

Citizens Trade Campaign

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Despite Objections from Farmers and Ranchers, U.S. Plows Ahead With “Free Trade Agreement” with Australia

WASHINGTON – Despite strong opposition from a variety of sectors, including U.S. dairy producers, family farmers and ranchers, the Bush Administration will today sign a bilateral U.S.-Australia “Free Trade Agreement.” Signing the agreement will bring it one step closer to submission to Congress for final approval. Although the Bush Administration is touting the trade deal as a boost to the manufacturing sector, it could hurt thousands of family farmers and ranchers, especially in the dairy, beef, and wheat sectors. The signing brings the legislation a step closer to submission to Congress. Under “Fast Track” (Trade Promotion Authority) rules, once implementing legislation is sent to the Hill, Congress will have only 60 days in which to debate and vote on the agreement, without amendment.

Among Australian exports expected to undermine family farms in the U.S. are “milk protein concentrates” – a highly processed dairy product that is not an approved food ingredient by the Food and Drug Administration, yet is being illegally used as an ingredient by food companies.

Paul Rozwadowski, a Wisconsin dairy farmer representing the National Family Farm Coalition stated, **“U.S. trade negotiators compromised our future as dairy farmers. Dairy imports from Australia, regardless of the amount, could cause a massive drop in our milk price. Only dairy processors and importers benefit from this trade deal.”**

Under the agreement, most lamb and sheep meat tariffs would be eliminated, and Australia would also be able to export increasing quantities of beef duty-free to the U.S. each year for the next 18 years. Multinational corporations that control significant portions of the beef market in both the U.S. and Australia would profit tremendously from the agreement, and have been among the companies leading lobbying efforts for it.

“Removing tariffs on livestock imports will allow multinational meat packing cartels to dump more imported cattle into the U.S. market at below the cost of production, and predatorily depress domestic cattle prices in violation of U.S. anti-trust laws,” said Dennis Olson of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. **“The Bush Administration should enforce U.S. anti-trust laws at home, rather than cutting bad trade deals like this that make it easier for the meat packing cartels to manipulate livestock markets and further erode competition.”**

“It is time for Congress to step forward and put a stop to these ‘free’ trade agreements that are free in name only,” said Karen Englehart, a member of Dakota Rural Action and the Western Organization of Resource Councils Trade Team. **“It is time for Congress to take a good hard look at what these agreements have done to diminish our rural communities, independent businesses and family agriculture, while enhancing the power and profits of the multinational corporations.”**

The Citizens Trade Campaign (CTC) is a national coalition of environmental, labor, consumer, family farm, religious, and other civil society groups founded in 1992 during the fight over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). CTC members include Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment; Americans for Democratic Action; Communications Workers of America; Defenders of Wildlife; Friends of the Earth; Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy; International Brotherhood of Teamsters; the National Family Farm Coalition; Public Citizen; UNITE!; United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society; the United Steelworkers of America; United Students Against Sweatshops; and Western Organization of Resource Councils, as well as regional, state, and city-based coalitions, organizations, and individual activists throughout the United States.

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