

## What kind of new social pact does the Mexican countryside require?

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As they marched in Mexico City on January 31, thousands of campesinos called on the nation to “Save the countryside to save Mexico.” The marchers cried out to the nation, demanding a new pact between the state, rural, and urban sectors, a new policy towards the countryside and a renegotiation of the agricultural chapter of NAFTA.

In recent days we have indicated in these very pages the need to renegotiate NAFTA (*La Jornada*; January 29; p. 8)

Now, the movement of small farmers known as *El Campo no Aguanta más* (The Countryside can't take it anymore) would like to share the details about this new social pact and describe the new policies the countryside will need in order to move us toward a new national plan aimed at sovereignty, growth, equity, sustainability, and globalization.

The social pact between the state and campesinos, which emerged during the revolution of 1910 and which was renewed under the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas, began to fray during the end of the 1960s and ruptured entirely during these recent decades of neoliberalism. This pact needs to be re-established today on the basis of new principles. Obviously, these new principles cannot be the same ones on which it was founded, nor the ones under which it broke apart. We need a new social contract with new rights and obligations between the state, urban, and rural sectors, based on fundamental respect for the role of the countryside and campesinos in the future of the nation.

The following are some of the principles and commitments of the state, urban, and rural sectors which would shape such a new pact:

1. The countryside, rural society, and small and indigenous farmers and their heritage constitute a *national priority* and represent a *indispensable sector* for the present and future of the nation in terms of its sovereignty, development, and long-term development.
2. The state is obliged to guarantee the right to a dignified life and to respect all human, economic, social, and cultural rights of the rural population, while recognizing the *principle of parity* between rural and urban standards of living.
3. *Food sovereignty* should be a central principle of agricultural policy, and should substitute a policy of food dependence.
4. Agricultural policies must reflect the *multifunctional* character of agriculture, rather than just the current reductionist policies that only consider production levels and economic efficiency,
5. The right of campesinos to continue being campesinos must be recognized, and the state should recognize the development potential of campesino and indigenous

- farmers, which would in turn lead to multi-year, structural investment in the productive, social, and environmental development of the countryside.
6. The Mexican population in general, and the low-income population in particular, must have *guaranteed access* to a sufficient amount of safe food that comes from Mexico.
  7. *Sustainable* systems of agricultural, forestry, and fishery production, oriented primarily towards internal markets and secondarily towards external markets, must be developed.
  8. Value chains in the agricultural and forestry sectors must be *reconstructed* to guarantee minimum national content to *add value* to locally produced goods in rural areas.
  9. Markets should be managed with *state intervention*, managing supply through agreements with *producers' organizations*.
  10. Rural jobs should be protected, non-agricultural activities should be nurtured, natural resources should be conserved, and *environmental goods and services* for urban, industrial, and tourist development should be developed, for the well-being of the entire Mexican population.
  11. The natural heritage (land, water, forest, arid zones, biodiversity, genetic resources, culture, knowledge, etc.) of indigenous towns, communities, and peoples should be protected and valued; end agricultural underdevelopment and distribute productive assets for rural and agricultural development, principally among youth and women.
  12. Diverse productive and social actors in the countryside must be recognized as subjects responsible for their own development; "clientelismo" (bribing/governmental corruption?) and corporativism in the countryside must come to an end, and a new state/ rural subject relationship based on autonomy, self-management, and full recognition of rights must be forged.

In addition to a national agreement signed by the Federal Executive, Congress, state Governors, and campesino organizations, the country needs to take concrete verifiable steps toward a lasting solution for the countryside, including:

1. A new rural development program for 2004-2006 a revised Mexico 2020 program that has the support of the rural sector and is approved by Congress;
2. Renegotiation of the agricultural chapter of NAFTA and parallel agreements on migration and compensatory funds for those workers harmed by free trade.
3. Constitutional modifications that would allow for multi-year funding for agricultural, forestry, and fishery development, with at least 3% of the annual budget (based on GDP) for integrated development in the countryside;
4. Structural reform of rural institutions and rural financial systems;
5. A constitutional right to food;
6. Reform of constitutional article 27 to prohibit real estate speculation companies from gaining access to land and to guarantee that ejidal parcels are treated as family assets;
7. Reform of the Indigenous Law to comply with the San Andres accords;

8. Reform of state and federal governmental agencies to ensure inclusive and pluralistic participation of the diverse organizational expressions of rural society.