financial institutions and governments should finance sustainable agricultural practices that improve rural infrastructures, protect land ownership, provide access to credit, offer technical assistance, and guarantee pricing mechanisms that reflect the true costs of production.

Based on a model of “food for export”, corporate globalization causes loss of family farms, increased rural poverty and hunger, erodes biodiversity, and puts control of our entire food system in the hands of a few multinational corporations. Food sovereignty – based on sustainable agriculture, biodiversity, respect for farmers, and land reform – is a proven alternative. We have the power to change the global food system if we work together with farmers, environmentalists, consumers, and human rights advocates to say NO to the global corporatization of food and YES to people and earth-centered global agricultural policy

For more information:

www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/cafta/agriculture/html
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy www.iatp.org
Via Campesina www.viacampesina.org
National Family Farm Coalition www.nffc.net
Citizens Trade Campaign www.citizenstrade.org
Public Citizen www.tradewatch.org
Food First www.foodfirst.org

GET INVOLVED!!

***SPEAK OUT** to your Member of Congress by calling 202-225-3121 and urging them to vote NO on CAFTA. Find helpful resources and more ideas at www.globalexchange.org.

***CONTACT** us at trade@globalexchange.org to sign up for our weekly listserv or for more information.