Free Trade in Central and North America

Agrarian Crises and Outward Migration

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Guatemalan market

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Executive summary

Neoliberal trade policies in Central and North America have altered food systems, resulting in outward migration. Both NAFTA and CAFTA-DR promised increased economic opportunities, primarily through manufacturing jobs, with open trade borders providing an influx of cheaper goods. These benefits in turn would reduce migration pressures. Nevertheless, NAFTA and CAFTA-DR have contributed to rural, agrarian crises by increasing agribusiness control and eliminating government support for smallholder farmers. As a result, agricultural trade imbalances have increased, with Mexico and Central American countries becoming more dependent on the United States. Food prices and choices have widely changed, compromising food security and sovereignty. Millions of *campesinos* have been forced to transition to export crops, sell their properties to agribusiness, relocate to cities or migrate abroad in search for a new livelihood. As such, free trade agreements have done little to improve economic situations for the most vulnerable. Future trade deals based on NAFTA style agreements will only perpetuate inequalities.

Introduction

The neoliberalization of the food system in the past 25 years has greatly altered landscapes and livelihoods. This is especially true for Central and North America with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). Free trade policies have resulted in greater corporate control in agriculture and further perpetuation of overproduction of commodity crops, resulting in trade imbalances that manipulate prices and cut small-scale agricultural support, thereby pushing smallholders and *campesinos* out of agriculture and into forced migration to urban centers and abroad. Through literature, data, and key informant insights, this report provides an overview of the aims and outcomes of NAFTA

About NAFTA

Countries: Canada, Mexico, United States

Implementation date: January 1, 1994

Major aims: Eliminate duties and tariffs, encourage direct investment and privatization, increase exports for all countries and create new employment opportunities (Wade, 2007; Olson, 2008).

Advocates from both the U.S. and Mexico claimed that NAFTA would address migration issues into the U.S. with the creation of more better paying jobs in Mexico as well as the availability of cheaper goods from eliminated trade barriers. The increase in opportunities in Mexico (i.e. diminishing push factors) would reduce the desire to migrate to the U.S. (COHA, 2012; Olson, 2008). This sentiment was expressed publically, with President Bill Clinton stating "in several press conferences on NAFTA that the trade agreement was a necessary condition to reverse the historical trend of illegal immigration from Mexico. Similarly, Mexico's President Carlos Salinas de Gortari referred to NAFTA as a migration-reducing agreement" (Flores-Macías, 2008, p. 436). However, it is important to note that immigration issues were rarely discussed during formal NAFTA ratification and negotiation conversations. In fact, Hicks (2004) contends that the topic was avoided to increase the likelihood of it passing by both the U.S. and Mexico, as the two countries had different immigration agendas.

About CAFTA-DR

Countries: Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, United States

Implementation dates:
United States – March 1, 2006
El Salvador – March 1, 2006
Nicaragua – April 1, 2006
Honduras – April 1, 2006
Guatemala – June 1, 2006
Dominican Republic – March 1, 2007
Costa Rica – January 1, 2009

Major aims: CAFTA-DR is modeled after NAFTA and contains similar goals of removing tariffs and trade barriers (COHA, 2012 August).

Seeing the implications of NAFTA, many development and immigration organizations cautioned that CAFTA-DR would threaten family farmers in Central America, which would have a devastating impact as agriculture is a major livelihood. This in turn would result in serious displacement. Yet these concerns were left unheard by the Bush administration (Beachy, 2014).

and CAFTA-DR, their implications for agriculture and livelihoods in Mexico and Central America, and the subsequent migration and realities for millions of agricultural producers.

Rural and agrarian crisis in Mexico and Central America

Snapshot of overall outcomes of NAFTA and CAFTA

The overall benefits for Mexico and Central America's GDPs have largely been non-existent for the majority of their respective populations.

A major trend resulting from NAFTA is the increase in imports for Mexico:

- Ten years after NAFTA went into effect, Mexico's agro imports increased 50 percent, mostly due to maize (Weis, 2007).
- Mexican maize imports grew from 2.5 million tons when NAFTA went into effect in 1994 to 6 million tons in 2001 (Shriar, 2011). Since 2008, Mexican corn imports have varied but remain high at an estimated 10 million tons in the 2014/2015 market year and a projected 10.3 million tons for the 2015/2016 market year (Juarez, 2015).
- Since 1992, U.S. wheat exports to Mexico increased 182 percent (Vaughan, 2004).

Prior to NAFTA, Mexico had a modest agricultural trade surplus, but now experiences food deficits (Weis, 2007; McMichael, 2009). This is important to note because Mexico is where corn was domesticated and is known as the crop's center of origin, maize capital of the world and considered a "megacenter of diversity" (Fitting, 2008; Isakson, 2009, p. 731). The United States is now the primary food supplier for Mexico (COHA, 2012). Moreover, stable employment of paid positions and real wages have decreased in Mexico along with the near destruction of agriculture and rural economies in the decade following NAFTA (Wade, 2007; Scott, 2003). Employment in agriculture continues to fall (FAO, 2014). Additionally, the poverty rate and income gap have grown, decreasing the standard of living (COHA, 2012). Migration to the U.S. has also doubled with the lack of jobs (Wade, 2007).

The overall trend with CAFTA-DR has been an increase in trade inequities. Latin American signatories saw negative or no economic growth between 2006 and 2007, and their exports to the U.S. have fallen and imports from the U.S. have risen (Salazar, 2008; Stop CAFTA, 2008). In general, Central America has become a net food and feed importer after the agreement (COHA, 2012 August). With CAFTA-DR, some countries have seen an increase in total exports such as Nicaragua; however, almost all of them are in foreign-owned agroindustry and also do not offset the increase in imports (Stop CAFTA, 2008). After acquiring Semillas Cristiana-Burkard based in Guatemala, the largest maize seed company in Latin America in 2008, Monsanto is now the top corn seed provider in Central America (Klepek, 2012; Peer, 2008). Thus, these profits do not stay in the local economy (Stop CAFTA, 2008). Some country specific examples illustrate these trends:

- In the years following CAFTA-DR, El Salvador saw a drop in exports and a loss of nearly 11,500 agricultural jobs across the sectors of farming, cattle ranching, hunting and forestry between 2005 and 2006 (Sanción, 2008). Jobs in these sectors continued to fall, losing an additional 8,247 jobs between 2006 and 2010, until 2011 when they rebounded (DIGESTYC, 2011; DIGESTYC, 2012). However, 2013 saw another drop in agricultural jobs (DIGESTYC, 2014). Emigration to the U.S. has also increased in the years following the implementation of CAFTA-DR (Sanción, 2008).
- Nicaragua had a 76.6% trade deficit in 2007, furthering its dependency on U.S. goods (Anderson, 2008). Imports from the United States to Nicaragua have totaled over $1 billion each year since 2011, mak-

ing the U.S. Nicaragua's largest trading partner and accounting for about a quarter of its total imports (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; Embassy of the United States, 2012). Anderson (2008) also notes that "rural agricultural producing centers of Nicaragua are by far the most impoverished" (p. 12). While rural poverty has decreased from 70.3% in 2005, the year before CAFTA-DR was imple-

Guatemalan *campesinos* in Chimaltengago

Campesinos in agriculture

It is important to look at *campesinos* in agriculture to better understand the trade implication on agriculture in Latin America. *Campesino*, translated to English as *peasant*, is a complex term with multiple facets. The formation of *campesino* identity varies across regions. They are often seen an iconic image of Mexican cultural heritage and the countryside and the center of revolution, taking on both empowering and vengeful roles. In the Michoacán region of Mexico, the cultural identity of *campesinos* began when agrarian people mobilized for land after the land reforms resulting from the Mexican Revolution of 1910. They adapted some ideologies from other activists and "[e]ventually they began to represent themselves as belonging to a social category known as *campesinos*, that is, as a distinct social group united by a shared set of political and economic interests as well as by a collective history of oppression" (Boyer, 2003, p. 3). This oppression comes in the form of other connotations and ideologies of *campesinos*; "that being a poor peasant was equivalent to ignorance, to backward[ness], [an] obstacle to progress, people who did not have the desire to progress, people that were opposed to modernization of life" represented by the image of a *campesino* sleeping in a cactus (C. Marentes, personal communication, March 20, 2015). Despite these negative connotations, *campesinos*, specifically "Latin American *campesinos* have increased their cultural, social and political presence in the region" (p. 606) and remain active on the forefront of resistance, particularly with networks of La Via Campesina organizations that are mobilizing around combatting industrial food systems and neoliberal economic policies (Altieri & Todelo, 2011).

Peasant farmers are an essential part of supplying food in the Global South (Isakson, 2009). At 1.5 billion people, smallholders, family farmers and indigenous people make up approximately 20 percent of the world's population, half of whom are estimated to use farming techniques similar to those used in agroecology[1] (Altieri and Toledo, 2011). Moreover, as people who have been practicing agriculture for generations, the FAO notes that "small-scale producers have evolved to more resilient and climate-adapted forms of agriculture which are essential [for] biodiversity and natural resources conservation, as well as [for] meeting the poverty and hunger challenge" (Maass Wolfenson, 2013, p. 1). In many cases they produce more than half of the food consumed in their regions (Altieri and Toledo, 2011). On a whole, smallholders and family farms provide approximately 70 percent of the world's food (FAO, 2013; La Via Campesina, 2012). As such, it is important that these domestic food markets remain strong as they play an important role in food security and food sovereignty.

1 Altieri and Toledo (2011) define agroecology-based production systems as "biodiverse, resilient, energetically efficient, socially just and comprise the basis of an energy, productive and food sovereignty strategy" (p. 587). Emphasis is given to low dependence on agrochemicals and energy inputs (Altieri and Toledo, 2011). Moreover, it "promotes community-oriented approaches that look after the subsistence needs of its members, emphasizing self reliance" (Altieri and Toledo, 2011, p. 589).

mented, to an estimated 61.5% in 2013, it remains extremely high (World Bank, 2015; FIDEG, 2014). Moreover, extreme rural poverty saw a 5.5% increase between 2011 and 2013 (FIDEG, 2014).

Thus, while these policies were presented as a win-win for all, they have proven to be powerful and profitable for grain, seed, and chemical companies in the Global North as well agro-industries in the Global South and far less so for the majority of farmers, especially for rural populations in Mexico and Central America (Holt-Giménez, 2006; Holt-Giménez and Peabody, 2008; Perla, 2014; Ray, De La Torre Ugarte & Tiller, 2003).

Free trade impacts on the rural agrarian crisis

In the case of Mexico and Central America, free trade agreements have delivered a major blow to agriculture in the way of food prices and choices, elimination of state support for smallholders, and preference for agroindustries, which has led to a rural agrarian crisis. As such, more and more rural *campesinos* are faced with dramatic changes to their livelihoods, including migrating to urban centers and across borders.

Food prices

One issue is changing food prices. After NAFTA opened up trading borders and the 1996 Farm Bill failed to control overproduction, the U.S. had a surplus of commodity crops to export to Mexico, with prices so low that it is considered dumping, that is, exporting crops at prices below production costs (Wise, 2009). When these cheaper foods, such as corn and grains, are imported in Mexico it undercuts domestic farm prices, which hurts Mexican farmers and the demand for domestic crops is replaced by the cheaper imports (Wise, 2009). As a result, local markets have been completely altered. Mexico previously had a robust dairy industry and it is now the top importer of powdered milk (Carlsen, 2011). Wise (2009) examined eight products subject to U.S. dumping and estimated that Mexican producers lost $12.8 billion between 1997 and 2005, demonstrating that Mexican food producers endure much hardship from the externalities by U.S. trade and agricultural policies. Thus, while some foods have become less expensive, it comes at the cost of compromising domestic markets and food sovereignty.

Making tortillas in San Miguel Escobar, Guatemala

Prices have also increased. Between 2005 and 2008, global food prices increased 83% (Holt-Giménez and Peabody, 2008). Tortilla prices in Mexico tripled in the 1990s and doubled again in 2006 (McMichael, 2009). Others also note the astronomical rise in tortilla prices (Olson, 2008; COHA, 2012, May). This is significant because as a primary staple food, tortillas "represent 75 percent of the daily caloric intake for Mexico's poor" (COHA, 2012, June). Part of this can be attributed to liberalized free trade agreements. With NAFTA, Mexico imports about 25 percent of its corn consumed from the United States (Muñoz, 2008). Central America has felt the increase in food prices, too; "CAFTA-DR has re-structured the countries' economies by flooding their markets with subsidized grains coming from the United States" (COHA, 2012 August). Corn prices nearly doubled and bean and rice prices increased by about 50 percent in El Salvador between 2005 and 2007 (Witness for Peace, 2010). COHA (August 2012) notes from a State of the Region

Report that if food prices increase 15 percent, that would translate into 2.5 million additional people facing extreme poverty and malnutrition. Countries like Guatemala and Honduras are especially at risk, particularly rural and indigenous populations.

Agrofuels and the rise of meat consumption (via feed crops) are also contributing to higher food prices (Stone, 2009; McMichael, 2009). In essence, "tortilla consumers [are] forced to pay more to sustain meat consumption elsewhere" (McMichael, 2009, p. 289). Numerous organizations attribute the rise in corn prices, and thus food prices in large part to U.S. ethanol production (McMichael, 2009). As more corn is produced for biofuels like ethanol, crops such as wheat and soybeans will be displaced and consequently will raise their market prices (Holt-Giménez and Peabody, 2008). Moreover, because corn for ethanol production is better suited for agroindustry's monocultures and not small-scale farmers in the mountains, it is hard for small farmers to enter this market even if they wanted to (Stone, 2009). The agrofuel boom has also increased land values, spurring many *campesinos* to sell or lease their land to corporations (Stone, 2009). CAFTA-DR has encouraged an increase in palm plantations for palm oil, displacing subsistence farmers and *campesinos*, including Afro-descendent Garifuna people in Honduras, many of whom have migrated to urban centers to work in factories or to the other countries. The Garifuna community has faced much conflict due to the takeover of the palm industry (in part financed by an entity of the World Bank), which has resulted in more than 100 people being killed, many of whom work in agriculture (AFL-CIO, 2015).

Food consumption

Other scholars point out that the type of food is changing, too. Not only have food choices and access expanded to include U.S. imported foods, including processed food, but the availability and affordability of diverse nutritious, fresh foods have also declined. As a result of NAFTA, the loss of food sovereignty has severely compromised Mexican diets (GRAIN, 2015). Agroindustry has substituted traditional crops for export crops like grains, which displaces traditional crops from the local market and alters diets and contributes to health concerns such as obesity (Otero, 2008). With the rise of tortilla prices, low-income people are "'forced into less-nutritious alternatives like white bread and ramen noodles'" (McMichael, 2009). A GRAIN report (2015) explains that NAFTA and other free trade agreements opened up Mexico to transnational agribusiness allowing them to "infiltrat[e], inundat[e] and tak[e] over traditional food distribution channels and replac[e] local foods with cheap, processed junk foods, often with the direct support of governments" (p. 2). Two decades later, obesity, diabetes and malnutrition rates have increased drastically[2] (GRAIN, 2015). Under CAFTA-DR, crops are increasingly being produced for the export market and not for local consumption; "While undermining local markets, 'the diversification of production has been done at the expense of starving the local population to satisfy the demand for tropical products in developed countries'" (COHA, 2012 August, p. 3). The number of *campesinos* in El Salvador has declined, and those that were growing for semi-subsistence and local markets are moving towards international exports, thereby undermining local agri-food economies (Abbott, 2015). Moreover, Sanción (2008) notes that the number of agricultural cooperative members in El Salvador who grow staple foods declined by 28% in 2006. Thus, people's health and food security and sovereignty are at risk. Despite this, cooperatives have strengthened in the past several years and are vital contributors to Salvadorian seed supplies today. Fifty percent of the state's corn seed

2 Total food insecurity of some form is 68.8% of the population or 78.5 million people in Mexico (10.5% severe food insecurity, 17.7% medium food insecurity and 41.6% mild food insecurity). Obesity rates for women ages 20 to 49, increased from 9.5% in 1988 to 37.5% in 2012. Diabetes complications are listed third on the most common cause of death in Mexico (GRAIN, 2015).

supplies are expected to come from rural co-operatives and national associations in 2015; however, CAFTA-DR challenges the validity of this regarding domestic protectionism (Weller, 2015). The GRAIN report (2015) contends that *campesinos* are one of the best resources for addressing hunger and malnutrition as "they are the ones that can best supply both rural and urban populations with nutritious foods" (p. 8). As such, they must be recognized by statemakers as a vital component to food systems and as a mechanism for mitigating consequences from trade policies.

Costa Rican banana plantation in Puerto Viejo de Sarapiqui

Changed livelihoods

To boost economic growth in agricultural sectors, free trade agreements prioritize large, monoculture, export crops, which often results in changing traditional rural livelihoods and growing debt (Altieri and Toledo, 2011). Overall, the population who is employed in agriculture in Mexico decreased from 26.8% in 1991 to 16.4% in 2004 (McCarty, 2008). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' data notes that this number continues to fall, as it was at 14.27% in 2014 (see Figure 1 below). The rural population also continues to decline (FAO, 2014).

Semi-subsistence agriculture and producing low-market value, local crops are becoming increasingly less viable in terms of maintaining livelihoods as international trade has promoted high-market value export crops (Alvarez, Barton, Baylis, & Soto-Gomez, 2011). Many Mexican farmers who are able to continue in agriculture have shifted from mainly semi-subsistence farming to growing export crops for the market and relying on that income to purchase food and other basic needs (Stone, 2009). Moreover, making this transition requires sufficient capital, access to credit, secure land tenure, infrastructure and labor that

Mexico: Evolution of population and labour force size

	Size [Millions]				Annual growth rate [%]		
	1999	2004	2009	2014	1999-2004	2004-2009	2009-2014
Total population	102.32	109.38	116.42	123.80	1.34	1.26	1.24
Total labour force	40.66	45.26	49.50	54.09	2.17	1.81	1.79
Labour force in agriculture	8.90	8.62	8.19	7.72	-0.64	-1.02	-1.18
Agricultural population	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: FAOSTAT, FAO of the UN, Accessed on January 24, 2014. http://faostat.fao.org/site/550/default.aspx#ancor

Mexico: Evolution of population and labour force composition

	Share [%]				Annual growth rate [%]		
	1999	2004	2009	2014	1999-2004	2004-2009	2009-2014
Rural population [% of total population]	25.56	24.00	22.47	21.04	-1.25	-1.31	-1.31
Labour force in agriculture [% of total labour force]	21.89	19.05	16.55	14.27	-2.74	-2.77	-2.92
Females [% of labour force in agriculture]	12.77	12.81	12.71	12.72	0.06	-0.16	0.02

Source: FAOSTAT, FAO of the UN, Accessed on January 24, 2014. http://faostat.fao.org/site/550/default.aspx#ancor

Figure 1: Mexico's population and agricultural labor demographics (FAO, 2014)

Global based markets

Neoliberalism has greatly influenced global food markets by moving away from state and institutional control and support and towards using free markets, trade and privatization for advancement (Alkon, 2013; Fitting, 2008; Otero, 2012). Neoliberal trade policies revolve around the basic economic idea of comparative advantage, meaning that individual countries should produce goods that they are best able to produce and liberalized trade will ensure access to the global market (Carlsen, 2011). Using this argument, Carlsen (2011) explains that Mexico was viewed as unable to produce staple foods because its efficiency and yields paled in comparison to the United States. To compete in the global market, Mexico must produce its comparative advantage crops, such as fruits and vegetables, and import staple foods. Carlsen (2011) further explains that NAFTA and other neoliberal programs view food security as the ability to have adequate income to import food rather than a country being able to produce for itself and thereby "separates farm employment from food security" (para. 9). As such, the neoliberal food model fails to see local externalities from global market trade.

many Mexican farmers do not have (Alvarez, Barton, Baylis, & Soto-Gomez, 2011). Many communities no longer have a robust working-aged population because they have migrated (Stone, 2009). Based on David Harvey's (2005) critique of neoliberalism, even if farmers are able to transition to export oriented agriculture, they should not be forced "into a market economy they may not wish to join" (Alvarez, Barton, Baylis, & Soto-Gomez, 2011, p. 208). This relates directly to the idea of food sovereignty, which is largely ignored in mainstream free trade policy discussions.

Current policies are essentially promoting de-peasantization among the Global South (Holt-Giménez, 2009). Under NAFTA, Mexico dissolved government extension services (from a staff of 20,000 to 370 in 1995), price supports for agriculture as well as credit assistance, making it even more difficult for small farmers to continue to farm (Alvarez, Barton, Baylis, & Soto-Gomez, 2011). In Guatemala, many families who were subsistence producers (about 92% of agriculture producers in the country) have lost their land and now work as day laborers and must purchase basic foods (Red Centroamericana, 2014). Moreover, there is an absence of public policies to revitalize the Guatemalan rural economy. Resources generally only cover fertilizers, which are minimal for small producers and credit, and agricultural extension programs only include a portion of the population. The Network of Central American Free Trade Agreement Monitoring notes that "In this way, the rural population is condemned to remain in poverty…and malnourished and rely on the imports of basic grains" (translation mine) (Red Centroamericana, 2014, p. 32).

With the growing presence of agroindustry, individual farmers are viewed as inefficient (Otero, 2012). Several U.S. crops receive huge subsidies from the Farm Bill due to bottomed out prices as a result of overproduction and lack of supply management policies. As a consequence, they are sold at prices below production costs, some up to 30 percent below production prices in Mexico (COHA, 2012). *Campesinos* cannot compete with these prices under current free trade terms and are pushed out of agriculture (Stone, 2009; COHA, 2012; Olson, 2008; Abbott 2015). The result is disproportionate market shares. Big name transnational agroindustries, Cargill and Maseca (a partially American owned and Mexican based corn company), now have market control over yellow and white corn and beans (Olson, 2008). CAFTA-DR produced similar results. Corporations were granted increased power and have altered the agriculture economy, decimating Central American smallholders.

U.S. agroindustry exports amount to $20 billion to Central America, which is more than disproportionate to the $245 million the U.S. pledged for foreign aid to Central America (Perla, 2014). Moreover, since CAFTA, agricultural imports from the U.S. to the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, see Figure 2 below) have increased 78%

Figure 2: Northern Triangle countries in Central America: Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras (Google Maps, 2015).

(Beachy, 2014).

Thus, neoliberal free trade agreements have contributed to increased food prices, altered diets, and changed livelihoods, resulting in a rural agrarian crisis in Mexico and Central American countries. There have been several agrarian crises in Mexico and Central America, such as the one that sparked land reforms and the 1910 Mexican Revolution, consequences of the Green Revolution of the 1960s, and corporate and neoliberal food regimes, specifically structural adjustment and bilateral and multilateral trade deals (Sanderson, 2013; McMichael, 2013). NAFTA and CAFTA-DR added another layer of challenges to recovering from previous crises and thus have exasperated already fragile agrarian conditions for marginalized stakeholders.

Privatization of lands

Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican constitution grants the right to own land and water, forming the basis of land redistribution and the ejido system of communal lands. Land could be passed down to family or other community members, but it could not be sold (C. Marentes, personal communication, March 20, 2015; Mexican Const. art. XXVII). To comply with NAFTA, Mexico allowed the privatization of ejidos, leading to their demise (Weis, 2007). Even before free trade agreements, indigenous communities were vulnerable to land tenure issues. However, after NAFTA was implemented this became more of an issue, and many people in Chiapas and other southern Mexican states were forced from some of the best agricultural lands (Hicks, 2004). An IAASTD report explains that equitable land tenure is a key contributor to reducing “the displacement of small-scale farmers, *campesinos* and indigenous people to urban centers or to marginal lands in the agricultural frontier” (McIntyre, Herren, Wakhungu, & Watson, 2009, p. 32). Communal land ownership and land rights, both formal and informal, must be better understood and recognized as they relate to smallholders and greater agricultural systems (McIntyre, Herren, Wakhungu, & Watson, 2009).

Husking corn in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

U.S. agriculture reality

Subsidies in a loose definition can take on several meanings in agricultural policy, some of which include direct payments, food reserves, loans and crop insurance. Direct payments are set payments for producers (EWG, 2012); grain reserves can act as price stabilizers that also manage supply (IATP, 2012); nonrecourse marketing assistance loans (MALs) support producers with cash during harvest time when prices are usually low so they can sell at a later date at higher prices (USDA, 2013); and insurance, particularly government subsidized private crop insurance, assists producers with risk management tools related to yield and revenue losses (CFRA, 2015). Subsidies are a component of externalities resulting from agricultural policies, but the reality is that they hide the disastrous effects of eliminating supply management and price floors. While farm subsidies put in place since the Great Depression were intended to be temporary, they have become a permanent addition to U.S. agriculture policy (Graddy, 2015). NAFTA and the 1996 Freedom to Farm Bill attempted to let "the market" take control of agriculture (Olson, 2008). However, price supports were soon reinstated with emergency payments due to plummeting grain prices (that were themselves due to overproduction after elimination of supply management mechanisms) and have once again become permanent with even higher levels of subsidy spending in the early 2000s (more than $20 billion) (Graddy, 2015; Olson, 2008; Ray, De La Torre Ugarte & Tiller, 2003). This has heightened U.S. farmers' dependence on government support to supplement their income (Olson, 2008). But even with these subsidies it is not enough for small-scale farmers with net income falling 16.5 percent (Olson, 2008). Family farms in the U.S. are disappearing, too (Ray, De La Torre Ugarte & Tiller, 2003); approximately 300,000 U.S. farmers have been forced out between the mid 1990s and mid 2000s (Olson, 2008; Public Citizen, 2008). Meanwhile, corporate agriculture reaps the benefits through consolidation and integration throughout the entire supply chain that allows them to produce below the true cost of production (Ray, De La Torre Ugarte & Tiller, 2003). The takeaway is this:

> **"NAFTA has greatly benefited agribusiness at the expense of farmers, consumers, and sustainable food systems. Even though certain agricultural exports have grown, most farmers in all three NAFTA countries have not realized any benefit from this growth. Nor have consumers benefited, because today they are eating more unhealthy, processed foods and paying higher prices; families have been split"** (Olson, 2008, p. 423).

Overproduction

Subsidies are not the only problem. The issue of overproduction is yet another component underlying subsidies. No matter if the price for crops is low or high, farmers continue to plant, which perpetuates overproduction (Ray, De La Torre Ugarte & Tiller, 2003). Price floors are a mechanism to help manage supply and aim to guarantee that prices are fair for producers, in essence acting like minimum wage for farmers (Wise, 2009; NFFC, n.d.-b). Advocates like National Family Farm Coalition support price floors because agroindustry must pay adequate prices to farmers (NFFC, n.d.-a).

Migration

Migration and free trade discussions in the United States that set the stage for NAFTA and CAFTA-DR date back to 1986 with the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which in part aimed to identify policies that would increase economic growth and decrease immigration, with the report statement suggesting that "'expanded trade between the sending countries and the United States is the single most important remedy' for unwanted migration" (Richter & Taylor, 2009). This sentiment continued with supporters of NAFTA seeing it as a way to control migration, using the logic that more opportunities in Mexico would result in less desire to migrate to the United States. Former attorney general at the Clinton administration, Janet Reno, stated that undocumented immigration would be reduced by two-third within six years with the implementation of NAFTA. Yet, this proved to be untrue. While undocumented immigration was on the decline in the years prior to NAFTA, by 2002 it increased 61 percent (COHA, 2012). This promise and assertion was echoed under the CAFTA-DR negotiation. Virginia Representative Tom Davis stated, "we need to understand that CAFTA is more than just a trade pact. It's a signal of U.S. commitment to democracy and prosperity for our neighbors. And it's the best immigration, anti-gang, and anti-drug policy at our disposal" (E1660: Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act, 2005, p. 1). On the contrary, Central America has experienced high levels of emigration in part due to altered economies and social structures facilitated by CAFTA-DR (Abbott, 2015).

Agricultural support in Mexico

Under NAFTA, Mexico's agriculture economy aimed to transition to market oriented policies and away from guaranteed prices. As such, PROCAMPO (Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo) was created in 1993 to help with the transition by offering direct cash payments (per hectare) to small farmers. The program was scheduled to end in 2009, but has since been extended (Juarez & Hansen, 2013). However, quoting Jonathan Fox, Bacon (2013) explains that while the program looks good on paper, in practice it benefits larger landholders. The payments doled out are also smaller. Moreover, "'the losses suffered by small Mexican farmers receiving PROCAMPO have grown…[t]his is a result of falling corn prices produced by increased US corn imports (actually dumping, at prices below the cost production)'" which has "'excluded the majority of its intended population [and] slanted [in] favor [of] the richest producers'" (Bacon, 2013, p. 60). Moreover, in 2013 PROCAMPO changed its name from PROCAMPO for Better Living to PROCAMPO Productive (Juarez & Hansen, 2013), perhaps indicating its priority. With this change, growers can only receive payments for actual production instead of land ownership (Juarez & Hansen, 2013). After coming under attack in 2014 when it was revealed that more than 60% of agriculture subsidies were granted to large companies, SAGARPA (Secretaría de Agricultura, Pesca y Ganadería - the equivalent to the USDA) said it would revise PROCAMPO starting in 2015 to eliminate subsidies to big companies, recognizing that the purpose of the program is to help small and medium sized growers. It also plans to use aerial footage to see which areas are actually being cultivated (Lara, 2014). GRAIN (2015) highlights the importance of institutional support for smallholders stating that, "Mexico could recover its self-sufficiency in food if there was official support for peasant agriculture backed with amounts comparable to the support granted to the big corporations. One of the necessary conditions for this would be the reconstitution of the instruments of support for the countryside that were disabled by NAFTA" (p. 9).

Many rural farmers see migration as their only escape from agrarian crisis and urban unemployment and violence. Trade liberalization under the World Trade Organization (WTO) is contributing to dislocating *campesinos* worldwide, as McMichael (2009) notes that “conservative estimates from the FAO are that 20 - 30 million peasants have been displaced during the WTO regime” (p. 284). Mexico and Central America are no exception. Small-scale farmers in Latin America’s countryside often have to resort to migrating to urban centers or across borders with the takeover of agroindustry (Olson, 2008).

Mexico

More than two million rural farmers in Mexico have left the countryside within a dozen years following NAFTA (Stone, 2009; McMichael, 2009; COHA, 2012 June) in addition to the eight million who were pushed to sell their properties at extremely low prices (COHA, 2012 June). Under NAFTA, the U.S. expanded factory operations along the U.S.-Mexico border, taking advantage of laborers willing to work for lower wages. Despite the creation of 1.3 million manufacturing jobs in Mexico, this did not make up for the loss of agricultural jobs. Moreover, about one third of these maquila jobs have been outsourced to China since 2001 due to even lower wages overseas (COHA, 2012). New trade deals will further this trend as tariffs in Asian countries are removed and could increase northward migration as it is projected that “TPP [Trans-Pacific Partnership] would displace an estimated 1.2 million textile workers in the Caribbean Basin and Mexico” (Prestowitz, 2013). Juan Manuel Sandoval, a professor at the National Institute of Anthropology and History in Mexico City and cofounder of the Mexican Action Network Opposing Free Trade sums it up well in David Bacon’s (2013) book, The Right to Stay Home: “‘From the beginning NAFTA was an instrument of displacement... The penetration of capital led to the destruction of the traditional economy, especially in agriculture, and produced a huge labor reserve in Mexico. People had no alternative but to migrate. The system helps corporations make profit, which is relocated to the United States. And it produces displaced people, who are needed by the US economy’” (Bacon, 2013, p. 19).

Central America

CAFTA-DR has resulted in a loss of jobs in the agricultural sector, and has pushed people that can find alternative employment into unstable and dangerous maquila, or factory jobs (Stop CAFTA, 2008; COHA, 2012). Rural populations have been hardest hit by free trade agreements. Between 2005 and 2007, unemployment increased by 71% in El Salvador’s countryside. Agriculture is no longer a viable option and thousands from Central America have resorted to migrating to Mexico or the U.S. (Witness for Peace, 2010). A 2015 AFL-CIO report noted that according to advocates, up to 60 Garifuna people leave Honduras everyday due to being forced off of their ancestral lands since CAFTA-DR has been implemented by “displac[ing] farmers and forc[ing] many to migrate to cities for work in low-wage maquila jobs, or north to the United States” (p. 15). Guatemala has experienced similar startling migration trends of displaced rural campesinos. Five years after the passage of CAFTA-DR, three departments in Guatemala (Huehuetenango, San Marcos and Quetzaltenango, whose residents have relied on subsistence

Land for sale in Tres Marias, Mexico

agriculture) noted substantial population losses. Huehuetenango unofficially estimated that about one third of its population has migrated (Abbott, 2015). One *campesino* from the Guatemalan highlands noted, "'There is no opportunity…We are unable to sustain on growing food for our local market, and there is little opportunity for work in the cities. That is why I left'" (Abbott, 2015, para. 13). Consequently, campesinos' economies and livelihoods have disappeared (Abbott, 2015).

Overall migration from Mexico and Central American has increased in recent years. These numbers have been increasing for unaccompanied minors too, doubling each year since 2011 (UNHCR, 2014). While most of this migration is sparked directly by gang and drug-related violence, Beachy (2014) connects the increase in violence and crime to economic instability rooted in failed trade agreements, namely CAFTA-DR. COHA (2012, June) explains that lower wages and employment means growing poverty, which can push people "into areas that [are] already troubled by inadequate housing, healthcare, and public safety, and [generate] further problems for the Mexican state, such as drug violence and urban sprawl" (p. 2). Thus, free trade agreements dismantle local economies and social networks, and contribute to violence and poverty, making migration the only escape.

Therefore, it is evident that both NAFTA and CAFTA-DR are examples of failed promises to create economic opportunities to reduce the push factors from migration, and in doing so have altered millions of livelihoods. Despite these unfulfilled outcomes, they continue to be free trade models. American University Professor of Economics, Robert Blecker commented that "Trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA, far from lessening migration pressures, have only increased them, and more trade agreements like TPP will only make matters worse" (Blecker, 2014).

U.S.-Mexico border fence in El Paso, Texas

Migrant journey

Many people seeking economic opportunities travel to the United States, which is an expensive and dangerous journey (McCarty, 2008). About half a million Mexicans attempt to cross the border every year (Olson, 2008; COHA, 2012). More than 4,000 people have lost their lives attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border during the first decade of the 21st century. As border security tightens, migrants journey through even harsher and more perilous desert conditions. This has contributed to the increasing fees of *coyotes*, or guides and smugglers, who charge thousands of dollars. The Mexico-Guatemala border has also become notoriously dangerous, known for its organized crime and corruption (Green, 2009). Green (2009) notes that, "almost everyone who passes through becomes a victim of robbery, rape, assault, kidnapping or violent 'accidents'" (p. 332). Migrants do not necessarily fare better at the U.S.-Mexico border, where there are several reports of Border Patrol using unnecessary force and violence (Green, 2009). Additionally, many are apprehended by authorities and sent back, further contributing to their debt (Anderson, 2008).

Migrants in the United States

Those that are able to cross the border take extremely low-paying jobs, many of which are in agriculture and the food industry. In fact, undocumented immigrants make up approximately half of the migrant and seasonal farm-labor force (Stone, 2009). This trend began in the early 1990s (see Figure 3 below). Moreover, Mexican born workers reached a high of 79 percent of hired crop workers between 1998 and 2000 (USDA-ERS, 2014).

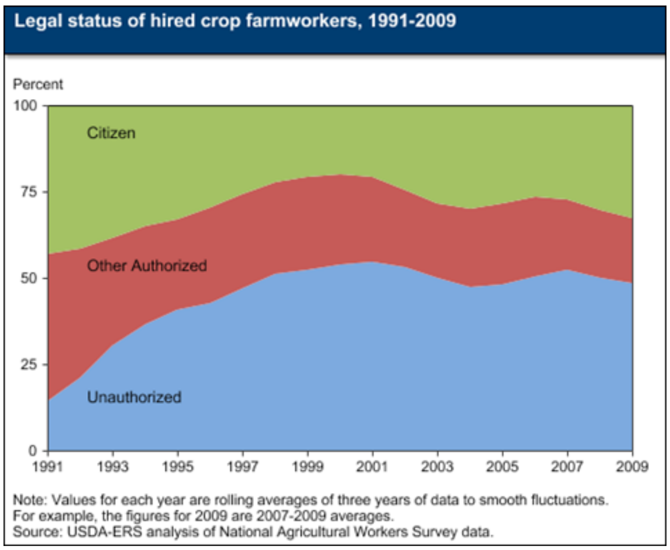

Figure 3: Legal status of hired crop farmworkers from 1991-2009 (does not include livestock or dairy industry workers) (USDA-ERS, 2014).

While there have been improvements in labor rights thanks to César Chávez, Dolores Huerta and other United Farm Workers community organizers, working conditions for approximately three million farmworkers in the U.S. are in violation of human rights because “the laws that exist are inadequately enforced, and penalties for violations are low” (Stone, 2009, p. 6). These externalities are not taken into account. Many migrant and seasonal farmworkers barely get any sleep between working long days and enduring long commutes to work, all for about $30-$40 a day (Stone, 2009; Green, 2009; Farmworker, personal communication, March 20, 2015). For one consumer dollar, laborers receive about eight cents (C. Marentes, personal communication, March 20, 2015). Some farmworkers along the border live at migrant shelters, while others live in colonias, unregulated settlements that lack basic services with poor living conditions and high incidences of illnesses (Stone, 2009).

Current immigration policies also make returning to one’s home country more difficult. Previously, migrant workers usually only worked for the season to earn extra income and returned to their home countries. Now it is too dangerous and difficult to go back and forth (C. Marentes, personal communication, March 20, 2015). Carlos Marentes, Director of Sin Fronteras in El Paso, Texas explains that relatives in Mexico often tell workers to “stay there [in the U.S.]” because they “don’t know how difficult the situation is here [in Mexico]. Workers are warned that if “you come, you are in danger” as organized crime already collects monthly quotas from families that have relatives working in the United States. Many migrant workers want to return home but feel trapped (Stone, 2009). Permanent migration is rising due to increased border policies and associated costs, which is weakening family ties (McCarty, 2008). Moreover, many migrant workers in the U.S. constantly worry about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, which “has driven migrants further into the shadows” (Green, 2009, p. 335), making them feel even more isolated.

Migrant workers picking chiles

The face of NAFTA on the border

La Mujer Obrera

La Mujer Obrera was founded in 1981 in El Paso, Texas in an area called El Segundo Barrio, or the Garment District where clothing factories, such as Levis, were located. The area was designed to meet the needs of the factories and not the community. Recognizing this need, La Mujer Obrera was founded by a group of women who started organizing so that women's voices were heard.

La Mujer Obrera and other organizers anticipated that the impacts of NAFTA would be devastating for both the people in Mexico and communities along the border, and that it would be a "death sentence for the indigenous people of Mexico," explains Lorena Andrade, Executive Director of La Mujer Obrera. And they were right. NAFTA was imposed on communities, resulting in a loss of 35,000 jobs in El Paso. Former garment workers describe completing a shift and then being told that was their last one with no warning (La Mujer Obrera members, personal communication, March 20, 2015). Andrade describes that this economic system "takes a place that is full of resources and people and uses them up; people are discarded; women on the border are disposable." After the factories were gone the community felt abandoned with failed commitments of new opportunities promised from NAFTA. Many of the workers could no longer pay for their homes, their cars, or their children's education with few resources provided by the factories or the city.

El Segundo Barrio in El Paso, Texas

La Mujer Obrera took to organizing again to demonstrate that "we have a right to produce for our own community and for the wellbeing of our community and for our children and for our families." La Mujer Obrera is filling the void of those broken promises and the lack of city support by creating space to have a collective practice to shape a new community. It has established several social enterprises to revitalize the community while creating spaces for women including a restaurant, day care, urban farm and farmers market and a trading company of a network of indigenous artisans in Mexico. La Mujer Obrera is building an alternative.

Café Mayan, one of La Mujer Obrera's enterprises


Meal at Café Mayapan

Migration implications at home

With so many people leaving the countryside or migrating north, communities are having difficulties keeping agriculture alive. Several communities that Stone (2009) visited have seen half of their working-age population migrate to the United States. Mexican country-sides are becoming depopulated, especially of men (McCarty, 2008). Moreover, "because millions of Mexican farmers have already left the countryside, and their production systems (i.e., basic equipment, rural mills and storage facilities, distribution channels, and local markets) have been largely dismantled, it would take a large investment for these people to return to the countryside and begin farming again" (Stone, 2009, p. 36). To revitalize small scale farming, communities need government support, but they also need the young people who have migrated to return (Stone, 2009). Outward migration of working-aged people and the loss of agriculture are resulting in a reduction of native varieties and culture. It is also breaking families apart. One migrant worker shares, "'I left Guatemala five years ago and the loneliness is killing me, I still have a wife and children in Guatemala, but I am no longer a part of that family, I only send back the money'" (Green, 2009, p. 334). Additionally, according to Green (2009), "the majority of the people crossing the Arizona-Mexico border are indigenous…these processes can also be thought of, in part, as an ethnocide in which people are torn from their history, their kin, their sense of place and space, and their work and livelihood are decimated" (p. 328). Thus, migration has widespread cultural, economic and social implications.

Young migrant worker on the U.S.-Mexico border


Migrant farmworkers on the U.S.-Mexico border

Remittances also play an important part in the agriculture-trade-migration nexus. As a vital part of the Mexican economy, making up three percent of its GDP (and the second largest source of national income after oil), remittances and thus migration, are not discouraged by the government. Where government spending has been reduced that once helped small-scale farmers, remittances are helping to "support families and provide services that were formerly the obligation of the Mexican government" (Bacon, 2013, p. 19). Moreover, Stone (2009) notes that "remittance money from the U.S. is actually being used to guarantee the dominance of foreign agribusiness in [Mexican] markets" because it is cheaper to buy corn at the store than it is to produce it. This coupled with the fact that the majority of migrant workers in the U.S. work in agriculture due to being pushed out of their home country creates a vicious feedback cycle within the agri-food system (Weis, 2007).

Solidarity

Carlos Marentes, Sin Fronteras Organizing Project and Centro de los Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos

Carlos Marentes has been leading the fight for food sovereignty and migrant rights since the 1970s and against NAFTA since 1992. Marentes describes the past 20 plus years of NAFTA as filled with environmental devastation, social and economic injustices especially among rural communities and peasants, displacement of people from their lands, racism and violence against the most vulnerable, intolerance and corruption.

Just like the Green Revolution did decades earlier, NAFTA destroyed rural communities. The idea of embracing "progress," that is transitioning *campesino* livelihoods to city and industrial life, has been dominated by policies that promote these ideologies, and NAFTA perpetuated this idea of "progress." Mexican people who were once able to nourish themselves physically, culturally and civically are no longer self-sufficient. When they come to the United States, migrant workers are seen as cheap labor and not as human beings. Nor are they usually treated like human beings; they do not have the right to organize and their hours of work often do not even earn them minimum wage. The Bracero Program[3] from 1942-1964, set this precedent of exploitation and racism, and NAFTA only further exacerbated it.

Even though NAFTA was implemented two decades ago with little reform and it may seem like the struggle against NAFTA is in the past,

3 The Bracero Program was an agreement signed in 1942 between Mexico and the United States to recruit and employ Mexican workers in agriculture and railroad construction, as the U.S. was facing shortages of labor, food and goods during World War II. The program officially ended in 1964 with more than 4 million Mexican farmworkers participating (Border Farmworker Center, n.d.).

Centro de los Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos

Marentes reminds us that Chávez said, "there are no lost struggles, just abandoned ones." Marentes explains that NAFTA was approved because those opposed to the treaty were divided on issues, such as the environment and labor. However we must recognize that all issues are interconnected and feed each other. The current economic system has created a loss of identity, but we must stand in international solidarity and not accept immigration reforms or agricultural deals that will have negative implications both domestically and abroad. Solidarity is a fight against inequality; "an attack against one is an attack against all." The reminder from NAFTA is that we need to continue to fight for solidarity and stop free trade agreements and policies that are responsible for many issues that we face today.

Border Farmworker Union flag

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