

Mexico's indigenous people fight NAFTA's destruction of their community

By

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Five thousand years ago the indigenous people of Southern Mexico first domesticated corn, from a inedible progenitor *teosinte*. Thus began the agricultural revolution in North America enabling Native peoples of America to grow a surplus that would take through the winters. The land was now able to support a larger population of people, and the arts were able to be developed. A similar development had begun in Tigris and Euphrates Valley enabling Europe, African, and Asia to begin the journey toward civilizations. According to the Mayans, people are descended from corn.

Today the Mexican people derive at least 60 percent of their calories from corn, eaten as tortillas, tamales, and according to Wendy Call corn is fashioned in Oaxaca province into "baked *totopos*. A large, round cracker that stays fresh for months, the totopo represents local culture as much as maize represents Mexican culture. Baking totopos is a special skill, passed from mother to daughter to granddaughter." Oaxaca may be home to the widest diversity of corn varieties in the world, but Call reports that the indigenous farmers in Oaxaca are having increased difficulty finding a market for their corn. They are being undercut by the relatively cheap corn imported from the United States under the so called agreement called the North American Free Trade Agreement. While corn is being processed in the United States into biofuels, and the price of processed foods and fresh corn in the super market is making increasingly difficult for working people to pay their bills, corn grown in the United States is being used to undermine Oaxaca's farmers and the provinces economy.

All over Mexico trade policies are displacing people from agriculture who then become part of the Mexico's surplus labor force. Many of these people join the migration north to become America's undocumented work force. [Read Wendy Call's article in Yes magazine](#) on indigenous rights organizing and cooperatives for how Oaxaca's people are fighting back.