



MSC 68th Student Conference on National Affairs

“Hanging in the Balance: American Leadership in Global Crisis”

Texas A&M University

Policy Proposal

“What’s for Dinner?: Forming Resilient Supply Chains and

Infrastructure”

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Homeland Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack

CC: Chief of Staff Jeff Zients

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SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: Supply Chain Interagency Working Group

SUBJECT: Supply Diversity - Agricultural Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (AFTAA)

DATE: 11 Feb 2023

Introduction

In order to address the security threat of supply chain shortcomings, we recommend the creation of an Agricultural Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (AFTAA). AFTAA will be an agricultural free trade agreement among the nations of North, Central, and South America. This coordinated international effort among the nations of the Western Hemisphere emphasizes food as both a solution to security issues and as the foundation of freedom.

Background

Unpredictable changes occurring in the global supply chain, especially pertaining to agriculture, are critical security concerns. The Covid-19 Pandemic disrupted the flow of trade across the world and exacerbated pre-existing issues in the supply chain. The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine adversely impacted the importation of agricultural inputs and products. As the United States (U.S.) population continues to expand, we precariously rely on a flawed agricultural system built on intensive monoculture production and the sourcing of agricultural inputs from unstable actors. With global predictions projecting 10 billion people by 2050, diversifying the agricultural supply chain at all levels is key to addressing current and potential conflict.

Problem Analysis

Supply chain shocks stemming from unforeseeable events such as the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrate the vulnerabilities in our current system. As political conflicts and natural disasters plague different regions of the world, it has become ever more important that we diversify our food supplies to be capable of sustaining ourselves in times of crisis.

Proposal

Diplomacy

Extensive trade agreements currently exist between North, Central, and South American countries. Creating AFTAA simplifies and focuses international efforts to solve critical food issues. Currently, pervasive environmental and distribution issues hinder Central and South America's potential trade capabilities and perpetuate social inequalities. As the world's most prolific importer of goods, the U.S. must develop source diversification in order to decrease resource dependence on malign actors. A mutually-beneficial agricultural partnership draws on a wealth of agricultural knowledge to not only foster cooperation but lower trade barriers of agricultural products amongst members.

Informational

USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) recently found that there has been a steady reduction in research and development (R&D) spending in agriculture within all high-income nations. Member nations can increase yields and production efficiency by increasing R&D for new agricultural sustainable intensification methods. This endeavor, in combination with a continual exchange of proven agricultural methods and vital agricultural inputs, will expand the variety of crops available within member countries, decrease the amount of food and input waste, and promote commodity diversification. Domestically, restructuring the Farm Bill to include a more diverse selection of commodities will allow farmers to better rotate crops, thus planting for the demands of the market rather than for the stipulations of subsidized programs. We should incentivize alternative growing techniques to develop 21st century farming solutions rather than depend on antiquated methods that have left us dependent on diminishing resources, proven detrimental to our environment, and created precarious dependence with adversarial nations.

Security

To facilitate the exchange of agricultural goods and knowledge between allies, we must strengthen and protect the transitory period. Nations will improve maritime security and foster international stability through extensive port security training such as establishing secure area boundaries and inspection protocol standards. AFTAA nations will host American maritimes forces and benefit from the gold standard of maritime protection and upgraded port infrastructure. American maritimes forces will withdraw from member ports after developmental training is up to internationally accepted standards. Additionally, it is critical to heighten domestic inspection efforts through the use of x-ray technology and detection dogs at major container ports throughout the U.S. This secondary layer of defense ensures American safety, institutes accountability for international training measures, and creates a quantifiable metric of success for training programs. In addition to improving the safety of transportation systems, these security initiatives will increase the efficiency of the international transportation of goods. Intensified maritime security enhances product quality, protects American citizens, and promotes agricultural diversity.

Economic

Effective trade integration in the Western Hemisphere requires reduced economic barriers. Implementing cost-effective incentives and minimizing tariffs between AFTAA member states emphasizes cooperation where there is competition. Optimally subsidizing American agricultural markets to address vital commodity needs, such as fertilizer and other agricultural inputs, can generate new market opportunities with AFTAA member states and decrease reliance on adversarial sources for critical agricultural resources. A U.S.-led integration of agricultural markets and supply lines in Central and South America reduces overall costs, increases regional productivity, and stimulates economic growth both domestically and internationally.

Conclusion

The innate needs of humanity are at the core of every security issue. AFTAA promotes healthy interdependence in a global world that is growing, connecting, and consuming at unprecedented rates. By addressing the lack of diversity in the American food supply, we care for our citizens, ensure our security, and protect our freedoms.

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