



National Family Farm Coalition

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**STATEMENT OF RALPH PAIGE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
FEDERATION OF SOUTHERN COOPERATIVES  
ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL FAMILY FARM COALITION  
TRADE SUMMITS AT THE CONVENTIONS  
Tuesday July 27<sup>th</sup>: Boston, Massachusetts**

Today, I speak for family farmers and those involved with cooperatives at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in the Southeast and nationally through the National Family Farm Coalition. Last year in Cancun, in Miami, in D.C. and today in Boston ---- we stand with our allies in labor, consumer, citizen, and environmental groups in questioning the current direction in trade and domestic policy, and calling for a new direction in global trade policy that values food security, farmers' livelihoods, and sustainable food production.

Trade is important to farmers – but it must be fair trade – whether in our local communities, within our nation – or internationally. This week, farmer coop members of the Federation are shipping their watermelons from the fields in Georgia and South Carolina to supermarkets here in Boston as part of a marketing agreement with Red Tomato. It is a fair trade arrangement that respects our growers' need for a fair price and their customers recognition of the value of our product – grown by family farmers striving to stay on their farms, in their communities but earning a fair price and respect for their production and labor.

The 2002 Farm Bill isn't working for farmers or their rural communities in this country or around the world. Low commodity prices and increasing concentration in food production, marketing and processing is driving farmers off the land in rural Alabama and in rural Mexico. The myth that increased exports is the solution for our rural communities has shown to be only a myth. We need a new direction in our farm and trade policy. Farmers are joining together across borders to mount campaigns to strengthen their opposition to current policies. In May 2004, NFFC joined with European farmer groups to launch joint campaigns to reform the US 2002 Farm Bill and the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The negative impacts of NAFTA have meant the loss of markets and a major drop in the prices farmers receive for their fruits and vegetables throughout the Southeast. This further compounds the loss of manufacturing and textile jobs that directly impact farm families and rural people.

Last year, over 30 organizations joined together in issuing a Declaration for a New Direction in Trade and Agricultural Policy just prior to the WTO meeting in Cancun. The statement affirmed that international trade agreements must be designed to defend and support the following principles:

- Access to safe, affordable food is a universal human right; widespread hunger cannot be acceptable in a world where food is abundant.
- Food production cannot come at the degradation of soil, water, air and biodiversity.
- Family farmers and ranchers around the world must be assured economic justice through fair prices for their production.
- Farm laborers must be assured economic justice through fair wages and contracts.
- All family scale producers, and especially indigenous, minority, immigrant and other excluded farm sectors must be assured access to land and to a system of agriculture that supports, protects and sustains their culture and communities.
- Corporate profits cannot come at the expense of the livelihoods of farmers and workers in the U.S. or other countries, nor at the expense of access to and diversity of the global seed supply.

The National Family Farm Coalition of which the Federation is a member has developed a Family Farmer Policy Agenda ([www.nffc.net](http://www.nffc.net)) which was submitted to the Policy Committees of the Democratic and Republican parties. Here are three excerpts relevant to today's discussion:

**Our government should:**

**(1) Negotiate Fair Trade Agreements that:**

- Ensure that all countries retain the right to achieve food sovereignty by developing their own domestic farm and food policies that respond to the needs of their farmers and consumers.
- Eliminate export dumping (the sale of commodities below the cost of production) which currently forces family farmers out of business, and instead seek agreements with other exporting countries to end resource-depleting overproduction.
- Ensure that environmental protection, fair wages and worker rights are part of every trade agreement.

**(2) Promote Food Security and Food Safety by:**

- Implementing and adequately funding Country of Origin Labeling to ensure that both domestic and international consumers have information about the origin of their food.
- Holding Congress and federal agencies accountable to enact and enforce adequate standards and safety measures to protect consumers from food-borne diseases such as BSE (mad cow) and e coli.
- Barring the illegal importation of Milk Protein Concentrate (MPC) and mandating vigorous USDA and FDA regulation of MPC use in food products.

**(3) Be Accountable by:**

- Ensuring fair access and implementation of all USDA programs.
- Guaranteeing that the newly created USDA Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights promotes real changes within the agency by delivering services to all who are eligible for USDA farm and credit programs, without discrimination.
- Opposing efforts to privatize USDA staffing functions whether in the delivery of credit, housing, or the debt restructuring process.

In conclusion, trade and farm policy are closely linked. Over the past fifteen years, the deals made at the GATT, WTO, and NAFTA have negatively impacted the lives of family farmers and the health of our nation's rural communities. Last week, Congress passed the Australia Free Trade Agreement jeopardizing dairy and livestock farmers. Pending is the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) that further threatens family farmers across the Americas. We need a new direction in our trade and farm policy and the outcome of the 2004 election is key to shaping this new direction. It must be based on what works for farmers and rural communities whether in this nation or around the world. Thank you.