



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY

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U.S.-Mexico relations should be based on fair trade, not xenophobia

Farm and food groups call for prioritizing fair and sustainable rural economies

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Washington, DC – President Trump’s call to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico has unsurprisingly incited the worst political crisis between the two countries in decades. That action, and the notion that a tax on Mexican imports (and U.S. consumers) could pay for the barrier, willfully ignore the real causes of declining livelihoods and increasing inequality, especially in rural areas.

President Trump has also said he will renegotiate NAFTA to benefit Americans or withdraw from it altogether. U.S family farm and food organizations counter that, rather than pitting people in one country against another, NAFTA must “be replaced with a different agreement with the goal of increasing living standards in all three countries.” Any renegotiation should start with an open assessment of NAFTA that includes both rural and urban communities, followed by a transparent negotiating process that eliminates the secrecy and backroom deals that has plagued past trade negotiations.

NAFTA has been controversial since its inception for promoting the interest of agribusiness and other multinational corporations over those of family farmers. In a statement of principles for NAFTA renegotiation, the groups asserted that U.S. trade deals “have contributed to the economic and social erosion of rural communities in the U.S. and oftentimes devastation of its trading partners and fail to address very real problems of price volatility and environmental sustainability.”

“Rural communities and farm, ranch and farmworker organizations must be at the table for these negotiations,” said Rudy Arredondo of the National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Association. “Since NAFTA, we have witnessed the collapse of rural economies in our nation and those of our neighbors. Any renegotiation of NAFTA must support trade policies and investments that rebuild our agricultural base and local food systems. “

The groups called for rules that respect the ability of local and national governments to set policies that support their farmers, including Country-of-Origin Meat Labels (COOL), programs to support local food systems and regulate pesticides.



“Trump has said he wants to fix NAFTA for all Americans, including putting independent farmers and ranchers ahead of the transnational meatpackers and agribusinesses. An immediate and clear step in that direction would be to restore mandatory country of origin labeling for beef in any NAFTA renegotiation,” said Bill Bullard CEO of the Ranchers-Cattlemen Legal Action Fund, United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF).

NAFTA was the first U.S. trade deal to include the controversial corporate rights provision called investor state dispute settlement (ISDS), which allows foreign corporations to sue for damages over laws, rules or actions that could undermine their future profits. The groups called for the removal of ISDS from NAFTA, protection for policies intended to reduce anti-competitive practices in agriculture, and a rejection of restrictive intellectual property rights that limit farmers’ ability to save seeds.

“NAFTA was negotiated by and for agribusiness and the result has been the loss of family farmers in all three countries,” said Karen Hansen-Kuhn from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. “We need an entirely different to trade that starts with creating a fair marketplace for farmers and rural communities, not the same old ‘Agribusiness First’ approach.”

Farmers in all three NAFTA countries are facing three consecutive years of price drops and farm debt. The groups called for countries to “have the right to and ability to protect their farmers from unfair imports that distort the domestic market” and apply existing laws to prevent agribusiness dumping of commodities below their cost of production. Additionally, NAFTA should protect, not undermine, the rights of farmworkers to decent wages and working conditions in all three countries.

“NAFTA has led to a loss of agrobiodiversity and exacerbated an already fragile rural economic situation in Mexico and other Latino American countries that led to this massive immigration crisis we are struggling to resolve. Taxing remittances will only make the situation worse. Restoring farming communities in rural Mexico devastated by NAFTA will do more to stem the crisis of displaced workers forced to migrate than any border wall.” said John Zippert, Chairperson of the Rural Coalition.

[The full principles statement can be read here.](#)

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Based in Minneapolis with offices in Washington, D.C. and Berlin, Germany, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy connects the dots of global justice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems.