

Press Release

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U.S., Canadian and International Groups Call for NAFTA Suspension

Over 70 Groups Support Effort by Mexican Farmers to Renegotiate NAFTA

The final implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) should be suspended and the controversial treaty should be renegotiated, over 70 U.S., Canadian and international groups wrote in a letter sent today to government leaders in the three NAFTA countries. The letter supports Mexican farm organizations challenging the implementation of the final agricultural provisions of NAFTA, scheduled to go into effect on January 1, 2008.

The final provisions of NAFTA include the removal of tariffs on white corn, beans, powdered milk and other staple foods. The groups called for the U.S., Canadian and Mexican governments to "halt the agricultural trade liberalization that is destroying the Mexican countryside, rural communities, indigenous peoples and farmers, driving them into economic exile." The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy's Steve Suppan will present the letter at a press conference of Mexican farmer and indigenous groups later this week in Mexico City.

Mexican farm organizations are planning major protests leading up to the 2008 NAFTA deadline. Their proposal to the Mexican legislature would exclude all staple foods in the Mexican diet from NAFTA's tariff elimination and would increase Mexican government support for agriculture that was cut sharply under NAFTA.

Enrique Daza, of the Hemispheric Social Alliance, said, "Governments have the obligation to defend their farmers and guarantee that they produce sufficient food to feed the population. If we lose the capacity to feed our people with national products, we seriously prejudice the possibility of national development and we become vulnerable and dependent on the actions of transnational corporations."

NAFTA has not benefitted U.S. or Canadian farmers either. George Naylor, National Family Farm Coalition President and Iowa corn and soybean farmer, called for the three NAFTA countries to cooperate to ensure farm commodity prices are stabilized and rural communities are rejuvenated. "For years farm policy that benefits corporate agribusiness has driven farmers off the land in the U.S. to become cheap labor; it's clear that the migration of Mexican farmers to urban centers in Mexico and to the U.S. is just a continuation of the tragic, unnecessary free trade process. It needs to be reversed, not continued or expanded," said Naylor.

Darrin Qualman, of the National Farmers Union in Canada, said "Amid the most serious farm income crisis since the 1930s, the benefits of NAFTA for Canadian farmers are very hard to find. Worse, not only are Canadian farmers suffering, farmers in the countries where our exports are destined are suffering too. Our drive to increase exports is hurting farmers around the world, and it's not helping us."

You can read the full letter to government leaders at: www.iatp.org

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