

Western Organization of Resource Councils

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 9, 2004

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Gilles Stockton, 406-428-2183, or Jeri Lynn Bakken, WORC staff, 701-376-7077

Agreement with Australia Trades Away U.S. Agriculture

GRASS RANGE, MONT. – The recently concluded trade negotiation between the United States and Australia threatens the livelihoods of family farmers and ranchers, WORC (Western Organization of Resource Councils) said today.

The agreement reached yesterday immediately ends or phases out tariffs for many agricultural products including beef, lamb, sheep, wool, wheat, and dairy products.

According to a WORC spokesperson, Gilles Stockton, a rancher from Grass Range, Montana, the trade agreement has three serious flaws.

“First, this agreement will put many family livestock producers out of business,” Stockton said. “Second, it gives even more economic power to multi-national corporations. Finally, the process is blatantly undemocratic.”

Stockton said the agreement tries to mollify U.S. producers by phasing in more beef imports from Australia over the next 18 years. He noted the agreement with Australia is just one of several trade pacts affecting family agriculture.

“We’ve yet to see the impact of more imports from trade agreements with countries in South and Central America,” he said. “These agreements will spur a stampede of beef imports that will overrun the American cattle industry.”

The agreement immediately lifts tariffs on most lamb meat and wool and phases out other restrictions over four years. It also immediately ends tariffs on wheat and cereal flour mixes.

Three packers control and pack more than 80 percent of all beef in this country. The agreement increases concentration because Swift and Co., the second largest meat packer and procurer of beef in the U.S. is also Australia’s largest meat packer.

“This agreement further concentrates economic power of multi-national corporations at the expense of the small businesses of family farms and ranches,” Stockton said. “Multi-national corporations are global traders with allegiance only to themselves. They exploit both importing and exporting countries at the cost of cattle producers and consumers.”

Although cattle ranching is one on the most affected industries in the trade agreement with Australia, the U.S. trade negotiators never consulted with the American cattle producers.

“The U.S. Trade Representative negotiated away the future of American agriculture without any input from family farmers and ranchers like me,” he said. “That’s blatantly undemocratic.”

-30-

WORC is a network of grassroots organizations from seven states that include 8,750 members and 48 local community groups. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing training and by coordinating regional issue campaigns. Members are farmers, ranchers, and consumers.