
Reduces Food Safety

Since NAFTA, food imports from Mexico and Canada have surged 194 percent, overwhelming border food inspectors. NAFTA also explicitly limited border food safety inspection and required us to accept food imports that do not meet U.S. safety standards. This most impacts communities with the least food security.

NAFTA required us to allow meat and poultry imports from Mexico and Canada if their safety regimes were deemed “equivalent” to our own, even if core aspects of our food safety requirements were not met. Before NAFTA, only meat and poultry from processing plants in Canada and Mexico that met U.S. safety and quality standards – and that were certified as doing so by U.S inspectors – could be sold here. NAFTA not only required us to allow imports produced under the other countries’ differing standards, but required us to accept meat from any processing plant in Mexico and Canada that was certified as complying with those countries’ domestic standards.

Effectively this required us to outsource our food inspection to the other countries. Even after infrequent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) spot checks of a sample of Canadian and Mexican processing plants found major health threats, their safety regimes were still deemed “equivalent” to U.S. standards.

And, U.S. consumers are eating increasing quantities of meat imported from Mexico and Canada. For instance, combined U.S. beef imports from both countries have risen 133 percent since NAFTA took effect. But the USDA only physically inspects 6.7 percent of beef, pork and chicken imports. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) only physically inspects about 1 percent of the food imports that it regulates (vegetables, fruit, seafood, grains, dairy and animal feed) at the border.

A U.S. food safety rule on pesticides, labeling or additives that is higher than international standards can be subject to challenge as an “illegal trade barrier.” The United States could be required to eliminate these rules and allow in the unsafe food or face millions of dollars in trade sanctions annually until we comply.

Under NAFTA, food labels can also be challenged as “trade barriers.” This isn’t just hypothetical: Canada and Mexico sued the United States under World Trade Organization rules over our country-of-origin labeling of beef and pork – and the United States lost! In order to avoid more than \$1 billion in annual sanctions, Congress repealed the popular consumer law. And, under NAFTA, a foreign meat processing or food corporation operating within the United States could directly challenge our policies that they claim undermine their expectations.

Featured Resources:

- [Sierra Club: The WTO Just Dealt a Blow to U.S. Consumers and Dolphins](#)
- [Congress Kills Country-of-Origin Meat Labels That 90 Percent of Americans Support](#)