



SIN MAÍZ NO HAY PAÍS

Without Corn there is no Country National Campaign

Open Letter to the President of the United States

- ✓ **We, the people of Mexico, also want to renegotiate NAFTA to protect our corn, the jobs of millions of farmers, and the way of life in the Mexican countryside**
- ✓ **Towards a new era of cooperation between the people of Mexico and the United States, based on respect for our sovereignty, dignity, and right to sustainable development**
- ✓ **We ask President Obama for a dialogue on NAFTA**

**Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America**

1. President Obama, Welcome to Mexico

On the occasion of your visit to our country, we welcome you in the name of farmers', human rights, environmental, and sustainable development organizations, as well as the thousands of citizens that participate in the ***National Campaign Without Corn there is no Country.***

The hope of the people of the United States, and their brave decision to end the Bush administration and elect you as president of the United States, represents for the people of Mexico as well a hope that we will end the era of neoliberalism and simulated democracy, guided by the hands of large corporations. We hope to advance towards a new era of cooperation between our people and take up the task of pursuing sustainable human development and rights.

The ***National Campaign Without Corn there is no Country*** is a plural, grassroots initiative that hopes to recoup for Mexico the right to food security sovereignty, the right of our farmers to maintain their way of life, the right to food for every member of our population, and the right to preserve the genetic and cultural patrimony of our native corn varieties. We consider the renegotiation of the agricultural chapter of NAFTA a necessary, but not sufficient step towards these ends.



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2. President Felipe Calderón does not speak the truth about NAFTA

You come here to meet with President Felipe Calderón. Surely you will not have the opportunity to meet with representatives of civil society. This limited opportunity for dialogue is the motivation for our letter.

We believe that President Felipe Calderón does not legitimately represent the Mexican people and won't tell you the truth about NAFTA and its dramatic negative impact on the economy, society, and environment in the Mexican countryside, as well as rest of the country's access to critical food resources.

On the contrary, President Calderón represents the interests of the largest corporations, particularly the agribusinesses, and pretends to "counsel" you, as he did before in Buenos Aires and Washington, that NAFTA has benefited our people, and Mexico, and that you should continue to deepen this failed model of free trade.

3. The truth behind NAFTA and its negative impact on rural Mexico

The truth about NAFTA and its economic, social, and environmental impact is different from what Calderón will tell you, and you, president Obama, should know it.

- Mexican emigration to the United States has gone up in the 15 years since NAFTA went into effect. During this time, six million Mexicans immigrated to the United States, tripling the average of the pre-NAFTA years, and reaching five hundred thousand Mexicans per year. Weren't we promised that, with NAFTA, this pattern would stop, as it was the result of a lack of opportunity in Mexico and the asymmetry in salaries and labor conditions? Instead, doesn't the continued and increased immigration represent irrefutable evidence of the failure of NAFTA?
- Of the 11.9 millions of undocumented people in the United States, 7 million are of Mexican origin.
- In the fifteen years of NAFTA, more Mexicans have died trying to reach the United States than Germans trying to cross over the Berlin Wall.
- The Mexican government has renounced its obligation to guarantee the development of the countryside and the production of food that had been promised as a supposed benefit of NAFTA and the end to the use of the "escape valve" that represents, on the one hand, migration to the United



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States, and, on the other, the income generated by the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics. In the Mexican countryside, millions of farmers lack employment opportunities as a result of U.S. dumping, the control of the large corporations, and the absence of a sound Mexican policy addressing agricultural production and sustainable development.

- With the implementation of NAFTA, Mexico lost its food self-sufficiency. Our country now imports 42% of the food it consumes, representing US\$22.5 billion and an agricultural trade deficit of US\$5.5 billion (2008); we import food and export millions of farmers and members of our rural communities.
- Dumping, including the importation of genetically modified corn, without control, and the Mexican government's irresponsible decision to promote the sowing of genetically modified corn in Mexico --corn's center of origin and diversity-- is affecting the way of life of millions of farmers and rural communities and the part of Mexican culture that is created and sustained through our food. This only serves to improve the sales and purposes of Monsanto. You cannot separate food from the way it is produced, acquired, and consumed. A study on genetically modified corn in Mexico produced by the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation, and conducted by Dr. Jose Sarukhán, recommended, among other things, that corn imported from the United States should be immediately ground as a measure to prevent its incorporation into the human food chain and protect native seeds from contamination. Furthermore, genetically modified seeds are contaminating the dozens of races and thousands of varieties of native corn that represent our genetic patrimony and an invaluable cultural resource, not only for Mexico, but for all of humanity. More than simply being the way we consume nutrients, calories, and protein, food is culture, it is identity; adequate nourishment is culture. As current White House food and backyard gardening practices show, we are confident that you are already well aware of these issues and we congratulate and appreciate the commitment to healthy, organic and locally produced food that your Administration has demonstrated. Right now, we want to be able to dialogue about promoting the same healthy eating and growing practices in Mexico, and ask for your support across the border.
- The prices of the basic basket of goods have increased ten-fold in the fifteen years of NAFTA. In the period of the administration of president Calderón alone they have increased 70%. While 65% of the Mexican population lives in poverty, our salaries have lost 70% of their purchasing power, more than 7.3 million Mexicans are unemployed in the first trimester of this year, and more than 55% of the economically active population works in the informal sector, without social security. Hunger stops being a mystery we need to explain through human decisions; the physical and economic access to food



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has stopped being a right. Hunger and malnutrition are a problem caused not by a lack of resources, but rather by a failure in the nutritional quality of the goods available, as well as their quantity and cultural acceptability, both of which affect our quality of life and human dignity.

- Mexico is a country of malnourished people, where the right to food is systematically violated. On one side, 20 million Mexicans are undernourished and suffer from anemia. As in sub-Saharan Africa, they are principally children under five-years-old who live in rural areas and are members of indigenous communities. On the other hand 70% of Mexicans suffer from obesity due to the consumption of junk food (and drink) produced by the largest food companies. We have the second highest levels in the world of obesity and soft drink consumption.
- It is concerning that the farmers' organizations that are defending their rights, the right to food of all of the Mexicans, fighting against the planting of genetically modified corn, and against the large agricultural and food corporations, are being persecuted by the authorities who invent crimes of which to accuse them. This criminalizes the right to defend our economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights.
- With NAFTA, the plundering of land and natural resources in indigenous and rural communities intensified. This has generated more poverty in the rural areas of Mexico. The land is used for large investments projects (dams, highways, airports, agro-industrial parks, etc) run by transnational or parastatal groups, and administered by private companies. These companies systematically violate the human rights of the population and the international agreements signed by Mexico, including article 169 of the OIT for indigenous communities and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- President Calderón says that NAFTA is working; the 20 largest corporations that control the system of agro-industry in Mexico agree. Nevertheless, the majority of Mexicans think otherwise, confirmed by a recent study. 73% of Mexicans and 72% of their leaders think that Mexico should renegotiate NAFTA, and more than any other part, the agricultural chapter.
- Thanks to the neoliberal social and economic policies that have deepened with NAFTA, inequality in Mexico has gone up (the richest 10% of the population controls 65% of our national wealth; president Calderón can boast the proud record of having one of the richest men in the world as a Mexican while at the same time we have the lowest growth rate of all of Latin American and the Caribbean).
- In sum, NAFTA was negotiated by and for the large corporations of North America. In Mexico, NAFTA was negotiated badly and implemented even worse.



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- We have lost our sovereignty and become a dependent country; the agreement has only benefited large corporations and a small minority of agro-exporters, making losers of our farmers, our workers, and our environment.

At the same time, President Obama, the lack of security and the growth of organized crime that worry us so much have been the result of the following causes: 1) lack of job opportunities, adequate salaries, and education for millions; 2) increasing inequality; 3) corruption and impunity; 4) a failure of credibility on the part of the government and its institutions that that only represent interest groups and defend the privileged; and 5) a failed, unilateral, partial and superficial strategy based on militarization.

As long as he continues to ignore the economic, social and institutional causes of the source of organized crime, the strategy of President Calderón will continue to fail.

4. Our proposal for the renegotiation of NAFTA and the construction of a new era of cooperation for sustainable development

As the preceding points have made clear, we believe that it is critical to negotiate NAFTA not only for the people of the United States —as you yourself articulated in your presidential campaign— but also for the people of Mexico.

We put before you, the Congress, and the people of the United States the following points to build a new era of cooperation between our people with the purpose of promoting sustainable development and a respect for human rights as well as the sovereignty of each of our countries:

I. Renegotiate NAFTA to recuperate our sovereignty and food security, for the right to preserve our own varieties of native corn without contamination by genetically modified seeds; for the right to produce our own food; for the right to maintain the work and way of life of three million corn growers and their families; for the right to the existence and value of our cultural and identity as a people of corn; for the right to sustainable human development in the Mexican countryside.

II. Establish a tri-national cooperation agreement for agricultural development and human development in rural areas, including creating a fund for structural investment and social cohesion, the prohibition of disloyal exports, and the suppression of protectionist non-tariff barriers disguised as food safety regulation.



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III. Promote a tri-national process of public debate between the administrations, congressional representatives, and civil society, based on cooperation and working towards sustainable human development, economic social, cultural, and environmental rights, and the rights of workers, farmers, and migrants, as well as democratic principles, to establish an alternative to the failed model of NAFTA.

IV. Promote immigration reform in the United States that permits legalization of the undocumented workers, opposes a wall along the border, and does not criminalize those in the United States without documentation.

V. Declare, in addition to everything else, a moratorium on the Alliance for Security and Prosperity of North America. We say “no” to the militarization of the border. The growing power of organized crime in Mexico is a product of inequality, the lack of employment opportunities and a dignified life for the majority of the Mexicans, largely from the countryside, and the lack of a government that responds to their needs, rights, and dreams.

To expand on what we have written, we would be grateful for the opportunity to begin a direct dialogue with you and your Administration.

Sincerely,

**The Countryside Won't Take It Anymore
Without Corn there is No Country
Hunger Cannot Wait
Mexican Food for Mexico**