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Colombia FTA Will Displace Tens of Thousands of Small Farmers in Colombia, Undermine Development Goals

- As Oxfam has noted in their report, the Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) includes agricultural provisions that are projected to displace tens of thousands of subsistence farmers.¹ The FTA rules zero out Colombian tariffs now applied to U.S. imports, including on basic commodities grown in Colombia for domestic consumption. Yet, the FTA does not discipline U.S. farm subsidies. The result is that the FTA would allow subsidized U.S. agricultural imports to be dumped in Colombia duty free. During the FTA's negotiations, the Colombian Ministry of Agriculture insisted that certain staple crops be excluded for tariff zeroing and published a report projecting what would happen if that did not occur. The Ministry concluded that an FTA that zeroed out tariffs in staple crops would give small farmers little choice but "*migration to the cities or other countries (especially the United States), working in drug cultivation zones, or affiliating with illegal armed groups.*"² U.S. negotiators insisted that there be no commodities excluded and thus the final FTA zeros out tariffs on all staple crops.
- Certainly the U.S. Congress is not interested in increasing violence and insecurity in the region. Beyond its moral implications, such an outcome is not in the national security interests of the United States. Ironically, some have argued that the FTA – which the Colombian government itself projects will displace and impoverish hundreds of thousands – should *be passed* to counter the broader populist backlash against neoliberalism in Latin America. But as Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz noted, the upheaval that such agreements will have on rural livelihoods is a self-defeating course that will mean "there will be more violence and the U.S. will have to spend more on coca eradication."³
- The *Washington Post* editorial board warned that the "rural dislocation that would follow from ending all protection for Colombian farmers could undermine the government's efforts to pacify the countryside. If farmers can't grow rice, they are more likely to grow coca."⁴ Despite this, the Bush administration rejected demands from Colombia to carve out basic staple crops from the FTA's removal of tariffs, and the Uribe government conceded to the Bush administration's position. None of these rules have changed under the Obama or Santos administrations.

ENDNOTES

¹ Luis Jorge Garay Salamanca, Oxfam, Impact of the U.S.-Colombia FTA on the Small Farm Economy in Colombia, *Bogotá, September 2009*.

² "El Agro Colombiano Frente al TLC con Estados Unidos," Ministerio de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural, July 2004, at 180.

³ Hugh Bronstein, "Colombia must be firm in U.S. trade talks – Stiglitz," *Reuters*, Oct. 21, 2004.

⁴ "Back Mr. Uribe," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 17, 2006.