

The Colombia FTA: Background on Illegal Drug Production

The Colombia FTA Could Lead to Increased Drug Production and Violence

- By displacing tens of thousands of Colombian peasant farmers, the Colombia FTA could easily lead to increased drug production and violence. This is not in anybody's national security interest.
- Just as we saw with NAFTA, the Colombia FTA's rules will allow multinational agribusiness cartels to dump cheap imports into Colombia at below the cost of production, displacing Colombian farmers from their local markets. NAFTA resulted in 1.5 million peasant farmers losing their rural livelihoods according to the Mexican government.
- In Colombia, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs conducted a study on nine primary agricultural products and found that full liberalization would lead to a 35% decrease in employment.
- The Colombian Ministry of Agriculture itself concluded that the FTA would give small farmers little choice but "migration to the cities or other countries (especially the United States), working in drug cultivation zones, or affiliating with illegal armed groups."
- Once rural farmers are pushed off their land, pressure to feed their families may force many of these locals to grow more coca for cocaine production or join illegal armed groups, leading to an increase in violence and insecurity in the region.
- Already Colombia is the top producer of cocaine, representing two-thirds of the world's supply. U.S. programs aimed at assisting small farmers in Colombia to grow legal food crops will be destroyed by the flood of new food imports expected under the FTA.
- The Washington Post editorial board warned in February 2006 that the "rural dislocation that would follow from ending all protection for Colombian farmers could undermine the government's efforts to pacify the countryside. If farmers can't grow rice, they are more likely to grow coca." Despite this, the Bush Administration rejected demands from Colombia to carve out basic staple crops from the FTA's removal of tariffs.
- As Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz noted, the upheaval that such agreements will have on rural livelihoods is a self-defeating course that will mean "there will be more violence and the U.S. will have to spend more on coca eradication."
- In the words of Archbishop Pedro Barreto, the President of the Episcopal Commission for Social Action of the Catholic Church in Peru, "We are certain that the trade agreement will increase the cultivation of coca, which brings along with it a series of negative consequences including drug trafficking, terrorism and violence."
- It's absurd that our country is considering passage of an FTA that is projected to lead to increased cultivation of drug crops, as we simultaneously spend millions in send taxpayer money to support growing of legal crops in Colombia.