



Colombia, 2016

Colombians call upon farmers, workers and peoples of the world to support the Referendum for National Agriculture

The historic crisis of the Colombian agricultural sector has deepened since the 1990s due to trade liberalization reforms and the implementation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the United States and the European Union. These policies have contributed to currency devaluations; the high cost of fertilizers and other agricultural inputs; the elimination of trade tariffs on foreign goods; an increase in food imports; and the expansion of ‘food dumping’. Furthermore, domestic production of export crops has also suffered as a result of low international prices for tropical products, including coffee. The National Coffee and Agricultural Strikes of 2013 laid bare the dramatic living conditions endured by rural producers throughout the country.

Colombia was self-sufficient in food production until the 1980s. However, neoliberal policies have seriously impacted domestic agricultural production. The country went from importing approximately 700,000 tons of food in 1990 to 7 million in 2001 and more than 12 million in 2015. Indeed, Colombia now imports 100% of the soybeans, barley, oats, sorghum, peas and lentils it consumes, as well as 95% of wheat, 90% of sesame, 70% of corn, 12% of rice, 30% of beans and almost 95% of cotton¹. At the same time, the overall crop area has decreased considerably. For instance, from 1992 to 2013, the country went from planting 2.3 million hectares of short-cycle cereals, vegetables and oilcrops to only 1.4 million. According to the Colombian Agricultural Society (SAC), Colombia ceased to cultivate 245,000 hectares of maize (a strategic crop for food sovereignty); 242,000

¹ Robledo, Jorge. 26 de Noviembre de 2008. <http://jorgerobledo.com/el-debate-sobre-seguridad-alimentaria-es-sobre-las-importaciones-de-cereales-y-demas-alimentos-basicos/>

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hectares of sorghum; 50,000 of barley; and 36,000 hectares of wheat, even though domestic consumption of these cereals has actually increased².

The situation in the countryside is increasingly daunting. With a Gini coefficient of 0.9, the distribution of land in Colombia is amongst the most unequal in the world.³ Only 0.4% of the population owns 46% of the land.⁴ In 2003, the poverty rate in rural areas was 1.9 times higher than in urban centers, while in 2014 it increased to 3.2. In fact, 89% of the rural population is categorized by the government as either poor or “vulnerable”, meaning likely to fall into poverty.⁵ The rural population, particularly women, the youth, indigenous peoples, and Afro-Colombian communities endure the worst living conditions and have the fewest opportunities in the country⁶. According to the National Planning Department, while the urban population above age 15 has at least 9 years of compulsory education, in rural areas that same population only attends elementary school (5.1 years)⁷ and has an illiteracy rate of 18.5%. Health membership for rural populations increased from 76% in 2005 to 96% in 2014. However, the Ministry of Social Protection recognizes that “membership does not necessarily imply coverage.” Moreover, 83.5% of rural jobs are informal⁸. This high rate of informality contributes to agricultural workers’ inability to access social security benefits.

Between 2012 and 2016, agricultural sectors consistently staged powerful mobilizations, which were, at times, militant and uncontrollable. Everywhere across the country, rural movements and agriculturalists rose up to an extent unseen for many years. During the

² See: El Tiempo Newspaper. “Colombia puede sembrar cinco veces más el área que cultiva”. Redacción economía y negocios. 6 de noviembre de 2013. <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-13163778>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Censo Nacional Agropecuario, 2015.

⁵ Censo Nacional Agropecuario, 2015.

⁶ UNFPA. Situación de Población. http://www.unfpa.org.co/?page_id=1307

⁷ Departamento de Planeación Nacional. 2014 (octubre). *Misión para la transformación del campo*. Bogotá D.C., page 7. <https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Prensa/DOCUMENTO%20MARCO-MISION.pdf>

⁸ *El Heraldo*. El 83,5 % de los campesinos colombianos trabaja en la informalidad. Consultado en línea el 22 de abril en la página: <http://www.elheraldo.co/nacional/el-835-de-los-campesinos-colombianos-trabaja-en-la-informalidad-245559>

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2013 Agricultural strike, and after several weeks of protests, highway blockades, and clashes with security forces, protesters reached a number of partial agreements with the national government that put an end to the demonstrations. However, the national government systematically refused to negotiate measures to protect the domestic market in ways that would contravene current Free Trade Agreements and warned agricultural leaders that if they “wanted to change the economic model, they would have to defeat the government in elections first.”

Faced with this situation, Dignidad Agropecuaria Colombiana is promoting a Referendum for National Agriculture to defend and guarantee food sovereignty and security against Free Trade Agreements and other free market policies. Amendments to the Constitution are intended to: 1) protect and promote domestic agricultural production and labor, as well as biodiversity and traditional knowledge, in frames of sustainability and gender equality; 2) unilaterally renegotiate or terminate current FTAs; and 3) through the enactment of a Law on Family Farming, guarantee peasant, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities the rights to a decent life, to social development based on their own economic models and to conserve and manage the biodiversity and associated knowledges found in their territories

By voting the Referendum, the Colombian people will decide on whether or not to reform the Constitutional articles that refer to agricultural production directly (arts. 64, 65 and 66) and indirectly (art. 100). These articles will be amended as follows:

Article 64 to promote the effective economic use of rural property, guarantee the rights of agricultural workers, farmers, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, and protect domestic agricultural production and national sovereignty. It will include a transitional paragraph to ensure the renegotiation of FTAs in accordance with national interests.

Article 65 to protect the domestic production of healthy and nutritious food in environmentally sustainable ways and guaranteeing gender equality. To this end, the State will promote public economic, scientific and technical policies and programs. Additionally, there is a paragraph to implement a Family Farming Act written with the full participation of rural communities and groups in order to guarantee the protection of their own economic models.

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Article 66 to promote real and effective access to credit for all agricultural producers, considering their particularities and to create a national agricultural development bank to encourage rural and agricultural development.

Article 100 to specify that the constitutional protection of civil and political rights of foreigners cannot be interpreted as the equal treatment of goods, investments, services and capital originating abroad. There is also the promotion of a law to regulate the access, ownership, and use of land, genetic resources and traditional knowledge by foreigners.

Dignidad Agropecuaria Colombiana has partnered with the National Committee for the Promotion of Family Agriculture, and agricultural unions that form part of the three Trade Union Confederations in the country (CTC, CUT and CGT) to promote the Referendum for National Agriculture.

Calling on the spirit of solidarity among farmers, workers and peoples of the world, we reach out for financial and political support. Help us succeed in our task to guarantee food sovereignty and decent living and working conditions for all agricultural producers in Colombia.

Sincerely,
National Committee for the Promotion of the Referendum

For more information, visit our webpage: www.referendoporelagro.com

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I support the countryside; I sign the Referendum for National Agriculture!

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