

December 17, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

We write to you as representatives of US family farm, ranching, farmworker, local foods, public health, and sustainable agriculture organizations to urge you to reject the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement (USMCA). The new agreement does nothing to fix the fundamental shortcomings of the previous North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), while further locking in trade rules that have devastated family farms and expanded corporate control over agriculture and our food system in all three countries.

The situation confronting family farmers is dire. According to data from the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture, nearly 250,000 small to medium scale farmers have been driven out of agriculture since the original NAFTA began. The promised benefits of increased farm exports and profits under NAFTA have not trickled down to farmers, farmworkers or rural communities. Instead, a handful of well-financed multinational firms have captured these export markets through vertical integration and now control greater shares of agricultural inputs, seeds, and equipment, while there are fewer buyers of crops, meat and poultry. In the absence of effective federal anti-trust enforcement in the agriculture sector, the diminished competition forces farmers to accept whatever prices -- and conditions -- are dictated by agribusinesses. U.S. agribusiness exports have, in turn, economically undercut family farmers abroad and, coupled with this removal of land tenure rights compelled in the first NAFTA negotiations, driven millions of Mexican farmers from their lands, forcing many of them to become farmworkers in Mexico or the US under precarious and unfair conditions.

Even the administration's own report on USMCA projects vanishingly small economic benefits. The International Trade Commission (ITC) forecasts that USMCA will generate just 1,700 new jobs in agriculture over the full period of its implementation. The ITC's economic simulations of the impacts of agricultural market access changes in USMCA project an increase in US agriculture and food exports of \$435 million and increases in imports of \$80 million.

When it comes to agriculture trade, however, farmers and rural communities can't simply accept the conditions that this deal reinforces. In contrast to the mildly optimistic ITC projections, a recent study by the University of Florida estimates that the failure to resolve problems confronting U.S. seasonal fruit and vegetable producers and the workers they depend upon could result in upwards of 8,000 jobs lost and a loss of \$471.4 million in annual revenue to Florida's overall economy if USMCA is ratified without changes.¹

The new USMCA takes a step back in other areas, reading like a deregulatory wish list for global agribusiness firms who operate in all three countries. It would create new obstacles to enact sensible rules on food safety, agricultural biotechnology, food labeling and pesticides. Rules on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards, Technical Barriers to Trade and Agriculture would direct regulators to choose the option that least distorts trade, rather than what best protects public health or the environment. A new chapter on Good Regulatory Practices would require regulators to submit new and existing rules to review by stakeholders from all countries. If approved, these new provisions would undoubtedly be

¹ Available at <https://fred.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/economic-impact-analysis/MexicoFruit&Vegetable.pdf>

extended to future negotiations with the EU, Japan and the UK. Taken together, these new rules create barriers to basic protections for farmers and workers, the land, our water and our health.

Many of our organizations made proposals to replace NAFTA with a better set of trade rules that would advance fair, healthy and sustainable food and farming systems. We called on the US government to press Canada and Mexico to withdraw their World Trade Organization complaints to Country of Origin Labeling for meat so that Congress could restore this popular program advancing market transparency and local food systems. Even this modest proposal was rejected.

We urge you to reject the USMCA and instead insist on new trade rules that would serve the interests of family farmers, ranchers, indigenous communities, farm and food chain workers, consumers and our environment in all three nations.

Sincerely,

ActionAid USA

Agroecology Research-Action Collective

Community Alliance for Global Justice

Community Farm Alliance

Dakota Resource Council

Dakota Rural Action

Family Farm Defenders

Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance

Farm Women United

Food & Water Watch

Food First / the Institute for Food & Development Policy

Food for Maine's Future

GROW North Texas

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Land Stewardship Project

Main Street Cheese, LLC

Missouri Rural Crisis Center

National Family Farm Coalition

Northeast Organic Farming Association - Interstate Council

Northeast Organic Farming Association, New Hampshire

Northeast Organic Farming Association, New York

Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance

Northern Plains Resource Council

Powder River Basin Resource Council

Progressive Agriculture Organization

PLANT (Partners for the Land & Agricultural Needs of Traditional Peoples)

Real Food Generation

Rural Coalition

Rural Vermont

Slow Food USA

Western Colorado Alliance

Western Organization of Resource Councils