April 27, 2016

Attention: Ag/Trade Leg. Staff

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

The undersigned 161 farm, food, rural and faith groups urge you to reject the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement. Independent family farmers and ranchers will see little benefit from the purported export gains from the TPP. At the same time, TPP imports will compete against U.S. farmers that are facing declining farmgate prices that are projected to stay low for years. The main beneficiaries of the TPP are the companies that buy, process and ship raw agricultural commodities, not the farmers who face real risks from rising import competition.

The TPP is promoted as a boon to farmers because of the increased agricultural export opportunities. The trade deals of the past two decades have been promoted as export generating, but it is important to recognize that despite the reduction of foreign tariffs, the volume of U.S. exports has not increased as projected. For example, the United States’ total combined exports of corn, soybeans and wheat have remained steady at about 100 million metric tons for the last 30 years despite a raft of free trade agreements since the mid-1990s.

More specifically, the TPP proponents have substantially oversold the agricultural market access and potential export gains. The TPP members that the U.S. does not already have existing free trade agreements with are mostly smaller economies like Malaysia, New Zealand and Vietnam where there is insufficient demand to generate significant export opportunities. Agricultural exports to the larger Japanese market will be hindered by long phase-ins of tariff reductions and offsetting policies like subsidies and tariff snapbacks for key products like pork and beef.

Even these modest export benefits accrue more to the companies that process and market agricultural products than to the farmers that produce crops and livestock. Individual farmers aren’t the ones exporting their goods to these new markets. Instead, grain traders, meatpackers, produce shippers and food processors sell these products overseas and reap the majority of the benefits from increased market access. The farmer’s share of any increased exports is similar to the tiny farmer’s share of the retail food dollar.

Any export opportunities must be weighed against the more likely increase in low-priced agricultural imports that would compete against and displace U.S. farm products. Trade deals do not just add new export markets — the flow of trade goes both ways — and the U.S. has committed to allowing significantly greater market access to imports under the TPP. Agricultural imports have surged under previous trade deals that have been particularly damaging to the U.S. fresh and processed fruit and vegetable sector. Tomatoes from Mexico, berries from Chile, cut flowers from Colombia, lamb from
Australia, garlic and canned produce from China have all undermined domestic producers and the livelihoods of the farmworkers and food processing plant workers.

The increased agricultural import competition under the TPP will likely overshadow export benefits and will drive down the prices U.S. farmers receive for their crops and livestock. Larger import volumes depress domestic prices — this is especially true for low-priced and even artificially low-priced imported farm goods. For example, already the United States has more than a one billion-pound beef trade deficit with TPP partners and beef imports will likely increase significantly more than beef exports. Currently, domestic cattle prices are collapsing and the added influx of even more beef will make this bad situation even worse. The TPP would also bring more dairy powder from New Zealand, processed fruits and vegetables from Vietnam and Malaysia as well as fresh produce from all the TPP partners.

These additional imports also benefit the buyers of raw agricultural products. These transnational companies have the capacity to look all over the globe for agricultural products, pitting farmers worldwide against one another. For example, the largest domestic beef and pork packing firms are not U.S.-based companies. The TPP gives these firms even more countries to shop for cheaper goods (often produced under considerably weaker environmental, farmworker and labor standards) and import them under lower tariffs to compete directly with U.S. farmers.

The TPP contains other provisions governing investment, government purchasing, food safety, animal health and crop disease and labeling that can further undermine domestic farm economies. Trade deals have been used to overturn U.S. country of origin meat labels, investment rules facilitate foreign corporate ownership of U.S. farmland, and the procurement provisions could be used to unravel domestic and local farm purchasing programs.

Finally, since the TPP lacks binding and enforceable provisions against currency manipulation, foreign countries would likely devalue their currencies to encourage even more agricultural exports to the United States. By failing to effectively deal with currency manipulation, TPP fails to address a substantial cause of a debilitating trade deficit that causes a 3 percent drag on our economy and caused the loss of millions of U.S. jobs. Many family farmers need off-farm income to supplement their farm earnings and ensure a decent living for their families. That off-farm income is harder to find as jobs are lost to trade deals like the TPP.

The TPP poses significant risks for American farmers and ranchers. The surge of agricultural imports from prior trade deals contributed to declining prices and the often-precarious economic viability of independent farms. The modest agricultural export opportunities would largely be captured by the shippers, distributors, processors and traders and provide a very limited benefit to farmers and ranchers. We urge you to stand up for American independent farm and ranch families and reject the TPP.

Signed:
Alabama Contract Poultry Growers Association  
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives  
Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network  
Alaska Farmers Union  
Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) (MT)  
American Agriculture Movement  
American Grassfed Association  
Arkansas Farmers Union  
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake County (OH) Farmers Union  
Bandera Grassland (TX)  
Belcampo (CA)  
BioRegional Strategies  
Bold Alliance (IA, LA, NE & OK)  
Boots on the Ground, LLC  
Buckeye Quality Beef Association (OH)  
Buffalo Mountain Coop and Café (VT)  
Bull Mountain Land Alliance (MT)  
California Dairy Campaign  
California Farmers Union  
Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform  
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment  
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (NC)  
The Carrot Project (MA)  
CASA del Llano (TX)  
Social Services Office-Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri/Diocese of Jefferson City  
Cattle Producers of Louisiana  
Cattle Producers of Washington  
Center for Family Farm Development Inc. (GA)  
Central United Methodist Church of Detroit Social Justice Society  
Church Women United in New York State  
Colorado Independent Cattle Growers Association  
Colorado Women Involved in Farm Economics  
Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CA)  
Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias  
The Cornucopia Institute  
Cottage House, Inc. (AL)  
Council for Healthy Food Systems (TX)  
Crawford Stewardship Project (WI)  
Dakota Resource Council (ND)  
Dakota Rural Action (SD)  
East New York Farms!  

Ecological Farming Association (CA)  
Fair World Project (OR)  
Family Farm Defenders (WI)  
Farm Aid  
Farm Alliance of Baltimore  
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance  
Farm Labor Organizing Committee  
Farmworker Association of Florida  
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund  
Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc.  
Food & Water Watch  
Food Chain Workers Alliance  
Food Democracy Now!  
Food for Maine’s Future  
Four Seasons Artisans and Farmers Market (CO)  
Franklin Community Co-op (MA)  
Friends of Family Farmers (OR)  
Grand Forks County Citizens Coalition (ND)  
Grassfed Livestock Alliance  
Hawai'i Farmers Union United  
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils  
Illinois Farmers Union  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota (I-BAND)  
Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming  
Indiana Farmers Union  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
International Texas Longhorn Association  
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement  
Iowa Farmers Union  
Just Food (NY)  
Kansas Farmers Union  
Land Loss Prevention Project (NC)  
Land Stewardship Project (MN)  
Local Food RULES (ME)  
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA)  
Michigan Farmers Union  
Michigan Land Trustees  
Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op (VT)  
Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association  
Minnesota Farmers Union  
Minnesota National Farmers Organization  
Mississippi Assoc. of Cooperatives  
Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network  
Missouri Farmers Union  
Missouri Rural Crisis Center  
Missouri’s Best Beef Cooperative  
Monadnock Food Co-op (NH)
Montana Farmers Union
Montgomery Countryside Alliance (MD)
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farmers Organization
National Farmers Union
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc.
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
National Women Involved in Farm Economics
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics
Neighboring Food Co-op Association (New England)
Nevada Live Stock Association
New England Farmers Union (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (MA)
North Dakota Farmers Union
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - CT
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - MA
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NY
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NH
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - VT
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate Council (NOFA-IC)
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association
Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
Northwest Farmers Union
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Ohio Farmers Union
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project
Oregon Rural Action
Oregon Rural Action, Blue Mountain Chapter
Oregon Rural Action, Snake River Chapter
Oregonians for Safe Farms and Families
Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM)
Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association
Organization for Competitive Markets
Our Family Farms Coalition
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
PLBA Housing Development Corp. (AL)
Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
Progressive Agriculture Organization (PA)
R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America
Rainbow Natural Grocery (MS)
Ranch Foods Direct (CO)
Real Pickles Cooperative, Inc. (MA)
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Rooted in Community
Rooted in Community Youth Food Justice Leadership Network (CA)
Roots of Change (CA)
Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA (RAFI-USA)
Rural Advancement Fund (SC)
Rural Coalition
Rural Vermont
Slow Food USA
Socially Responsible Agricultural Project
South Dakota Farmers Union
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Spokane County Cattlemen (WA)
Sustainable Food Center (TX)
Texas Farmers Union
Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Assoc.
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
Utah Farmers Union
Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives (MA)
Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network
Western Colorado Congress
Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC)
Willimantic Food Coop (CT)
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Wyoming Women Involved in Farm Economics