

## **Farmingville**

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**T**onight is the PBS premiere of **Farmingville**, an outstanding documentary on the devastating impact that the bizarre, literally quite lethal combination of globalization plus increasing First World farm subsidies is having on developing countries like Mexico.

Produced and directed by Carlos Sandoval (Amagansett, NY) and Catherine Tambini (Hampton Bays, NY), Farmingville won this year's "Special Award for Documentary" at the Sundance Festival, and it has also received many other prestigious awards. (For those of you in Long Island, it will also be shown on Thursday June 24 on Ch. 21, accompanied by a discussion with Sandoval and several of the film's participants, moderated by OLA's outstanding local leader, Isabel Spevedula de Scanlon.)

The social crisis described by Farmingville is a striking example of one of neoliberalism's more disturbing patterns – the combination of "socialism for the rich" with "free trade for the poor." Each year the US government provides more than \$10 billion in subsidies to American corn farmers in politically-influential states like Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas. From a political standpoint, these subsidies are usually justified in the name of preserving the "American family farm." In fact the vast bulk of the subsidies goes to a handful of incredibly rich US agro-conglomerates, such as **Cargill** and **Archer Daniels, Midlands ("ADM")**. Together, these corporate giants now account for more than 70 percent of domestic US corn production.

These subsidies have not saved America's family farmers, who continue to disappear at a rapid rate. But the \$10 billion a year in subsidies has the giants to overproduce, resulting in surpluses that have been dumped onto world markets at artificially-low prices.

As documented in [Farmingville](#), combined with the “free trade” policies adopted by the US and Mexico in the last decade, these surpluses have devastated family farmers throughout Mexico.

Of course Mexican farmers were the original source of “corn” – they’ve been growing it for at least 10,000 years. Until recently, corn accounted for at least half of the acreage they planted. In fact corn is not just a product in Mexico; it is also at the core of a whole cuisine and culture.

Since the adoption of the North American Free Trade Treaty in 1993, however, the real price of corn has dropped more than 70% in Mexico, even as domestic non-labor production costs have risen dramatically.

Most of the price declines are due to escalating US corn imports. Recent estimates by an Oxfam study of “[The Mexican Corn Crisis](#),” for example, show that US corn is dumped in Mexico at between \$105m to \$145m a year less than the cost of US production.

As a result, many campesinos are being forced out of business -- the country has lost the majority of its corn farmers in just the last 10 years. This has caused havoc in the entire rural economy, produced mass unemployment and forcing a mass migration to Mexico’s already overstuffed cities. And that, in turn, has accelerated emigration, with thousands of desperate, hungry people trying to leave Mexico every day, and dozens of them literally dying in the desert wastelands along the border, trying to get to “El Norte.”

Indeed, according to the latest statistics from the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, illegal immigration along the Mexican border is now at an all-time high.

Meanwhile, US agricultural conglomerates like ADM and Cargill have become more profitable than ever. They are using their fat profits to extend their dominance abroad. For example, Cargill now owns 30 percent of **Maseca**, the giant Mexican food distributor that dominates the Mexican tortilla market.

As Oxfam’s recent report on this neoliberal debacle concludes, “The Mexican corn crisis is yet another example of world trade rules that are rigged to help the rich and powerful, while destroying the livelihood of millions of poor people.” Indeed, the story that Farmingville relates is an especially graphic example of the perverse consequences that neoliberal policies can have once powerful interests get hold of them --

when US corporate giants are able to have their way with free trade, wide-open capital markets, lavish government subsidies, political leaders on both sides of the border, and poor farmers all at once.



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