

Livestock Producers from Mexico, Canada and United States Seek New Trade Policy and Market Reforms

**Urge Obama, Calderon and Harper to change NAFTA
as Obama prepares to visit Canada
Expanded trade has not helped consumers**

Billings, Mont. – Representatives of consumer groups and livestock producer organizations from Canada, Mexico, and the United States today called on leaders to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and address concentration in livestock markets.

The groups have been meeting in Billings to address the challenges faced by family farmers and ranchers from trade policy and uncompetitive livestock markets.

“NAFTA is not working for Mexican and Canadian farmers,” said Gilles Stockton, a rancher from Grass Range, Mont., representing the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC). “It is certainly not working for U.S. farmers and ranchers. We also learned that it is not working for consumers.”

Representatives of Mexican hog producers said NAFTA has severely affected agricultural and livestock sectors in Mexico. U.S. exports of pork to Mexico increased about 40% between 2007 and 2008 and now supply about half of the domestic pork consumption in Mexico, said Alejandro Ramirez González, with the Confederation of Mexican Hog Farmers.

“Far from providing benefits for farmers, we’ve been trampled on by imports to degrees that threaten the sovereignty of our country,” González said.

Powdered milk imports from the United States, Argentina, Uruguay, and New Zealand threaten Mexican dairy farmers, which supply only two-thirds of the domestic demand, according to Victor Quintana with the Peasants’ Democratic Front of Chihuahua.

“Hundreds of thousands of Mexican dairy farmers will be driven into bankruptcy if Mexico’s federal government does not change current agricultural and food policies, Quintana said.

Neil Peacock, with the National Farmers Union of Canada, said the best way to advance cattle farmer’s interests is through collaboration with U.S. and Mexican farmers and organizations.

“Forming a coalition to pursue common objectives and speak to governments with a common voice is a critical step toward success for all North Americans – farmers and non farmers, rural and urban, Canadian, Mexico, and American,” Peacock said.

A representative of a consumer group, Patty Lovera, assistant director of Food and Water Watch, said the promised benefits of expanded trade have not materialized for consumers.

“Even as prices livestock producers receive have gone steadily down, retail food prices rarely do,” Lovera said. “So while the producer’s share of the retail food dollar continues to shrink, consumers are not spending less at the meat and dairy case.”

Dennis Olson, senior policy analyst with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, said the “promises made by supporters of NAFTA have not been kept and new policies are urgently needed.” He

said the groups are focusing on opportunities to work jointly on policy initiatives, such as the ban on packer ownership of livestock, that would curtail the power of global meat cartels to influence livestock markets and politics.

On behalf of the conference participants, Olson urged leaders of the United States, Canada, and Mexico to repeal provision in NAFTA that impede the rights of all countries. Olson said these rights include:

- Establishment of domestic food and agricultural policies that provide farmers with the cost of production without dumping commodities into other countries at below the cost of production.
- Enforcement of antitrust laws preventing price manipulation and other anti-competitive practices in agricultural markets.
- Setting up publicly-owned grain reserves to stabilize prices and to provide fair prices to both farmers and consumers.
- Regulation of commodity futures markets and speculative investments.

“We commit ourselves to building an alternative food system that is designed to make safe, affordable food a higher priority than increasing the profit margins for the global meat cartels,” Olson added.

The conference was sponsored by the National Association of Peasant Marketing Enterprises, National Farmers Union of Canada, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Food and Water Watch, and the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC).

Other participating organizations included the Confederation of Mexican Hog Farmers, Democratic Peasant Front of Chihuahua; La Jornada del Campo, and National Association of Peasant Marketing Enterprises from Mexico; and the Dakota Resource Council, Dakota Rural Action, Farmers Legal Action Group, Northern Plains Resource Council, and R-CALF USA from the United States.

Copies of statements delivered during the news conference are available at www.worc.org.

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