

Statement

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Good morning. Thank you for taking the time to cover this important event. The groups in this room have spent literally decades challenging the agricultural trade deregulation model epitomized by NAFTA and the Freedom to Farm Bill of 1996. Now we are coming together to seize this historic moment, during this time of transition, to begin rebuilding together, across borders, an alternative food system based on fair prices for farmers and ranchers, healthy food, conservation and prosperous rural communities.

As the people of North America anticipate President Obama's trip to Canada next week, we will all be watching closely for signs that he and political leaders of all three NAFTA countries recognize what the majority of our citizens already know—that the promises made by the proponents of NAFTA have not been kept, and that new policies are urgently needed. President Obama did acknowledge during the campaign that there are serious problems with NAFTA, and made a strong commitment to renegotiate this flawed agreement.

One key area where NAFTA has failed is agriculture, and it is on agriculture that we are focusing over the three days of this meeting. Specifically, we are focusing on opportunities to work together to move specific policy initiatives—such as the ban on packer ownership of livestock, which president Obama supports—that are designed to curtail the growing power of the global meat cartels, both in our livestock markets, and in our politics. We will offer these initiatives not only to President Obama, but to President Calderon of Mexico, to Prime Minister Harper of Canada, and to legislative leaders in all three NAFTA countries. Such steps—some of which will be explained in more detail by other speakers—include repealing provisions of NAFTA that impede the right of all countries:

- 1) To establish their own domestic food and agricultural policies that provide farmers with the cost of production as long as those policies do not result in the dumping of agricultural commodities into other countries' markets at below the cost of production.
- 2) To enforce antitrust laws designed to prevent price manipulation and other anti-competitive practices in agricultural markets.
- 3) To establish public owned grain reserves to stabilize prices, and to provide fair prices to both farmers and consumers.
- 4) To regulate commodity futures markets and speculative investments.

- 5) And finally, we call for the immediate repeal of the Chapter 11 “investor-state” clause of NAFTA, which gives investors the right to sue governments to obtain compensation for measures taken in the public interest that might diminish the value of their investment or reduce their profits.

We are not alone in our commitment to support NAFTA renegotiation.

The Permanent Commission of the Mexican Congress, as well as several State Governors, responding to the wide-spread demands by well-organized campesino organizations, is demanding a revision of NAFTA given the devastation it has caused for agriculture and its harmful effects on the rural population.

Similarly, a Canadian Parliamentary Sub-Committee on International Trade recommended that the Permanent Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade undertake a comprehensive review of NAFTA Chapter 11 on Investment and Chapter 19 on trade disputes.

In the United State, Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OHIO) and Representative Michael Michaud (D-MAINE) introduced the **2008 Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act** with over 80 cosponsors, which would require a review and renegotiation of NAFTA and other trade agreements. And they are committed to re-introducing the bill in 2009.

The groups participating in this tri-national meeting join with other citizens in Mexico, Canada and the United States in calling for NAFTA renegotiation, and 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.

Thank you.