Farm Policy Reforms and Harmonization in the NAFTA

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Abstract

The NAFTA agreement is being implemented at the same time that the United States, Canada, and Mexico are adopting major reforms of their domestic farm support programs. This paper analyzes the interaction between trade and domestic policy reforms. Domestic policy changes have had a greater impact on the region's agriculture than NAFTA. They also affect how regional agriculture will respond to NAFTA in the long term. By strengthening market signals, policy reforms increase farm producers' responsiveness to changing prices due to NAFTA, leading to potentially greater specialization and trade, and larger welfare gains than under the former support programs. New farm programs also result in more trade creation and less trade diversion due to NAFTA than would have occurred under former programs. In the United States, NAFTA is expected to increase agricultural production and trade. Free regional trade effectively limits the ability of NAFTA members to maintain independent farm programs because the pressures of market arbitrage tend to unify prices. The recent decoupling of most support by NAFTA members is compatible with the trade pact.

Introduction

The removal of trade barriers between the United States, Canada, and Mexico under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has had positive but generally small impacts on U.S. agriculture through 1996 (USDA, 1997). More important for the region's agriculture than NAFTA are the major farm program reforms that have been adopted by all three members of the trade bloc, which have increased the market orientation of North American agriculture. Farm program reforms have been driven mostly by domestic budgetary pressures and broad, economy-wide changes in members' economic policies that are not directly related to NAFTA. To a lesser extent, NAFTA has also motivated reforms, because free trade within the region makes some types of farm support programs costly or ineffective, and creates pressures to harmonize institutions and regulations.

Domestic policy changes have had a greater impact on the region's agriculture than NAFTA. They also affect how regional agriculture will respond to NAFTA in the long term. By strengthening market signals, policy reforms increase farm producers' responsiveness to changing prices due to NAFTA, leading to potentially greater specialization and trade, and larger welfare gains than under the former support programs. New farm programs will also result in more trade creation and less trade diversion due to NAFTA than would have occurred under former programs. NAFTA and farm program reforms together will result in substantial structural change in the region's agriculture. It is their combined impacts that may account for the perception that NAFTA has significantly affected the region's farm sectors. The regional pact is likely to contribute to the goals of the upcoming mini-round for achieving more open world markets, and more market-oriented global agriculture. By adopting less trade-distorting farm programs and liberalizing the regional agricultural market, the North American countries are already addressing, and resolving, some of the issues that will be on the agenda in the upcoming, multilateral World Trade Organization (WTO) talks on agriculture.

NAFTA's Comprehensive Treatment of Agriculture

The NAFTA agreement, essentially three binational agreements among the United States, Canada, and Mexico, came into effect on January 1, 1994. It incorporates the Canadian-U.S. free-trade agreement (CUSTA) implemented on January 1, 1989, and adds binational agreements between the United States and Mexico, and Canada and Mexico. A small trilateral component establishes institutional mechanisms for administering NAFTA and resolving disputes. NAFTA's treatment of agriculture is comprehensive and, with a few exceptions, provides for the eventual full liberalization of agricultural trade in the region. In addition to tariffs and quotas, NAFTA addressed export subsidies, import safeguards, rules of origin, and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements.

Between the United States and Canada, tariffs on most agricultural products were phased out over a 10-year period, and were completely eliminated by January 1, 1998. As specified in the original CUSTA, NAFTA allows Canada to permanently maintain restrictions on imports of dairy, poultry, and eggs from the United States. These restrictions, originally specified as quotas, were later redefined as tariff-rate quotas (TRQ's) to comply with the rules of the WTO. A TRQ permits a specified quantity to be imported duty free, with quantities above that quota to be assessed a tariff at pre-NAFTA rates. The United States maintains TRQ's on imports of sugar, dairy products, and peanuts from Canada.

Between the United States and Mexico, NAFTA eliminated all agricultural import quotas and most tariffs. Remaining tariffs on sensitive products, such as U.S. imports of wheat, rice, and horticultural crops, were permitted phase-out periods of 5 to 15 years. For some commodities, extended protection over the 5- to 15-year time period is in the form of TRQ's, in which over-quota tariffs are gradually reduced over the transition period. U.S. imports of peanuts, sugar, and frozen orange juice and Mexican imports of corn, beans, and dry milk are covered by TRQ's for the full 15-year period. Special safeguards, or "snap-back" tariffs, allow specified quantities to be imported at preferential NAFTA rates, with excess quantities assessed at tariffs that "snap-back" to the lower of either the June 1991 most-favored-nation (MFN) rate or the current MFN rate. For U.S. horticulture, special safeguards are designed as seasonal TRQ's.

In the Canada-Mexico agreement, Canada accorded Mexico the same treatment as the United States under CUSTA, including Canada's continued import protection on dairy, poultry, and eggs. Mexico specified long phase-out periods for the same commodities as in the U.S.-Mexico agreement. As a reciprocal measure, Mexico permanently retained its import protection from Canada's supply-managed commodities—poultry, dairy, and eggs.

Export subsidies between the United States and Canada were banned under CUSTA. Under NAFTA, export subsidies are permitted if the importing country agrees to them, or the importer is benefiting from subsidies from other countries. This treatment has enabled the United States to continue to extend GSM credit guarantees to Mexico. NAFTA also requires that SPS measures be scientifically based, nondiscriminatory and transparent, and that they restrict trade only minimally.

Farm Program Reforms Strengthen Market Signals

Domestic agricultural programs in the NAFTA countries have undergone fundamental change since 1994. In general, domestic reforms have both lowered support levels and "decoupled" payments by making them independent of farmers' production decisions or market conditions. At the same time that these reforms have made the region's agriculture more market-driven, NAFTA has contributed to changes in regional agricultural market conditions.

The 1985 Food Security Act, the first large-scale U.S. farm program reform, reduced target prices, froze payment yields, and introduced some planting flexibility. Farm legislation in 1990 reduced payment acres and further increased planting flexibility. In April 1996, the United States adopted the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform (FAIR) Act, which fundamentally changed the U.S. farm support program. The FAIR Act replaced the longstanding, crop-linked, deficiency-payments/supply-management program that covered wheat, rice, feedgrains, and upland cotton with a program of fully decoupled, temporary contract payments based on land acreage enrolled in the former deficiency payments program. Payments were capped at about $36 billion over 1996-2002, and were scheduled to decline over the 7-year program. The FAIR Act also eliminated the Acreage Reduction Program (ARP), gradually eliminated dairy price supports, and modified U.S. peanut and sugar programs.

Canada's new generation of farm programs, introduced in 1991 under the Farm Income Protection Act (FIPA), mostly affected grains and oilseeds, Canada's major export crops. Producer subsidies for grains, provided mainly as freight subsidies under the Western Grain Transportation Act (WGTA), were eliminated by August 1995; this support was replaced with two voluntary revenue insurance programs to which producers and the Federal and Provincial Governments contribute. The Gross Revenue Insurance Program (GRIP), available to grains and oilseed producers, has already been discontinued due to its high costs. The Net Income Stabilization Account (NISA) extends risk management support to all grains, oilseeds, and some horticulture.

Canada continues to support poultry, dairy, and eggs through supply management programs that rely on production and import quotas to maintain farm prices at levels based on the costs of production. Because these programs require trade restrictions, Canada exempted these sectors from free trade under NAFTA. Butter and skim milk prices are additionally supported through marketing board purchases; export subsidies are financed through producer levies. Direct payments to dairy producers ended in 1996.

Mexican agricultural policy reforms began in the late 1980's. Before that, Mexico supported its agriculture through subsidized inputs, guaranteed producer prices, food processing subsidies, retail price controls, and high import barriers. In 1988, Mexico sharply lowered tariff protection and converted most import quotas to tariffs following its accession to the GATT. However, import licensing remained an important instrument for price support, particularly for corn, a staple crop produced by Mexico's large subsistence farm sector. In 1991, Mexico began to lower agricultural input subsidies and to reduce the pervasive role of the government in purchasing, storing, and distributing agricultural commodities. Mexico reduced subsidies to corn and wheat millers and eliminated most retail food price controls. Guaranteed producer prices and government purchases were continued only for corn and beans.

In anticipation of NAFTA, Mexico adopted the PROCAMPO program in October 1993. PROCAMPO is a 15-year, direct payments program that compensates producers for the loss of input subsidies, price support, and import protection. It was designed to provide transitional, mostly decoupled income support to farmers while allowing Mexico's agriculture to undergo structural change in response to market conditions. Farmers who continue to produce receive annual PROCAMPO payments based on historical acreage in nine specified crops. In 1996, Mexico announced the Alliance for the Countryside (Alianza para el Campo), a major initiative to improve agricultural productivity that includes PROCAMPO and other programs.

Effects of NAFTA and Farm Program Reforms

Model Scenarios

We analyze how farm program reforms and NAFTA affect regional agriculture using a multi-country, computable general equilibrium (CGE) model of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The model focuses on sectoral resource allocation, employment, production, and trade. It solves for relative prices, wages, and the real exchange rate that equilibrate product markets, factor markets, and the balance of trade among the three countries. The model includes substantial agricultural detail, including specific modeling of pre- and post-NAFTA farm programs. The base year of the model is 1993.

Four scenarios compare the effects of trade and domestic policy changes (table 1). The first two scenarios compare the effects of NAFTA under pre-NAFTA farm programs with the effects of NAFTA under the decoupled and/or reduced farm support introduced in all three countries since 1993. In the first scenario, we implement NAFTA (free trade in all sectors, with exclusions for some farm products), but assume pre-NAFTA farm programs remain at 1993 levels of expenditure. In the second scenario, we assess the effects of NAFTA trade policy liberalization against a different base, one that assumes that domestic farm program reforms are already in place, at 1996 levels of expenditure. In the United States, the domestic reforms eliminate deficiency payments and introduce decoupled contract payments. In Mexico, decoupled PROCAMPO payments replace the guaranteed price for corn and farm input subsidies. Canada reduces farm subsidies, increases revenue insurance payments, and maintains supply-management programs. These two NAFTA scenarios suggest that farm program reforms increase the flexibility of producers to respond to changing prices under NAFTA. In the new farm-program environment, the change in the sectoral structure of agriculture is greater, and welfare gains are larger compared with the effects of NAFTA under pre-NAFTA farm programs.

Table 1--Model scenarios

Scenario	Base model	Experiment
1	1993 base	NAFTA
2	1993 base year with post-NAFTA farm policy reforms	NAFTA
3	1993 base year	Farm policy reforms
4	1993 base year	NAFTA plus farm policy reforms

In scenario 3, we analyze the effects of farm program reforms alone (implemented simultaneously in all three countries). In the United States and Canada, domestic farm program reforms are shown to have much greater effects on agriculture than trade liberalization. In scenario 4, both farm program reforms and NAFTA are implemented in all three countries. This scenario shows the combined, long-term effects of trade and domestic farm policy reforms on North American agriculture.

Farm Policy Reforms Magnify NAFTA Effects

In all three countries, NAFTA has a greater effect on agriculture under the new farm programs than under pre-NAFTA farm programs. One measure of NAFTA's impact is the change in factor employment: the number of workers, acres of land, and value of capital stock initially employed in agriculture that must find new employment, in agriculture or elsewhere, after changes in agricultural policies. Under both old and new programs (scenarios l and 2), NAFTA has a greater impact on Mexican agriculture than on U.S. and Canadian farm sectors, reflecting Mexico's greater trade dependence on its North American partners and higher pre-NAFTA trade barriers.

In Mexico, employment effects of NAFTA are substantially greater under the new farm programs than the old—labor employment changes 1.3 percent under the old programs and 5.1 percent under the new (table 2). However, the effects of NAFTA on Mexico's land use are slightly lower under the new farm programs—this is an example of how one country's farm program can affect resource allocation in its trade partner. In scenario 1, free trade exposes Mexican wheat production to the more heavily subsidized U.S. production, and Mexican land use devoted to wheat drops sharply after NAFTA. Under the new farm programs, U.S. wheat production is lower because deficiency payments have already been eliminated, and Mexican wheat production is less affected by import competition under free trade.

In the United States, NAFTA results in greater adjustment in land use with the new, decoupled farm program than with the former farm program. Labor and capital exhibit negligible differences between the scenarios. In Canada, labor adjustment to NAFTA is marginally greater under its new program than under its pre-NAFTA farm support program (0.6 percent vs. 0.5 percent).

Why does the extent of agricultural adjustment differ in the two scenarios? Under Mexico's former, guaranteed price program, producers and consumers faced fixed prices for corn. Corn millers were compensated with input subsidies for purchasing corn at the artificially high, guaranteed price. Likewise, in the United States, the former deficiency payments programs for wheat, corn, and other program crops largely insulated producers from NAFTA effects on their markets. In these fixed-price sectors, farm output could change only marginally due to NAFTA, in response to some of the adjustments in more market-oriented farm sectors that compete with program crops for land, labor, and capital. Under the new farm programs (scenario 2), producers respond to market price signals, which are affected by NAFTA. In contrast, Canadian WGTA subsidies were coupled to output, but Canadian producers still responded at the margin to changes in relative prices due to market shocks such as NAFTA. Under Canada's revenue insurance programs, which we assume to be a fixed transfer to household

Table 2--Changes in factor employment due to NAFTA, under old and new farm programs

	Scenario 1: NAFTA under old farm programs	Scenario 2: NAFTA under new farm programs	Scenario 4: NAFTA plus farm program reforms
		Percent change	
United States:			
Labor	0.2	0.2	1.3
Land	0.1	0.2	0.5
Capital	0.1	0.1	2.7
Canada:			
Labor	0.5	0.6	1.4
Land	0.9	0.9	1.7
Capital	1.4	1.4	6.1
Mexico:			
Labor	1.3	5.1	9.3
Land	4.7	4.6	8.5
Capital	2.3	3.2	8.6

Note: Percent change in factor employment refers to number of workers, land, or capital that leave any farm sector because of NAFTA, relative to base level of agricultural factor employment. They may be reemployed in other farm or nonfarm sectors.

income, producers still respond to price shocks, but the initial level of output is lower since subsidies have been removed.

New Farm Programs See Greater Welfare Gains

The flexibility introduced by farm program reform leads to larger welfare gains under NAFTA (table 3). Under decoupled farm programs, resources are more flexible in moving into sectors that become more remunerative under free trade, and out of sectors that face competitive pressures from imports. This flexibility is particularly important for Mexico because it results in a welfare gain from NAFTA, instead of the welfare loss that would have occurred under Mexico's guaranteed price programs.

Under both old and new farm programs (scenarios 1 and 2), Mexico's terms of trade decline because of NAFTA. One reason is that Mexico's pre-NAFTA import barriers were slightly higher than those of its North American partners, causing Mexico's imports to increase more than its exports as those barriers were lifted. Mexico's high trade dependency on its North American partners results in a large increase in import demand when trade barriers are removed. Some analysts have cited the expected deterioration in Mexico's terms of trade due to NAFTA as an argument against regional trade agreements (Bhagwati and Panagariya, 1996). In scenarios 1 and 2, we find that terms-of-trade losses lead to net welfare losses only if there are distorting domestic policies in place that prevent an efficient reallocation of resources in response to trade reforms. Under Mexico's new, decoupled farm programs, NAFTA leads to net welfare gains. The United States and Canada also achieve larger welfare gains under NAFTA with reformed farm programs than under former farm programs.

Farm program reforms within NAFTA also benefit nonmembers. In the context of domestic reforms, NAFTA supports trade creation and minimizes trade diversion for all three participants.

Farm Program Reforms Reduce Effects of NAFTA on Farm Program Costs

Expenditures on farm programs coupled to farm output are affected by NAFTA (table 4). In scenario 1, we assume that U.S. deficiency payments for wheat, corn, feed grains and other program crops remained in place under NAFTA. Assuming fixed target prices, we analyze how the deficiency payment costs would have changed as a result of the effects of NAFTA on market prices. Under NAFTA, deficiency payment costs would have declined because of increased demand from Mexico for crops such as corn and wheat. Total U.S. farm program costs, including expenditures on deficiency payments, dairy programs, and other programs, would have declined by 1.4 percent (scenario 1). Likewise, Canada would have experienced slight changes in farm program expenditures under NAFTA. Assuming Canada's pre-NAFTA subsidy levels had been maintained, total farm program costs would have increased 0.1 percent. The increase is based on increased output of subsidized crops, and increased export subsidy costs associated with the dairy price management program.

In contrast, Mexico's farm program expenditures would have increased dramatically following free trade, if Mexico had maintained its guaranteed price program (scenario 1). Under this program, the government guaranteed a fixed price for domestic corn production, maintained import quotas (with an estimated tariff equivalent of 83 percent in 1993), and subsidized corn millers to offset the high cost of domestic inputs. Faced with cheaper corn imports from the United States under NAFTA, these subsidy expenditures would have increased substantially, raising total farm program expenditures by 126 percent. Such a dramatic increase in program costs suggests that Mexico needed to restructure its farm program support in a free trade environment.

Farm Policy Reforms Have Greater Effect Than NAFTA on Region's Agriculture

In the United States and Canada, the effects of farm program reforms alone (scenario 3) are greater than

Table 3--Trade creation, trade diversion, terms of trade, and welfare impacts of NAFTA

	Scenario 1: NAFTA under old farm programs	Scenario 2: NAFTA under reformed farm programs
	Million dollars	
United States:		
Imports from NAFTA	8,478	8,503
Imports from rest of world	-2,686	-2,659
Agricultural imports from NAFTA	253	267
Agricultural imports from rest of world	-12	-12
Welfare	374	464
	Percent change	
International terms of trade	0.5	0.6
International agricultural terms of trade	1.6	2.1
	Million dollars	
Canada:		
Imports from NAFTA	3,105	3,106
Imports from rest of world	-200	-198
Agricultural imports from NAFTA	64	64
Agricultural imports from rest of world	5	5
Welfare	494	500
	Percent change	
International terms of trade	0.4	0.4
International agricultural terms of trade	0.6	0.9
	Million dollars	
Mexico:		
Imports from NAFTA	3,009	3,269
Imports from rest of world	-625	-573
Agricultural imports from NAFTA	776	774
Agricultural imports from rest of world	-49	-48
Welfare	-1,020	299
	Percent change	
International terms of trade	-0.8	-0.9
International agricultural terms of trade	-0.7	-1.9

Note: Welfare is reported as equivalent variation, where a positive number indicates a welfare gain.

the effects of NAFTA on agricultural output and trade (table 4). For the United States, even large changes in its agricultural trade with NAFTA partners translate into relatively small changes in farm output, compared with the effects of domestic policy reforms—U.S. agricultural trade is geographically diversified so North American trade accounts for only a small share of production.

For the United States, NAFTA increases agricultural output, imports, and exports under both old and new programs. The increases help offset some of the contractionary pressures that new farm programs introduce in the farm sector. NAFTA and farm policy reform combined cause a slight (less than 1 percent) reduction in farm output and relatively small changes in exports and imports.

Table 4--Impacts of NAFTA and farm program reforms on agriculture

	Scenario 1: NAFTA under old farm programs	Scenario 2: NAFTA under new farm programs	Scenario 3: Farm program reforms	Scenario 4: NAFTA plus farm program reforms
	Percent change from base			
United States:				
Output	0.1	0.1	-0.7	-0.7
Exports	1.0	1.3	-5.2	-4.0
Imports	4.3	4.7	2.6	7.4
Farm program costs	-1.4	0.0	-35.0	-35.0
Canada:				
Output	-0.4	-0.4	-3.5	-3.9
Exports	0.1	0.1	-7.7	-7.6
Imports	1.5	1.5	-0.4	1.1
Farm program costs	0.1	0.0	-4.7	-4.7
Mexico:				
Output	-1.5	-1.8	-2.5	-4.1
Exports	7.8	10.4	2.6	13.6
Imports	27.5	23.7	4.6	28.5
Farm program costs	126.0	0.0	-46.7	-46.7

Note: In scenario 2, the base incorporates farm program reforms. In all other scenarios, the base is pre-reform period. Scenarios do not add up because the model is nonlinear; scenario 4 captures the interaction between NAFTA and farm programs.

For all three countries, the combination of NAFTA and the new farm programs have significant impacts on their farm sectors (scenario 4). The combined effects of both of these shocks may account for the perception that NAFTA has significantly affected the region's agriculture.

Farm Policies, Trade Disputes, and Policy Harmonization

Although the three NAFTA members significantly changed their farm programs, some coupled programs remain, including the U.S. sugar, dairy, and peanut programs, and Canada's supply management programs in dairy, poultry, and eggs. Regional free trade makes coupled farm programs difficult to sustain, since arbitrage within NAFTA can increase the costs of domestic price supports and export subsidy programs, or can make them ineffective in raising domestic prices. Consequently, the remaining coupled programs have either received special treatment under NAFTA or have become trade irritants. In some instances, disputes have led to the successful negotiation of bilateral solutions, while in others, disputes have been taken outside NAFTA to the WTO.

Canada's supply management programs remain viable because NAFTA permitted Canada to continue to control imports of dairy, poultry, and eggs from its NAFTA partners and the rest of the world. While import controls are permitted (the United States failed to rescind them in a WTO action), Canada's dairy export subsidies have become a trade irritant within NAFTA. In 1997, the United States brought a complaint against them in the WTO, and in 1998 requested that the WTO investigate the dairy support program.

U.S.-Canadian grain trade has resulted in a number of trade-related disputes since NAFTA's inception. During a dispute about the surge in Canadian wheat exports into the United States in 1993-94, the United States expressed concern about the ineffectiveness of the U.S. Export Enhancement Program in raising U.S. domestic wheat prices. In the absence of controls over wheat imports from Canada, U.S. export subsidies would either be unable to raise U.S. wheat prices or, if they succeeded, would increase costs because the United States would in effect be subsidizing both U.S. and Canadian wheat exports. The dispute resulted in the formation of a Canada-U.S. Joint Commission on grains that recommended greater coordination of cross-border trade, grading and regulation, infrastructure, domestic programs, and export programs and institutions. In early 1998, in response to continued tension over bilateral grain trade, the two countries established a pilot program to help U.S. wheat enter Canada, monitored by the Canadian Grain Commission. The program, intended to protect Canadians from the potential introduction of karnal bunt, responds to U.S. complaints about the difficulty of selling wheat in Canada.

The United States has retained import controls over sugar imports from both Canada and Mexico; the controls on Mexican sugar will be phased out after 2008. The NAFTA agreement permits Mexico to export a gradually increasing quantity of its net surplus production, sugar production minus consumption of sugar and high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS), to the United States. This agreement prevents Mexico from substituting sweeteners for sugar in its domestic consumption to increase its sugar available for export. Mexico's sugar industry has struggled with increased domestic use of HFCS, much of it imported from the United States. HFCS imports dampen the domestic price of sugar, but duty-free exports to the United States cannot increase. Mexico has begun to subsidize its sugar exports to non-U.S. markets to support its domestic price and imposed a tariff on U.S. HFCS imports. The United States may approach the WTO to resolve the HFCS conflict with Mexico.

Despite some important, commodity-specific trade disputes among the North American partners, they have also achieved a substantial degree of policy harmonization. Under NAFTA, the three countries have reconciled many divergent standards and regulations. The resolution of phytosanitary disputes in citrus, for example, is credited with having had a greater impact on stimulating U.S. exports of fresh citrus to Mexico than tariff reductions, and contributed to U.S. acceptance of live hog and avocado imports from Mexico. Under CUSTA, for example, Canada and the United States have worked toward harmonizing beef inspection.

NAFTA and Multilateralism

NAFTA farm policy developments are likely to reinforce the goals of the 1999 WTO mini-round in agriculture to increase the transparency of farm policies and reduce their trade-distorting effects. NAFTA members have already adopted less trade-distorting farm programs because of domestic budgetary pressures and a broad public policy shift toward more open markets and reduced government intervention. Increased trade within the NAFTA region has pressured members to resolve remaining conflicts among their farm support programs and regulations. Some of these solutions, as for the U.S.-Canadian grain trade, are ad hoc, while others are a permanent resolution of problematic trade issues. As a consequence, NAFTA is already addressing some of the same issues that will be on the agenda at the 1999 multilateral WTO talks on agriculture. At the same time, the WTO continues to serve as a venue for resolving some NAFTA disputes, indicating that strengthening both the regional and multilateral processes can be mutually reinforcing.

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