

Area beet farmers say no to CAFTA

By [Jeff Zent](#), The Forum

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Lawmakers and sugar beet farmers gathered Thursday on the Mark Nyquist farm south of Moorhead and announced collecting 25,000 signatures on a petition against the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement.

In December, U.S. negotiators reached a trade agreement that calls for phasing out tariffs and other trade barriers with six Central American countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

U.S. sugar beet and cane farmers say the trade deal is bad news because it increases the amount of sugar the Central American countries can sell in the United States.

Sugar beet farmers and processing plant workers in the Red River Valley began circulating copies of the petition early this year in hopes of gaining support against the agreement.

Sugar industry officials displayed the petition signatures on a large wooden wall on Nyquist's farm and packed copies of the petition in boxes to be sent to President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and members of Congress.

"My family farm and other family farms are in danger," said Victor Krabbenhoft, a Clay County sugar beet farmer and chairman of the Minn-Dak Farmers Cooperative in Wahpeton, N.D.

"This is not about a bag of sugar," Sen. Byron Dorgan said. "It's about family farms.

"It's about exporting jobs," said Dorgan, D-N.D. "It's about destroying an industry." CAFTA, along with other free-trade proposals, could drown the U.S. sugar industry in cheap imports, said Rep. Earl Pomeroy, D-N.D.

The Bush administration hasn't asked Congress to vote on CAFTA because the accord hasn't garnered enough support, Pomeroy said.

Congress will not consider the trade agreement until after the election, he said.

Readers can reach Forum reporter Jeff Zent at (701) 241-5526