

Statement
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Food & Water Watch is a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization and we are happy to be here today with farmers and ranchers from Mexico, Canada, and the United States to talk about how to work together to stop the negative impacts caused by bad trade policies.

Consumers care about workers, farmers, and the environment – all of which are damaged by trade policy that puts corporate controlled trade as its top priority. But consumers are also directly impacted when trade policy means that they are exposed to unsafe food or lose the ability to know what they are eating, where it is from, or how it was produced.

The growing number of food safety scares, from both domestic and imported food, has made it very clear that regulators are not doing enough to protect consumers. And the rising volume of imported food in all three of our countries makes it even harder for citizens to hold officials accountable for establishing and enforcing food safety rules. Consumers have no way to influence the governments of other countries on what they do to regulate food safety, but have to live with the consequences of what these governments do.

And despite many promises that expanded trade would benefit consumers, these benefits have not materialized. Even as the prices livestock producers receive have gone steadily down, retail food prices rarely do. So while the producer's share of the retail food dollar continues to shrink, consumers are not spending less at the meat and dairy case.

The tremendous interest in local food shows that consumers are looking for something different and that food that comes from closer to home fits the bill. The advantages of decentralizing our food production are many: local farmers can stay in business, we use less fuel to ship food, and consumers know more about where and how food was produced. But our ability to recreate these local food systems and to ensure that consumers in every country have access to safe food is being undermined by bad trade policy. Our current trade policy lets agribusiness pit producer against producer in a race to the bottom on price that few will survive. And it exposes reasonable regulations on food safety and food labeling to constant attack by corporations.

It is time to take a time out on free trade and rework trade policy to ensure that consumers everywhere are protected by strong food safety and labeling standards. These rules must be off limits to any efforts to weaken them for the convenience of agribusiness. And there must be room in our trade policy for antitrust measures so we can restore competitive markets for producers and prevent a handful of corporations from calling all of the shots about how our food system works.