



Building Sustainable Futures for Farmers Globally

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U.S. Farmers Link with Farmers Around the World on Farm Policy

Washington, D.C. — Sixty farm, faith, consumer, environmental, development and rural advocacy organizations today declared the current U.S. agricultural trade model—epitomized by the existing farm bill and the North American Free Trade Agreement—a failure for farmers, farm workers and rural communities both in the United States and around the world.

Under a campaign of “Building Sustainable Futures for Farmers Globally,” the groups launched a new comprehensive platform for the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill as a basis for moving away from the current policy of agricultural market and trade deregulation, and towards an alternative vision for food and agriculture based on what they call “food sovereignty.”

“All people have the right to decide what they will eat and to ensure that agriculture in their community is fair and healthy for everyone,” said George Naylor, an Iowa farmer and President of the National Family Farm Coalition. “This is the basic principle behind food sovereignty. If you’re a farmer who wants to support domestic food security by producing healthy food at a fair price and you believe that farmers should have the first right to local and regional markets, then food sovereignty is for you.”

The Building Sustainable Futures’ platform calls for changes in the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill that would:

- Ensure fair commodity prices to family farmers in the U.S. and abroad
- Promote sustainable bioenergy production
- Support socially disadvantaged and other small farmers, and farm workers
- Reform ineffective U.S. food aid programs
- Support healthier local food systems
- Address the need for effective disaster response for farmers, fishers, and rural communities impacted by Katrina, Rita, and other natural disasters

Over 40 farmer, fisherfolk, farm worker, and citizen and consumer groups from the North American region will take the Building Sustainable Futures Platform to the World Forum

for Food Sovereignty in Mali where it will be shared with 500 delegates from around the world.

The groups also called on Congress to just say no to extending Fast Track trade negotiating authority to the President, which expires in June. “Fast Track authority usurps crucial Constitutional authority from Congress that is needed to provide checks and balances on the President in the conduct of international trade, which is a pivotal part of U.S. foreign policy,” said Dena Hoff, a farmer from Montana. “Fast Track has given us one bad trade agreement after another, from NAFTA to CAFTA, to the World Trade Organization. These agreements harm farmers, workers, consumers and the environment, both in the United States and around the world.”

“For example, NAFTA has allowed global food corporations to dump corn on Mexican farmers at far below the cost of production, which has forced millions of farmers off their land, often leaving migration to urban centers and to the United States as their only option,” said Hoff. “In the meantime, NAFTA has deregulated tortilla prices in Mexico, and the resulting high prices have sharpened the pain of hunger for millions of the poorest Mexicans who are unable to pay the escalating prices for one of the most important staple foods in their country.”

“As the war in Iraq has proven, everyone pays a price when Congress abdicates its Constitutional obligations to oversee foreign policy,” Hoff concluded. “The last thing this Congress should do is vote to extend Fast Track, and give this President another blank check to continue his destructive unilateralist foreign policy.”

David Waskow of Friends of the Earth said that the Building Sustainable Futures would press for a sustainable direction in biofuels production, including through incentives for the production of native perennial energy crops and for use of biofuels in rural communities. He said such a transition provides an opportunity for farmers, the environment and a new energy path; “We have to create a sustainable model of biofuels production – one that will benefit family farmers and protect the environment.”

Ben Burkett of the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives said that the diversity plank of the Building Sustainable Futures platform is essential to address historical inequities in the farm programs. He also stressed that emergency assistance is still needed to alleviate the ongoing suffering in the Gulf states in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Tirso Moreno of the Farm Worker Association/Rural Coalition said that many of the farmworkers he worked with were farmers in Mexico and other countries, but had been forced off their farm and migrate to the U.S because NAFTA allowed the dumping of corn at below the cost of production. He supports the Building Sustainable Futures platform because it would take the interest of farmworkers into consideration and begin to address their problems.

Karen Hansen-Kuhn of ActionAid USA said the Building Sustainable Futures plank on Food Aid offers much needed reforms to make U.S. food aid programs more effective in

alleviating hunger both in the short and longer term. “We are confronting a new situation of recurring food crises caused by climate change and inadequate agricultural policies with the same old food aid policies, policies that were designed 50 years ago. We need more flexible programs that can get food to hungry people quickly and efficiently and that can address the underlying causes of these crises.”

Margaret Curole of the Louisiana Shrimp Association, who is part of the North American delegation traveling to the Mali Food Sovereignty Forum, said that trade agreements have devastated the shrimp industry by allowing global food corporations to dump cheap shrimp from around the world in the U.S. market. She said, “Farmers and fisherfolk must work together, both at home with their counterparts and abroad to address many of the common problems.”

To learn more about the Building Sustainable Futures Campaign, visit:
www.globalfarmer.org.

To learn more about the World Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali, visit:
www.nyeleni2007.org.

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