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Trump administration’s chaotic tariffs push political fights at the expense of our farmers and food system

New reciprocal tariffs do nothing to address trade issues in our food system and only create more uncertainty for farmers

MINNEAPOLIS—In response to the Trump administration’s tariff announcement last week, and ahead of the delayed start date on August 7, the [Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](https://www.iatp.org) (IATP) has issued the following statement from Karen Hansen-Kuhn, IATP’s Director of Trade and International Strategies:

“It’s not clear exactly what these erratic deals contain, and that confusion itself is a real problem, especially for agriculture. These trade deals won’t bring us closer to stable markets for food and farming. They only make it harder for farmers here or abroad to make any plans,” says Hansen-Kuhn.

“We have real problems in our food and farm system that need to be addressed. These include climate change, pressures on rural livelihoods, and the growing corporate concentration that limits farmers’ and consumers’ options to address those problems. These challenges are mirrored in other countries, where the practice of dumping our excess production of commodities also undermines their farm economies. These are all at least in part trade problems, and none of them will be solved by slapping on tariffs without finding ways to support a just transition.”

Though existing U.S. trade agreements with Canada and Mexico have long undermined family farmers in all three countries, the answers lie in building new, multi-faceted approaches that benefit all sides of the partnership — not in relying on a blunt-force, volatile system of tariffs.

“Those solutions cannot be simply a return to existing trade agreements,” says Hansen-Kuhn. “Recent trade disputes have pushed back hard on Mexico’s program to produce non-GMO corn, on Canada’s efforts to balance supply and demand for dairy, and on U.S. programs for Country of Origin labeling for beef. Each of those cases are about countries determining the kinds of food and farm system they want and then running into trade obstacles. The solution is not to abandon the rules, or to impose on-again, off-again tariffs, but to find new approaches with our trading partners that work for today’s economy. But clearly we’re not heading in that direction at all.”

The U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) is scheduled for review starting in July 2026, when the three countries will consider changes to the agreement and determine whether to extend it for another 16-year term starting in 2036. But with Trump wielding erratic, punishing tariffs that stand to damage those long-held trade partnerships, the future of the agreement is far from certain.

For more information and insights on U.S. trade developments, visit www.iatp.org/trade.

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Based in Minneapolis with offices in Washington, D.C., and Berlin, Germany, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. To learn more, visit: www.iatp.org.