

29 April 2021

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington DC 20250
Via email: Tom.Vilsack@usda.gov.

The Honorable Katherine Tai
U.S. Trade Representative
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20508

TRANSMITTED ELECTRONICALLY

Dear Ambassador Tai and Mr. Secretary:

Congratulations on your recent confirmations as leaders of key agencies in the new US Administration.

We, the 80 undersigned organizations representing American farmer, worker, consumer, public health and sustainable agriculture constituencies, and other food systems research and advocacy organizations, write to express our grave concerns regarding a pattern of ongoing interference and pressure exerted by multinational pesticide companies and other agribusiness interests that seek to undermine the Mexican government's policy decisions to protect its peoples' health, environment and the integrity of their food and farming systems.

We strongly object to any interference by U.S. government officials or agribusiness interests in a sovereign state's right to enact policy measures to protect the health and well-being of its people. We urge your agencies to resist and reject these ongoing efforts.

As revealed through a Freedom of Information Act request by the Center for Biological Diversity and [reported](#) in *The Guardian*, under the previous administration, public officials in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) strategized with agrochemical industry representatives from CropLife America and Bayer AG on ways to pressure the Mexican government to rescind its policy decisions—[announced](#) December 31, 2020—to [phaseout the use of glyphosate](#) and the planting and use of GMO corn as food in Mexico. USTR subsequently warned Mexico's Minister of Economy that Mexico's actions threatened the "strength of our bilateral relationship."

This interference and pressure from the agrochemical industry is continuing. On March 22nd, industry representatives [sent](#) a letter directed to your attention as leaders of USTR and USDA, identifying Mexico's planned phaseout of glyphosate and genetically modified corn as a "leading concern" for agribusiness interests and the pesticide industry (represented by the pesticide industry's trade group, CropLife America). The industry groups complained of a potential negative impact on U.S. agricultural exports of their products. However, basing U.S.-Mexico trade relations on the continued U.S. export to Mexico of harmful pesticides and genetically engineered seeds that depend upon use of these

chemicals—products that together have contributed to loss of agricultural biodiversity and of rural livelihoods in both Mexico and the U.S.—should not be the basis of the new administration's relationship with Mexico.

We strenuously oppose any action by US public officials that puts corporate profit above public well-being, and that undermines another country's right to self-determination. We urge you to respect the measures taken by the Mexican government to protect its people's health and its environment, and draw your attention to [this response](#) from 335 civil society organizations and concerned individuals in Mexico (translated from the original Spanish by DeepL.com):

“We reiterate our support for the [Mexican government] policy implemented to ban the planting of transgenic corn and glyphosate gradually by 2024, as well as for the NOM-051 that allows the implementation of a frontal warning labeling on packaged food and beverages. We consider these measures to be a necessary and fundamental step in the transition to a healthy and sustainable agri-food model.

[We] emphasize that the health crisis caused by COVID-19 is a call to leave behind the ... model that devastates the environment and health and instead construct comprehensive public policies ... which guarantee Mexico's production of healthy, nutritious, fair and competitive food in order to achieve food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty.

We agree and support President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the decision to move forward and make the right to food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty a reality.”

Mexico's forward-looking policies have been lauded by experts in UN agencies as well. As Christian Skoog, UNICEF representative in Mexico, explains, “The labeling approved by Mexico contemplates the *best international experiences and the most updated and relevant scientific evidence, so it could even become an example for other countries*” (emphasis added).

Today we face the urgent need for coordinated global action to transform the harmful practices of chemical-intensive industrial agriculture into ecologically-based biodiversified farming systems that are climate-resilient and support healthy soil, ecosystems and communities. Making progress towards these goals in our own country *and as a global community* necessitates resisting industry efforts to pursue the export of harmful products for corporate profit at the expense of people and the planet. At the very least, the imperative for global cooperation means supporting rather than undermining other countries' proactive steps in the right direction.

For these reasons, we were deeply disappointed to learn from your recent address to commodity crop growers and exporters (highlighted in a CropLife America [publication](#)) that you, Mr. Secretary, have already expressed to Mexican officials your displeasure with their country's “reluctance” to accept U.S. exports of CropLife member companies' genetically engineered seeds. Yet in this same address, you acknowledged that nearly 90% of U.S. farmers are unable to support themselves from farming alone and must seek additional work to make ends meet. This reality, coupled with persistent hunger and food insecurity in the U.S., signals the social and economic failure of the industrial, chemical-intensive, export-oriented model of GMO crop production that dominates the US agricultural landscape today.

We welcome the Administration's [stated commitment](#) to listening to the science, improving public health, protecting the environment and limiting exposure to dangerous chemicals and pesticides, while

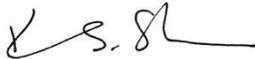
holding polluters accountable and prioritizing environmental justice particularly for communities of color and low-income communities. ***We trust that these stated commitments, as well as your dedication to “fairness for farmers,” extend equally to other countries and include respect for other nations’ and peoples’ rights to self-determination.*** We further expect that the new Administration understands and is determined to protect and fulfill the internationally recognized human rights to health, food, clean air and water, and a safe working environment.

As Victor Suárez, Mexico’s Undersecretary of Agriculture for Food and Competitiveness, has [explained](#):

“We are a sovereign nation with a democratic government which came to power with the support of the majority of citizens, one that places compliance with our constitution and respect for human rights above all private interests.”

In keeping with these principles and commitments, we call on the Biden Administration, USTR and USDA to respect Mexico’s sovereignty and refrain from interfering with its right to enact health-protective policies. Accordingly, we urge USTR and USDA to strenuously resist and reject agro-chemical industry attempts to pressure the Mexican government into rescinding its important forward-looking policies and instead, to actively encourage and support the much-needed transitions both at home and abroad towards agroecological, biodiversified and climate-resilient farming systems.

Sincerely,



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On behalf of the following U.S.-based organizations

ActionAid USA
Agroecology Research-Action Collective (ARC)
Alaska Community Action on Toxics
Alliance for Democracy - Portland OR
American Indian Movement - Central Florida
American Sustainable Business Council
Ben & Jerry’s Homemade, Inc.
Beyond Pesticides
Beyond Toxics
Californians for Pesticide Reform
Caribbean Agroecology Institute

Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Food Safety
Colectivos Indigenas de Borikén y el Caribe
Community Agroecology Network
Community Alliance for Global Justice
Cultural Survival
Dancing Bee Gardens
Economic Justice Action Group, 1st Unitarian Church, Portland Oregon
Environmental & Public Health Consulting
Fair World Project
Family Farm Defenders
Farmworker Association of Florida
Florida Indigenous Rights and Environmental Equality
Food in Neighborhoods Community Coalition
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the MST
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
Greenpeace US
Harambee House, inc
Hawai'i SEED
Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action
HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance
Health Care Without Harm
Healthy Environment and Endocrine Disruptor Strategies (HEEDS.org)
Herbicide Free Campus
Indigenous Environmental Network
Informed Green Solutions, Inc
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
International Indian Treaty Council
International Pollutants Elimination Network
Iowa CCI (Citizens for Community Improvement)
JSA Sustainable Wealth Management
Kiss The Ground
LEAD for Pollinators, Inc.
Maine Fair Trade Campaign
Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns
Maryland Pesticide Education Network
Mobilization for Pollinator Survival
National Family Farm Coalition
Nature's Dietician™

Naturepedic Organic Mattresses & Bedding
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)
Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
Organic Consumers Association
PODER
Pollinate Minnesota
Pueblo Development Commission
Real Food Media
Rural Community Workers Alliance
Rural Education Action Project, DBA Rural Vermont
Science and Environmental Health Network
Seed the Commons
Steward Foundation
Student Action with Farmworkers
Sustainable Agriculture of Louisville (SAL)
Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services
Textile Exchange
The Oakland Institute
Thousand Currents/Miles de Afluentes
Toxic Free NC
Tribal Link Foundation
United Confederation of Taino People & Caribbean Amerindian Development Organization
US Food Sovereignty Alliance
Women's Environmental Institute

Women, Food and Agriculture Network

Women's Voices for the Earth
Yamocuno Tanama Tribu Taino