



The Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act of 2009, H.R. 3012 and S. 2821, would make significant progress in protecting family farmers at home and abroad and would promote food sovereignty, a country's right to determine its own food policies. With more than 130 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives and support from a range of labor, environmental, family farm and faith organizations, the time has come for Congress to debate and pass the TRADE Act.

The Senate introduced the bill on December 1, 2009.

The Problem

Current US agriculture policy allows agriculture products to be sold on the international market far below their cost of production, benefiting agribusinesses and corporate farming operations. Large players can buy cheap and sell high across international borders, maximizing profit while underselling local farmers both in the U.S. and abroad.

This commodity “dumping” seriously undercuts the ability of small farmers and peasants in developing countries to sell their goods at fair prices in their own domestic markets. During negotiations for agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, developed countries representing the agenda of the same global food corporations demand that developing countries dismantle their remaining quotas and tariffs in the name of “market access”. Unfortunately, these quotas and tariffs are the only control mechanisms developing countries have to shield their agricultural markets from below-cost imports. Family farmers can not compete with these cheap imports and sell or lose their farms, often migrating to cities or to the US. Their exodus further destabilizes rural economies and adds to the wave of immigration that has recently sparked heated debate in the U.S. Congress.

In the United States, existing farm policy results in widespread environmental and rural community degradation as major agribusiness corporations underpay farmers to reap unfair profits, while taxpayers foot the bill. For example, U.S. dairy prices have collapsed by more than 50%, fueled by failures in domestic dairy farm programs and the importation of milk protein concentrate – a dairy substitute that is not approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and would not be allowed under the TRADE Act.

While the distribution of inequitable agricultural subsidies is one of the factors contributing to the crisis in agriculture, the elimination of subsidies in and of itself will not solve the crisis. Indeed, unless farmers gain more control through new agriculture policy, including strategic grain reserves with on-farm storage and a pricing system providing fair and stable market prices, eliminating U.S. farm subsidies could harm many smaller-scale U.S. family farmers and lead to further market concentration.

Alternative agriculture and trade policies must provide stable livelihoods for farmers in the United States and around the globe by ensuring that global food corporations pay family farmers fairly for their products and promote socially and environmentally sustainable farming.

The TRADE Act

The TRADE Act is an important step in remedying American trade policy, particularly surrounding issues of agriculture, the environment, and workers' rights, and:

- Calls for an analysis of Free Trade Agreements and their effects on agriculture including market concentration, prices, and fair competition in the markets for agricultural commodities and food products;
- Ensures adequate and stable market returns for farmers in each country that is a party to the trade agreement;
- Ensures adequate and affordable supplies of safe food for consumers;
- Protects the right of countries to encourage conservation through the use of best practices;
- Ensures fair treatment of agricultural workers in each country that is a party to the trade agreement;
- Protects the right of countries to prevent dumping of agricultural commodities at below the cost of production through border regulations or other mechanisms and policies;
- Protects the right of each country to establish policies that require farmers to receive fair payment for their management and labor;
- Protects the right of each country to establish strategic food and renewable energy reserves;
- Preserves any existing United States law relating to antitrust and anticompetitive business practices from being preempted or rendered ineffective by the trade agreement.

The legislation makes it clear that fair trade begins with farmers earning fair prices reflecting their costs of production, fair treatment of farm labor, and limitations against unfair dumping practices. The time has come for Congress to reevaluate our nation's trade agreements and to ensure our future agreements protect family farms, the environment, labor rights, and countries' right to determine their own food policies (food sovereignty). Please urge your Representative and Senators to co-sponsor the TRADE ACT!

For more information on agriculture trade policy, please visit the National Family Farm Coalition at www.nffc.net. For more information on the TRADE Act and ways to get involved, please visit our partner, the Citizens Trade Campaign, at www.citizenstrade.org.



Joel Greeno at Farm Aid;
Animal Welfare Approved photo