

Defend Animals and the Environment:

STOP THE US-PANAMA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT!

The US-Panama Free Trade Agreement represents a serious threat to unique habitats and endemic animal species in some of the most biologically diverse areas of the world. The agreement also threatens to expand the consumption of animals raised in inhumane, polluting factory farms. Negotiated by the Bush administration, but never ratified by Congress, the Obama administration has stated its intention to complete Bush's unfinished business and sign the agreement into law. People who care about animals and the environment must work to ensure that this never happens.

What's Wrong with the US-Panama FTA?

- Panama has a terrible record for environmental protection, and the Shrimp industry has its sights set on devastating precious mangrove forests, which provide habitat for many endangered species. Otherwise dangerous foreign investment in heavy industry will also increase as a result of the FTAs.
- Substandard environmental provisions only require the enforcement of preexisting environmental laws and the protection of a few token species. This is of little help when each species (particularly the migratory birds of Panama's threatened wetland areas) depends on networks of ecosystems. The language of the FTAs reinforce the weakness of Panama's environmental laws, asking that new environmental standards be “voluntary, flexible and incentive-based,” but not rigorous or restrictive.
- The agreement contains state-investor provisions that give corporations the power to challenge environmental regulations by suing governments for lost profit in international tribunals. The threat of lawsuit will make Panama more likely to bow to pressure from corporations.
- Factory farmed U.S. poultry, pork, and beef will flood markets, taking the place of the locally raised farm animals. Rural Panamanians' primary meat source is domestic poultry, but urban civilians eat primarily factory-farmed poultry. The National Agricultural Organization of Panama explains the imbalance of U.S.-Panamanian markets, stating, “The FTA proposal will be like stabbing the national farming sector, since it would allow the entrance of subsidized agricultural products to compete with up to 80 percent of the national market. Competition between two considerably different economies is impossible.” The attack on the national farming sector will increase urbanization and consumption and production of factory-farmed meat with lower sanitation standards. Meanwhile, Intellectual Property Rights written into the agreement will make health care more expensive and unavailable, increasing risk of outbreaks like swine flu.
- In spite of Panama's promises to stay out of the dolphin trade, the FTA not only allows the export of dolphins for US marine mammal parks, but it removes tariffs on dolphin exports to U.S. aquatic parks.



CONTACT YOUR SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES IN CONGRESS!

If you aren't sure who represents you in Congress, go to <http://snipurl.com/LegLookup> or call (718) 880-7979 to find out.

BY PHONE: Call your Senators and Representatives (if you can't get their numbers from the link above, you can call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to your Representative's and Senators' offices. When you reach your elected officials' offices, ask to speak to their legislative assistants on international trade. When you reach the assistants, give your name, say that you are a constituent, and say that you want your rep to vote no on the inhumane, anti-environment Panama Free Trade Agreements. Here's a sample of what you can say during your call:

Hi, my name is _____. I live in _____ (your city) and I'm calling to ask (Representative/Senator) _____ to oppose the Panama Free Trade Agreement. I'm concerned about these agreements' weak environmental provisions and unlimited investor protections as these could destroy habitats, threaten endangered species, and weaken animal protection laws. I'm also concerned that forcing other countries to weaken sanitary standards on imports while eliminating their import tariffs will facilitate the expansion of polluting and inhumane factory farms in this country, as well as in Panama. I'd appreciate a statement in writing explaining (Rep/Senator) _____'s position on this issue. My address is (your address).

BY EMAIL: Go to <http://snipurl.com/LegLookup> and find your elected officials. Click on "Send Message" for your two Senators and your Representative: Send an email to the attention of your legislator's aide on trade issues expressing your opinion on your legislators' vote on this issue. You can use the sample letter below as a model for your letter.

BY FAX OR MAIL: Go to <http://snipurl.com/LegLookup> and find your elected officials. Click on "View Info" for your Senators and Representatives and copy their fax numbers and mailing addresses. Write letters to your Representatives and both of your Senators expressing your opinion on their vote on this issue. Put your letter to the attention of your legislators' aide on trade issues. Fax and/or mail your letter. You can use the sample letter below as a model for your letter.

SAMPLE LETTER

(Send a separate to each of your legislators. Fill in your address, the date, choose Senator or Representative, your legislators' name, and choose one or the other of the words in parentheses, depending on your legislator's vote. Please modify and personalize using the additional info on this issue provided at the top of this alert as you please)

(Your Address)
(Your City, State and
Zip) Date

(Senator/ Representative) (First and Last Name)
(Your Legislator's DC Office Street Address,
City, State and Zip)

Dear (Senator /Representative) (Last Name):

I am very concerned about the Panama Free Trade Agreement, which I believe is detrimental to animal welfare and habitat protection. The agreement expands the rights of foreign investors, which will give extractive industries the power to challenge environmental regulations that limit resource contracts. These corporations will have the ability to sue the government for lost profits, making it less likely that Panama will pass future environmental laws. The agreement's emphasis on protecting only certain species evinces a failure to see the forest for the trees. Delicate and irreplaceable habitats continue to be cut down for an unsustainable trade, contributing to the illegal hunting of thousands of primates and birds.

Panama is home to both endemic and endangered species and its mangrove forests are considered biological hotspots by ecologists. The destruction of these habitats would have irreversible damage. In addition, I do not support the increase in U.S. exports of cheap, factory-farmed products such as poultry, beef and pork because they will soon replace family-farmed locally raised animals, increase pollution, and expand the consumption of factory farmed meat, which is unsanitary.

I urge you to speak out and vote against the Panama Free Trade Agreement. Please write back to me with your position on this issue.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)

URGE THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES TO OPPOSE THE PANAMA FTA

Despite the threat to animals posed by this Agreement, Patricia Forkan, President, of Humane Society International, the global arm of the Humane Society of the United States, has stated that " the [Panama] Agreement provides adequate safeguards to ensure that Congress's environmental negotiating objectives will be met. HSI's comments concede that the Panama FTA is a mixed bag, and suggest an openness to reevaluate their position based on changes to the agreement made around the time they offered their comments.

Global Justice for Animals and the Environment views HSUS/HSI's stand as well intentioned, but terribly misguided. In years past, HSUS was one of the leading voices in opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreements and the World Trade Organization. The animal advocacy community NEEDS HSUS/HSI to apply its resources, influence and expertise to STOP the passage of the Panama Free Trade Agreement. Please POLITELY call, fax, email or send a letter to HSUS/HSI to express your disappointment with their present stance on this issue, and your hope that they will oppose the Colombia and Panama Free Trade Agreements.

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