

TRADING IDEAS FOR A NEW FOOD SYSTEM

TRADE POLICIES FOR SUSTAINABLE, HEALTHY, FAIR FOOD SYSTEMS

In recent years Europe has seen unprecedented opposition to free trade agreements such as TTIP and CETA and their impacts. Central to these protests were concerns that these new trade and investment agreements would have harmful impacts on food quality, consumers' rights, farmers, producers' income, as well as wider negative impacts on jobs and working conditions in the food sector.

This short discussion paper aims to contribute to the debate on visions of another trade and food policy, the changes that are needed to prompt a shift towards a more resilient, fair and sustainable food system, and how the EU's trade policies can build a more sustainable future for everyone.

1. FAIR AND DIVERSE FOOD SYSTEMS

VISION

A sustainable trade policy fosters trade that ensures a fair income and decent conditions for workers, and grants access to high quality products for all citizens. Trade policies, in conjunction with food and social policies, ensure a balance between fair prices for producers and a level playing field for farmers, decent wages and access to adequate and nutritious, good quality food for all. Vibrant and diverse food and farm businesses flourish without being undermined by cheaper imports, corporate control or unfair trading practices.

PROBLEM

In the absence of meaningful social policies, cheap food is often seen as a social good and therefore something that must remain cheap. Increasing global trade aggravates the view of food as a simple commodity, obscuring its environmental, socio-cultural, economic and health aspects. Many farmers and small food businesses are struggling to survive as the cost of production is often more than the price they receive for their products.

Trade is distorted by exploitative and unsustainable practices that damage the environment, prevent farmers receiving a fair income, and lower workers' rights in the EU as well as in exporting countries. These practices are most often pursued due to their lower production costs.

QUESTIONS

- What needs to change to ensure EU trade policies ensure a fairer deal for producers, workers and consumers?
- What complementary policies are needed to ensure the right to food for all is guaranteed and fulfilled, whilst ensuring the price of food reflects the true cost of production?
- What other mechanisms can be employed to ensure that the true cost of food is reflected in its price, and therefore in trade regimes?

2. ENHANCED HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

VISION

Trade policy contributes to delivering a healthy and environmentally friendly food system, making the healthy option the easiest. A healthy and environmentally-friendly food system ensures food quality, and reduces dependence on intensive animal farming methods which lead to problems such as antimicrobial resistance, as well as making sustainably-produced food available to all.

Resource efficient food production, which works within planetary boundaries, is implemented through EU farming and trade policies. The EU is reducing its dependence on – and depletion of – natural resources from countries in the Global South.

PROBLEM

Food and environmental standards (for example, related to production, labelling etc.) are seen as barriers to trade, rather than being recognised for ensuring quality, protecting and informing people, or protecting the environment. Globalised trade contributes to intensification in agriculture by placing the emphasis on reducing costs in order to compete internationally, thereby reducing diversity in farming systems as well as in food.

QUESTIONS

- How can trade encourage diverse, sustainable and healthy food systems and producers e.g. short/local supply chains?
- What changes are needed to EU trade policy to ensure that health and environment standards are not seen as barriers to trade?
- How can trade policy be used to foster diversity in agriculture?
- How can trade policies reflect the multi-dimensional aspect of agriculture and avoid farm outputs being treated only as tradeable commodities?

3. RESILIENT AND DIVERSE FOOD SYSTEMS

VISION

Trade policy contributes to building a robust and diverse food system that builds environmental and economic resilience to cope with sudden unexpected changes such as weather extremes or economic downturns. Trade policy serves society's goals to prevent climate change and biodiversity loss, reduce inequalities, ensure the right to food for all, and contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

PROBLEM

Increased international trade promotes standardisation and economic dependency on a handful of corporations, increasing the challenges of feeding a growing global population and economic sustainability. Trade policy is contributing to growing inequality and the consolidation of ever-larger corporations.

QUESTIONS

- Can trade policy be used to foster diversity in food production?
- How can farm, landscape and economic diversity be built into the food system and trade rules designed to ensure that this is not undermined?
- How can trade policy help build food system resilience to economic and environmental shocks?

4. PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN TRADE RULES

VISION

The right of governments to legislate on food-related public health, consumer and environmental issues is a cornerstone of trade policy. Governments have the right and freedom to raise standards and take precautionary measures where necessary to protect human health and the environment. Human and environmental rights have primacy over corporate rights.

PROBLEM

New trade deals have sought regulatory cooperation or convergence, often leading to the reduction of standards to the lowest common denominator. Emphasis is given to ensuring trade is prioritised over other public issues, shifting discussions from democratic processes to opaque trade committees. Trade deals also contribute an increasing lack of protection for human and environmental rights and lack of regulation to control the behaviour of multinational corporations.

QUESTIONS

- What measures need to be introduced to ensure that trade policy allows the right to regulate on public safety and the environment?
- How can the precautionary principle be made legally binding in trade policy?
- What policies or agreements are necessary to ensure human and environmental rights have primacy over corporate rights?
- How can corporate rights be balanced with binding corporate responsibilities?

We hope that others will also contribute to this discussion and share their views for how the EU's trade policies can build a more sustainable future for everyone.

This is an introduction text to 5 individual short visions for another trade policy by Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT), European Milk Board (EMB), European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE).

**LOOK FORWARD FOR
YOUR OPINION?**

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