

Public Policy in Mexico

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Food has always been the sustaining life force for the human body. Absence of this life force can cause entire nations to have to struggle with health problems and basic nutrition. Mexico is one of those countries where people are struggling with this problem. Mexico has to be one of my favorite countries to learn about. Everything there has always interested me, the people, the language and culture, the food, and the location. I have had many opportunities to learn various things about Mexico and its lifestyles, but I never thought about its agriculture, until now. I have many, many Hispanic friends that randomly teach me facts about them and where they come from. I guess I never put much thought into what it was like for them to grow up in a country where some things weren't just given to you. Growing up for me in the United States was easier than I thought. Everything was given to me. Well, not necessarily everything, but everything that I take advantage of. I never had to worry about if and when my next meal would be. I never thought where it would come from or even what it would be. There was always food in the house; even if I didn't like it, it was still there. If we didn't want to eat it right away, then it sat there in its little package until someone wanted it. I believe we U.S. citizens take advantage of small things, when really those little things are the ones that mean the most. They are the things that keep us going and we would never think to live without them. Not all countries are as blessed as ours. Mexico is going to be my example. Everyone works for his or her next meal, including children and mothers. It's a team activity. Some days they have to wonder what the next meal will be, or who will provide it for them. The advantages that I have don't even register in the minds of many people in other countries. Mexico doesn't have a sense of food security based on their public policies. Along with this, they also don't have any income security.

Can we really talk about a typical Mexican family anymore? We have so many different cultures all in one community today. This is a huge improvement from even just ten years ago. The typical Mexican family I will be describing is one you would find if you were to travel into Mexico, where families are still together. Mexico's divorce rate is much lower than any other country. Mexican families are the center of each individual's life. A typical family in Mexico is put together and stays together. Even when you get into the extended families, they are still close to one another. Most of the time, whether in a rural or urban area, it is common to see at least three generations of a family living in the same household. Most keep in close contact with aunts, uncles, and even the in-laws. During family celebrations they are all celebrating together. It isn't rare to see teens and children having a great time with their loving grandparents. Many see the importance of these families through their frequent and arranged family vacations.

According to Mexico Maps, there are many traditions that Mexican families follow. These traditions play a part in the genders of the men and women. Home is usually where the women stay, as the mothers and wives of the families. The men are commonly found at the workplace. Everyone in the family is expected to work on the farm. Their main crops grown are corn. Corn is planted on approximately forty percent of Mexico's rural land. Each family may only have five or fewer acres to plant on. They are usually very poor and cannot afford more land. They use most of the crops to feed their families, since even meat is rather expensive for them to buy. Young girls are kept under great surveillance until they become married. There is an unwritten code for the men to follow for their behaviors. These are also passed down through tradition. The behaviors that the men should portray include a display of confidence, control, and pride. Many family traditions are passed down through the number of family occasions. Weddings are one of

the biggest events that also carry many rituals with them. One of the main events for a young woman is her fifteenth birthday, quinceanera, which brings the families together once again. Almost ninety percent of Mexicans are Roman Catholic, so many towns have at least one Roman Catholic Church.

To provide money for these families, almost two-thirds of the rural population work on a farm. Many Mexicans will do low-paying, dirty work that many others wouldn't even think of. Although many speak Spanish, a select few that speak English, as well. There are a wide variety of other native languages.

John N. Burstein states,

“The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1992 by Mexico, the United States and Canada. The Agreement has been phased in during a 14-year implementation process beginning in 1994. In January 2008 the remaining agricultural tariffs – on corn, beans, sugar, powdered milk and other products – are scheduled to be eliminated. Policymakers who follow the process of integration of the North American agricultural and food sectors differ in their projections of the effects of trade liberalization in the short and long term. All agree that it is time to take a new look at the sector.

Rural poverty is one of the major reasons for the significant development gap between Mexico and the United States and one of the principal “push-factors” in Mexican migration to the United States. Furthermore, the persistence of rural poverty strains the social fabric, at a moment when the Mexican political system is more fragile than it has been in the recent past. Finally, the array of rural production systems is threatening the sustainability of Mexico’s natural resource base. For all these reasons, agricultural policy and the effects of bilateral integration of the agri-food industry are important for policymakers.”

The United States Department of Agriculture describes NAFTA as, “Implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) began on January 1, 1994. This agreement will remove most barriers to trade and investment among the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Under the NAFTA, all non-tariff barriers to agricultural trade between the United States and Mexico were eliminated. In addition, many tariffs were eliminated immediately, with others being phased out over periods of 5 to 15 years. This allowed for an orderly adjustment to free trade with Mexico, with full implementation beginning January 1, 2008.

The agricultural provisions of the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement, in effect since 1989, were incorporated into the NAFTA. Under these provisions, all tariffs affecting agricultural trade between the United States and Canada, with a few exceptions for items covered by tariff-rate quotas, were removed by January 1, 1998. Mexico and Canada reached a separate bilateral NAFTA agreement on market access for agricultural products. The Mexican-Canadian agreement eliminated most tariffs either immediately or over 5, 10, or 15 years. Tariffs between the two countries affecting trade in dairy, poultry, eggs, and sugar are maintained.”

Currently, by using NAFTA, Mexico has an increasing corn yield, which is very good. But, they are also having decreasing incomes. They aren't using NAFTA to the right extent to make it

more beneficial to not only their country, but small-farmers as well. The United States and Canada also seem to be flooding Mexico with crops of corn as well. As the United States is producing large amounts of white corn, this gives negative feedback to Mexican farmers. They need to produce their own white corn since that is what many of them live off of and what they grow as well. If it is being flooded into their country then their local crops will not be sold, which then again comes back to them losing more income. The three countries still make a small amount of money, even with low prices for these crops, but the amount made is not significant enough to solve these issues. By using NAFTA, agriculture trade has tripled, and has given the United States a positive trade balance.

Mexico does not have many other public policies other than NAFTA. This public policy isn't changing much. Over the past few years it has remained the same. Unless someone new comes in, I don't see it changing much in the near future either. To measure this they look at yields and incomes over the years. The change that is seen is the yields of the corn crops increasing and the income decreasing. Mexico is importing nearly forty percent of their corn. On top of importing all of this, they are still producing their own crops, which is another factor as to why they are losing money. If they buy and import crops that they already have, then they are getting an excess amount, which makes the prices decline. Overall, in Mexico this problem isn't getting solved, but it isn't getting worse either.

Mr. Burstein discussed how small-scale farmers can benefit.

“Experts differ in their projections regarding the price of corn in the future. In what is referred to as the ‘fuel vs. food’ debate, the surge in corn-based ethanol production is greatly affecting the price of food in the United States and Mexico. This will benefit in the short term those small-farmers to be able to sell their excess harvest after meeting consumption needs, but the price of corn might slump within a year or two.

U.S. commodity subsidies have consistently topped Mexican subsidies, which helps compound the technological, credit, and scale advantages of U.S. farmers vis-à-vis their Mexican counterparts. Moreover, since both U.S. and Mexican subsidies tend to favor larger producers disproportionately, Mexican small-scale farmers are doubly disadvantaged by the existing subsidy regimes in the two countries.”

Improving public policies in Mexico could result in a lot of success for this country. Instead of importing most of the crops, using their own would be a great start. They then would be buying from the small-scale farmers who aren't making much income. This would help the farmers to become richer and have a healthier lifestyle. If the agricultural productivity were to be increased then this would obviously increase the income for the farmers. This would improve their current status and help everyone in their country, not just the farmers. This would greatly improve the corn yields and be great for families.

My recommendation to help Mexico with food security and income is to keep it within the country. They still have their agreement with NAFTA, which is fine, but they need to make it beneficial to small-scale farmers as well as the big ones. If Mexico secures agreements for the farmers that they will buy crops from them, then this gives them their security to not only food, but to their incomes at the same time.

Before anyone, the policy makers should come into role here. They are the ones that create the rules this country is following. If they create policies that are well rounded and thought out,

many people could be served. Each community needs to come together and discuss what has been working for them and what hasn't. Many ideas together can create one great policy. As far as the World Bank or other similar organizations go, I think they could stay put for now. Mexico needs to go into action and attempt to help themselves before anyone else can help them.

In conclusion, Mexico could be doing many things to make their country more successful. The policies in Mexico could be improved greatly. They should look further into other countries' policies that work for them. Bringing many ideas together could be very beneficial for Mexico. The policy makers, in my opinion, have been slacking to improve their country. They are seeing it as if they are getting by and it works for them. But in all honesty, the people of Mexico are suffering from their lack of commitment. At some points, this could be good for the individual growth of the Mexicans. I think other countries, including the United States, could learn from this. We should not be taking advantage of things that are given to us; but rather be thankful for them. Many of the young people in the U.S. today know nothing about working for what they want and being able to achieve something that will benefit not only themselves, but also others. I was always taught by my parents that if I wanted something, then I would have to earn it and work for it. But food was never something I had to earn; it was just there. Food in Mexico does have to be earned and that means they will have to work for it. They may need to create new policies, create treaties with other countries, and make wise choices with those other countries. These new methods will take time and effort from all the countries involved, and in doing so the countries can learn from each other in all aspects of life, not just in agriculture.

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