

Know Where Your Food Is Grown? Globalization Destroys Farming

by Marcia Merry Baker

Globalization—a proven disaster—will be presented as the first priority on July 7 in Nashville, Tenn., when the U.S. Department of Agriculture starts its first in a months-long series of public-comment “Farm Forums” on the policy for a new five-year U.S. farm bill, to take effect in 2007. The first of six discussion topics, released in June by the USDA, asks: “How should farm policy be designed to maximize U.S. competitiveness and our country’s ability to effectively compete in global markets?”

In reality, over the past 30 years, the shift of food supplies away from nation-serving farming patterns, to “global sourcing”—as its called in the argot of free-trade—has been, predictably, deadly in its impact. Africa is food-short to the point of genocide. Mexico, once a net grain exporter in the 1960s, today has developed extensive, official “hunger zones.”

In the United States, the once highly productive, highly capitalized, high-infrastructure farm regions—from dairy, to grains, livestock, fruits, and vegetables—have been *destructured*, even to the point of mass depopulation from rural counties. The few new U.S. food production centers rely on low-pay, immigrant labor. As of June 2004, the United States became, in money terms, a net food importer—that is, the value of its imported foodstuffs exceeded U.S. food exports. For many basic food items, the volume of U.S. consumption—by weight of product—is now dependent on foreign production.

In July, a series of maps and animations of the economic patterns and sources of the American food supply, will be released by *EIR*. They are commissioned by Lyndon LaRouche as part of his ongoing mobilization of lawmakers and citizens to understand the physical economy, and to intervene with emergency measures in the collapse process now under way in the economy and financial superstructure gener-

ally (see “Recreating Our Economy” at www.larouche.pac.com).

There are two main features characterizing the takedown of U.S. food and agriculture output capacity over the past 35 years. Both involve the imposition of agriculture and trade practices intended to serve the interests of a select few commodities multinationals, and associated financial circles, over and above sovereign nations. First, there was outsourcing of production in the name of “free” (rigged) trade, and international “competition,” especially through successive international changes enforced through the 1980s Uruguay Round of the GATT (UN General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade), the 1989 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (CFTA), the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January 1995.

Second, there has been sweeping destructuring of traditional domestic, high-infrastructure American farm production, to on-the-cheap, cartel-controlled output centers.

U.S. Food Import Dependence

Table 1 shows a summary picture, by major food group, of the increasing degree to which the United States has become dependent on foreign sources for its basic food supply over the past 20 years. Since the time these figures were assembled (February 2004), the pattern has intensified. The figures show import share of consumption, in terms of volume, not money value. In these terms, the import dependence for consumption of fish and shellfish, for example, has risen to close to 80%; the import share for U.S. consumption of fruits, juices, and nuts now stands at over 33%.

This latter category, plus many vegetable crops, comprise what is called “horticulture products” in agriculture trade,

which as a group has been driving the U.S. import surge over the past ten years. About 43% of all U.S. agricultural imports in 2003 were horticultural products—tomatoes, peppers,

asparagus, onions, etc. In turn, as of 2001, Mexico alone was the source of 27% of U.S. fruit imports, and 38% of vegetable imports. The particulars of this import flow make the point

about the *disorganization* this kind of trade and production represents in the farming, transportation, handling and distribution, and other aspects of the physical economy, for the United States, Mexico, and other nations which are partner to this destructive, “free” trade.

The continental United States has the agro-climatic potential for nearly year-round self-sufficiency in all but tropical and certain specialty crops—bananas, pineapples, coffee, etc. This comes mostly from open-field production, and certainly also from “protected” agriculture—glass, plastic, and other forms. The relevant Winter-crop counties are in California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida, besides Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

However, once NAFTA phased out tariffs on Mexican fruit and vegetable imports into the United States, huge for-export operations were started up in Mexico, by various corporations of the global cartel networks. This is true for frozen and various processed foods, as well as fresh. Accordingly, farm counties declined in the United States where fruit- and vegetable-growing were centered. Alongside this pattern, seasonal truck-gardening around cities likewise disappeared, as farming was displaced by suburban sprawl.

The case of the dramatic rise in tomato imports from Mexico and Canada illustrates the process, as shown in the map of locations of for-export tomato greenhouses, in **Figure 1**.

U.S. Farm Regions Subverted

Apart from the imposition of food import dependence on the United States, and export-sourcing forced on Mexico, Canada and elsewhere for certain kinds of food products, which have displaced large areas of U.S. farming, there are some other commodities that are still mostly supplied domestically in the United States, but by downgraded methods. There have been sweeping shifts made, away from traditional, highly organized farming counties, into “new,” on-the-cheap production centers run by the globalizing commodity cartels.

This is especially the case for dairy, hogs, poultry, and certain crops such as soybeans. For example, as of the 1960s, pork production

TABLE 1

Import Share of U.S. Food Consumption Is Rising, By Weight, 1981-2002

Food Groups	Average Percent				Percent in 2002
	1981-85	1986-90	1991-95	1996-2000	
Total Food					
Consumption	9.0%	9.7%	10.5%	12.0%	13.0%
Animal Products ¹	3.4	3.7	3.5	4.1	5.3
Red Meat	6.7	8.1	7.3	7.7	9.5
Dairy Products	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.5	3.5
Fish, Shellfish	50.9	56.0	56.0	64.4	78.6
Crops and Products ²	14.0	14.9	16.1	18.2	19.1
Fruits, Juices, Nuts	21.0	26.6	27.3	28.6	31.0
Vegetables	4.9	6.0	5.5	8.0	9.6
Grains and Products	1.7	2.9	5.6	5.9	5.3
Vegetable Oils	15.5	17.6	17.4	18.0	15.5
Sweeteners, Candy	35.8	25.6	29.4	34.2	28.0

1. Includes poultry meat; animal fats.

2. Includes coffee, cocoa, and tea whose import shares are 100%; and beverages.

Sources: Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture; U.S. Census Bureau.

FIGURE 1

Major Tomato-Producing Greenhouse Sites In North America, for U.S. Consumption



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Amber Waves*, April 5, 2005.

was concentrated in the “hog belt” running from Ohio westward, centered in Iowa and Illinois. In 1981, of 58 million hogs in the U.S. inventory, fully 16 million were in Iowa. Nearby Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Missouri had 18 million head. Family farming predominated. With Iowa’s nearly 90% land area considered arable, the swine effluent was handled for fertilizer, and otherwise disposed of. Pork-processing plants were located throughout the region. Feed was grown likewise in the region. As of the 1970s, railroads still served farm needs for inputs and marketing.

Then, over the intervening 25 years, pork—and all meat processing—became highly consolidated under the control of very few global companies, which, in turn, either set up their own hog “factory farms,” and/or dictated the terms (type, price) of animals they would buy. Thousands of Midwestern family farms went out of operation. At the same time, the world’s largest pork processor, Smithfield, headquartered in Virginia, moved, with a few other multinationals, to set up gigantic hog operations in North Carolina.

Whereas in 1981, North Carolina had 1.98 million hogs, grown by family farmers throughout the coastal plains, today the state has 9.7 million hogs, mostly raised by Smithfield, and others in the consortia. Livestock feed is brought in from Brazil, through a new port the meatpacker consortia set up in Wilmington, N.C. Immigrant labor gangs tend the hog buildings. In the event any livestock disease outbreak occurs, the automatic result will be a hit on the national food supply.

The amount of swine effluent is so great relative to the arable land in North Carolina—more than half of the state is uplands and forest—that even if all the slurry of urine and feces is applied to the farm fields in the most high-tech, subsoil fashion, there is simply not enough surface area to accommodate the volume of swill. In June 1995, during flooding season, a huge dump of hog waste overwhelmed the New River.

In the Midwest, the former hog-producing counties have, overall, experienced a loss of family farms, infrastructure—rail, hospitals, urban centers—and are becoming depopulated. Iowa itself still has the same number of hogs, 16 million, as in 1981, but far more are produced either in larger family-run operations, where family members must work off-farm for needed income; or in mega-hog corporate production facilities. The surrounding states have 2 million fewer hogs than in the 1980s.

Warning: ‘Just-In-Time’ Food Supply?

The implications of the decline in the U.S. domestic food production were the topic of a *Kansas City Star* feature article, posted on May 29 (kansascity.com), “Old Plains Ranching, Farming Traditions Disappearing,” by Jack Coffman and George Anthan, longtime Midwestern farm state journalists. “ ‘We now have a just-in-time delivery system for food,’ is the description for the vulnerability of the U.S. food supply to shortages, by Dr. William Heffernan, of the University of Missouri. ‘Anything that disrupts that system, including a terrorist attack, we come up against it pretty fast.’ ”