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# Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail

Discussion and Study Guide

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## Foreword by

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Everyone in the Americas has migration as part of their history. This includes native peoples. Understanding the dimensions of that history, be it millennia ago or recent, is essential for coming to grips with our identity, our sense of place, our social interactions and our possible future on this continent.

The heated political debates on immigration usually drown out the deep and often wrenching realities of migration itself. The movement of people from Latin America to the United States, in the best of cases, is recognized as a desperate response to adverse economic or political circumstances. Less obvious, however, is how the movement of finance capital, industry and political influence from the United States to Latin America drives northward migration and contributes to the deteriorating economic conditions here in the U.S. Migration is a powerful transformational force within our continent (as well as on its own). It affects those who migrate, those who stay behind and those who receive or reject the newly arrived. If we are to positively influence a transformational movement in the Americas, first we need to understand the proximate and root causes of migration. Next, we need to explore the possible solutions to the social and economic problems that both drive and follow migration. Finally, we need to clearly see and overcome the obstacles to pursuing those solutions. These steps require social learning and collaborative action, as well as individual inquiry and personal commitment.

This documentary and the accompanying study guide are an invitation to contribute to solutions for the benefit of all of us affected by migration. They can be an opening into a deeper conversation on immigration and related issues. If you are a science teacher, you might use this study guide as a way to talk about genetic modification of corn, or the social and environmental impacts of agribusiness in the U.S. and Mexico. If you teach economics or social studies, use it for a lesson on the consequences of structural adjustment and free trade. Perhaps you and your neighbors want to get a better handle on the issues in order to engage informally with your representatives in Congress. The experiences, information and thought-provoking questions in this packet will help you in this exploration and can serve as a motivation for becoming active on these important issues that affect us all.

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Phonograph Films LLC



# Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail

*an educational video*

directed by Juan Carlos Zaldívar

produced by Eric Holt-Guiménez and Juan Carlos Zaldívar



*stills from the video "Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail."*

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## Discussion and Study Guide



Dori Stone, *writer*

Dori Stone is a graduate of the University of California at Davis where she studied International Agricultural Development. Dori participated in a reality tour from El Paso to Oaxaca led by Food First executive director, Eric Holt-Giménez in the summer of 2007. The purpose of the tour was to gain a better understanding of the factors driving so many despairing farmers to abandon their homes and families to come to the U.S. to work, and to explore the impact of their absence on those who remain in Mexico. Dori's book, *"BEYOND THE FENCE: seeking new possibilities along the migrant trail"* documents that trip, and like many good travelogues, raises questions and ponders possibilities.

## A brief history of notable events that significantly affected migration from Mexico to the United States

pre-1980:

Mexico-U.S. migration was relatively low.<sup>(1)</sup>

1982: Mexican Debt Crisis

A crash of global oil prices left Mexico unable to repay its foreign loans. The World Bank and IMF (\*) provided assistance, but with conditions that the government cut spending and allow foreign imports. This had a devastating impact on small farmers, who had formerly been protected by import barriers and government support programs.<sup>(8, 9)</sup>

1980's: U.S. Farm Labor Demand

While conditions worsened for small farmers in the Mexican countryside, U.S. demand for immigrant labor was rising. The United Farm Workers of America went on strike for better wages, so employers began turning to labor contractors who could recruit workers from their villages back in Mexico. Even after the strikes ended, the number of legal union farmworkers continued to decrease while the number of low-paid unauthorized workers increased. Migration grew dramatically throughout the decade, with apprehensions of illegal border crossers reaching an all-time peak of 1.7 million in 1986.<sup>(1)</sup>

1986: Immigration Reform and Control Act

Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), attempting to reduce immigration by granting legal residency to those already in the U.S., and punishing employers who hired undocumented workers. But IRCA actually wound up *increasing* illegal immigration, because many newly-legalized residents brought their families up from Mexico, and because former farmworkers moved to other jobs and left a vacuum for new unauthorized immigrants to fill. <sup>(1)</sup> From 1980 to 1994, migration from rural areas of Mexico to the U.S. grew by 95%.<sup>(2)</sup>

1994: North American Free Trade Agreement

The governments of Mexico, Canada and the U.S. signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in order to stimulate increased trade and investment among the three countries. Some studies predicted that NAFTA would reduce migration by creating new job opportunities in Mexico. But in reality, post-NAFTA job growth in the manufacturing and agro-export industries did not compensate for the

\*The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are the world's largest public lenders, providing loans to "developing countries" for debt relief and projects such as highways, power plants, schools, etc. These institutions are collectively owned by the governments of over 180 countries, with the largest and most influential shareholders being the U.S., Japan, Germany, the U.K., and France.

displacement of about two million farmers, who lost their markets due to cheaper imported U.S. corn. Illegal immigration skyrocketed, with the number of unauthorized Mexicans in the U.S. rising from about 2.5 million to 4.5 million over the next five years.<sup>(1)</sup>

1996: Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996  
New legislation dramatically increased border patrol and immigration enforcement, with the addition of new agents, fencing, surveillance equipment, and higher penalties for illegal immigrants.<sup>(15)</sup>

2001: Post-9/11 U.S. Immigration Policy  
Presidents George W. Bush and Vicente Fox met in early 2001 to begin forging a bi-national migration policy that would ensure humane treatment and improved labor conditions. But the terrorist attacks of September 11th effectively halted this process, and the U.S. government re-prioritized border enforcement as a national security issue.<sup>(1)</sup>

2006: The Secure Fence Act  
Congress directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to add 850 miles of fencing and surveillance equipment along the U.S.-Mexico border at an estimated cost of over \$3 million per mile<sup>(11)</sup>. This project remains highly controversial, with opponents arguing that it fails to address the core issues underlying Mexican migration to the U.S..<sup>(10)</sup>

2003–2007: Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits and Security Act (AgJOBS) pending before Congress  
Congress has attempted to create a new temporary guest worker program, providing a legal route for migrant farmworkers to enter the country. This would reform the existing, rarely-utilized guest worker program by streamlining the process of importing workers, setting new requirements for wages and labor conditions, and offering permanent residency to those who have already worked in the U.S. for several years. AgJOBS is highly controversial and has thus far failed to pass through any session of Congress.<sup>(14, 15)</sup>

2008: Mexico-U.S. migration continues  
Today, an estimated 12 million unauthorized residents live in the U.S., about 56% of whom migrated from Mexico and 78% from Latin America as a whole.<sup>(3)</sup> These undocumented workers comprise over half the nation's migrant and seasonal farm labor force,<sup>(7)</sup> as well as a large portion of other low-wage jobs such as cleaning, construction, and food preparation,<sup>(3)</sup> and their unauthorized status has contributed to a decline of labor conditions and wages in those sectors.<sup>(6)</sup> Meanwhile, massive emigration from Mexico continues to cause a loss of human capital, division of families, erosion of communities, and a rising death rate as people attempt to cross through more remote and dangerous areas of the border.<sup>(2)</sup> Total illegal border crossings have actually continued at a fairly steady rate (of about 500,000 people per year<sup>(3)</sup> since the 1990's<sup>(11)</sup>, despite the fact that U.S. spending on border enforcement has *quintupled* during that time.<sup>(4)</sup>

## Migrant workers in the U.S. and Mexico

Millions of displaced rural Mexicans have taken low-wage manufacturing or agricultural jobs in the U.S. and northern Mexico, where they are commonly denied basic labor rights and humane living conditions. Due to their unauthorized status, extreme poverty, and lack of other opportunities, these workers are reluctant to complain about poor conditions and are thus easily exploited.<sup>(16)</sup>

Common issues faced by farmworkers include:

- musculoskeletal damage, due to long hours of repetitive tasks in awkward positions<sup>(16)</sup>
- lack of affordable health care<sup>(17, 18)</sup>
- heat stress, causing occasional fatalities<sup>(19)</sup>
- lack of drinking water and sanitary facilities on the job<sup>(7)</sup>
- pesticide poisoning and lack of adequate pesticide training<sup>(20, 22)</sup>
- high rates of cancer among farmworkers and agricultural communities<sup>(23, 24)</sup>
- substandard housing lacking functional plumbing and appliances<sup>(16, 17)</sup>
- declining real wages, with 60% of farmworkers below the official poverty level<sup>(7, 25)</sup>
- employment through labor contractors, and lack of protection under unions<sup>(16)</sup>

In the 1960's, U.S. farm labor activist Cesar Chávez began a nationwide movement that eventually led to new legislation protecting U.S. farmworkers under basic federal labor laws from which they had initially been excluded.<sup>(1)</sup> Yet despite these achievements, farmworkers today often fail to receive the rights promised them by law.<sup>(16)</sup> The regulations that exist are inadequately enforced, and penalties for violations are low.

According to David Lighthall of the California Institute for Rural Studies, poor conditions endured by farmworkers are a "hidden cost" of food production, which can only be improved through a "broadening of responsibility to the larger public."<sup>(26)</sup> Recently, several nonprofit organizations have begun creating certification programs for fair labor practices in agriculture. The Food Alliance has certified almost 300 farms and ranches in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico,<sup>(27)</sup> and the Agriculture Justice Project has recently begun a pilot project growing and selling "local fair trade" products in the U.S. Upper Midwest. The organization's social stewardship standards include the right to collective bargaining, fair wages, workplace health and safety, and adequate housing. With programs like these, consumers can choose to pay for equitably-produced food, compensating farmers for the higher costs of implementing fair labor practices.<sup>(28)</sup>

Migration has also provided a labor force for Mexico's *maquiladoras*, foreign-owned factories (mainly in the border region) that import machinery and parts into Mexico for cheap assembly, then export the finished products back to the U.S. under special tax exemptions.<sup>(29, 39)</sup> Many large companies such as General Electric, Ford, Sony, IBM, Fisher Price and Honda have set up factories in Mexico in order to take advantage of the low-wage labor force,<sup>(30, 36)</sup> although lower wages in Asia and Central America have prompted many companies to shut down their Mexican factories and re-locate in

recent years. This shift has caused many workers to lose their jobs,<sup>(41)</sup> just as the movement of factories across the border to Mexico in the 90's left thousands of U.S. workers without employment.<sup>(41)</sup> Many factories do continue to operate along the U.S.-Mexico border today, employing nearly one million people<sup>(36)</sup> mainly young migrant women from rural areas.<sup>(31)</sup>

Proponents claim that maquiladoras have raised Mexico's average income and provided valuable jobs and independence to women workers,<sup>(42)</sup> while critics draw attention to the industry's poverty wages,<sup>(33)</sup> lack of independent unions, high rates of sexual harassment and violence,<sup>(34)</sup> severe pollution of the border region, unhealthy working conditions<sup>(33)</sup> (causing respiratory and skin disease, cancer, musculoskeletal disorders and other health issues),<sup>(29)</sup> and substandard living conditions. Because the companies are exempt from paying local taxes, border cities lack funding to provide for their growing populations, and workers have been forced to erect makeshift shelters in sprawling slums without electricity, potable water, sewage, garbage collection, or adequate roads.<sup>(35)</sup> A recent study found that maquiladora wages are insufficient to meet workers' basic needs, and that it would require four to five minimum wage salaries to support a family of four in the border region.<sup>(35, 37)</sup>

Such conditions persist despite the fact that the Mexican constitution has some of the highest labor standards in the world, and despite NAFTA's "labor side agreement," whereby citizens can submit complaints if a government fails to enforce its own labor laws. The lengthy investigation process under this agreement produces mere recommendations with no method of enforcement, and Mexico's heavy reliance on foreign investment dollars makes the government reluctant to pressure foreign companies to uphold its labor laws.<sup>(29, 38)</sup> Grassroots citizen action (such as labor organizing and boycotts) has, in some cases, managed to advance worker rights in the factories, but these are relatively small and isolated successes in the scheme of the maquiladora industry, and in the overall scheme of globalized production and labor.<sup>(40)</sup>

## Why are people leaving? NAFTA, Mexican agricultural policy, and the Farm Bill

Because the majority of Mexican migrants are from rural farming communities,<sup>(1)</sup> it is crucial to examine agricultural policy in order to understand the root causes of migration. Farming is inherently different from other economic activities, because production fluctuates with temperature, rainfall, and other uncontrollable factors. Oversupply causes prices to fall and leaves farmers unable to make a living, while scarcity causes prices to rise and leaves consumers unable to afford food.<sup>(50)</sup> Because of this natural vulnerability, governments throughout history have intervened in agricultural production and distribution. They have restricted trade (to prevent foreign imports from flooding the market) and have maintained reserves (to hold grain during years of abundance and release it during years of scarcity) thereby stabilizing prices for both producers and consumers.<sup>(49)</sup>

Prior to the 1980's, the Mexican government took on such a role.<sup>(44, 47)</sup> The National Food Staples Company, CONASUPO, purchased grain from farmers at guaranteed prices, processed it, and sold food through a network of retail stores across the country. Other government agencies provided farmers with services such as crop insurance, low-interest loans, and marketing assistance.<sup>(43, 46, 48)</sup> But following the Debt Crisis of 1982, the World Bank and IMF required Mexico to eliminate these programs, privatize its food distribution system, and boost production for export rather than domestic markets.<sup>(43, 47)</sup> As a result, the government dismantled farm programs and began privatizing its grain storage and processing facilities,<sup>(43, 44)</sup> so that a few agribusiness corporations soon became the main purchasers, processors, and distributors of Mexican corn.<sup>(45)</sup> But unlike the government agencies they replaced, these corporations did not invest in peasant agriculture or purchase grain from small farms, causing many of those farmers to lose their market access entirely.<sup>(9)</sup>

On top of these changes came the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which removed trade barriers (such as import taxes and quotas) among the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. The USDA Foreign Agriculture Service claims that NAFTA has benefited both farmers and consumers in all three countries.<sup>(51)</sup> Yet opponents maintain that it has only benefited a few large-scale growers and processors, while devastating smaller producers. As cheap U.S. corn entered Mexico<sup>(\*\*)</sup>, small farmers (who historically supplied up to a quarter of the national market) could no longer find buyers for their crops.<sup>(9, 43)</sup>

The architects of NAFTA predicted that declining corn prices would simply prompt Mexican farmers to switch to other crops such as fruits and vegetables, in which they have a comparative advantage over the U.S. (due to a cheap labor force and winter

growing season).<sup>(43)</sup> But this change did not take place to the extent predicted, because only large landholders in the north (located on irrigated land with access to credit, technology, and marketing channels) were able to make such a shift. Meanwhile, the vast majority of producers live in central and southern Mexico on small plots unsuitable for vegetable production (due to steep slopes, poor soil, and irregular rainfall) and cannot afford the high start-up costs of shifting to agro-export production. Therefore, only a few large-scale growers have gained access to U.S. markets, while their success masks the plight of smaller farmers across the country.<sup>(9, 43)</sup>

Throughout the course of NAFTA, rural Mexico has faced ever-increasing poverty, environmental degradation, social unrest, and out migration.<sup>(43)</sup> Rather than profiting from new markets, many of these displaced farmers fled to northern Mexico and became the *labor force* for large agro-export farms, picking fruits and vegetables for U.S. markets under some of the worst living and working conditions in Mexico.<sup>(52)</sup> While their incomes may have increased (contributing to a higher overall GDP in the country), these workers also face serious health issues, separation from their families, job instability, and higher living costs due to the loss of self-provisioning.<sup>(43)</sup> Yet advocates of NAFTA point to Mexico's increased GDP as an indicator of success, arguing that poverty and uneven distribution of wealth are the failure of *domestic policies* rather than free trade. Opponents contend that NAFTA has increased corporate influence over national politics and thereby prevented the government from enacting better policies.<sup>(9)</sup>

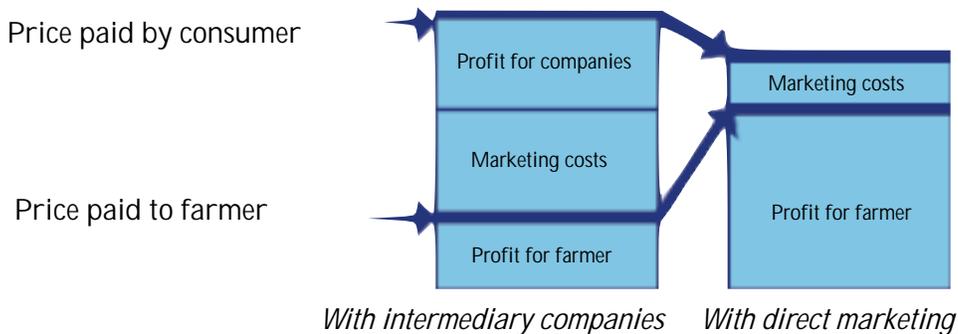
The debate over NAFTA belongs to a broader debate over free trade in general. Proponents view trade as a solution to poverty and underdevelopment, with each country exporting goods for which it has a comparative advantage and using the revenue to import other goods.<sup>(53)</sup> Opponents argue that the reality on the ground is very different from this theoretical model, and that free trade in agriculture reduces food security, threatens rural livelihoods, consolidates wealth in the hands of the few, and contributes to rising migration.<sup>(54)</sup>

\*\* The majority of U.S. corn is produced on large tracts of flat, fertile, irrigated land, with high-tech equipment and an abundance of chemical inputs, producing an average of eight or nine tons per hectare. In Mexico, on the other hand, the vast majority of production is on small plots of marginal, sloped, non-irrigated land, with manual labor and an average of only two tons per hectare.<sup>(8, 9)</sup> U.S. grains are also cheaper because of government subsidy payments prescribed in the Farm Bill, a large piece of legislation passed by Congress every five to seven years. The U.S. government pays billions of dollars to support a surplus production of corn, ensuring that growers stay in business while selling corn below the cost of production.<sup>(50)</sup> The main beneficiaries of these subsidies are large food processing corporations, which gain access to an abundant supply of cheap grain as raw inputs for manufacturing processed foods and animal feed.<sup>(49)</sup> For small-scale producers, the subsidies received by large U.S. farms create a situation of impossible competition.<sup>(2)</sup>

## Alternatives to Migration: direct marketing, sustainable farming, and food sovereignty

The situation faced by Mexican farmers is very common throughout the world, as the majority of profits from our modern food system are reaped by intermediary companies, not by those who grow food. Because processors and distributors aim to make a profit while keeping prices competitively low, they seek to purchase raw inputs as cheaply as possible. When farmers have no other options but to sell to these companies, they are forced to accept lower prices for their crops. USDA data show that the costs of transporting, processing, packaging and distributing foods are growing faster than the prices of crops themselves,<sup>(56, 57, 58)</sup> so that U.S. farmers who received forty-one cents for each consumer dollar spent on food in 1950 received only twenty-two cents for each dollar spent in 2005.<sup>(59)</sup> In other countries, coffee farmers generally receive between thirty and fifty cents for a pound of coffee that may retail for as much as ten dollars. Even with recent spikes in food prices, the portion received by farmers still appears to be falling.<sup>(61)</sup>

Yet increasingly, growers (like those in the *Ranchero Solidario* Co-operative presented in this film) are using *direct marketing* in order to bypass the intermediary companies and obtain a higher return for their goods. By eliminating the profits of "middlemen," it's possible to set a better price for both producers *and* consumers. Examples of direct marketing include farmers markets, farm-to-institution programs (e.g. cafeterias and hospitals), "community supported agriculture," and fair trade cooperatives.<sup>(55)</sup> With such strategies, farmers around the world have succeeded in raising incomes and overall standard of living in their communities,<sup>(61, 66)</sup>



Some people in rural Mexico are also resisting migration by restoring degraded landscapes that make it difficult to grow crops and sustain a livelihood. This degradation dates back to colonial times, when the Spanish government deforested vast areas of land (for lumber, mining, and grazing), allowing the exposed topsoil to wash away during heavy rains, and leaving a brick-hard layer of subsoil that could not support plant growth.<sup>(68)</sup> In addition, the chemical fertilizers and pesticides introduced by crop scientists of the 1940's-70's "Green Revolution" further depleted the soil and overall ecosystem health in rural Mexico. These technologies brought an initial boost in pro-

ductivity, but required ever-increasing amounts of fertilizer to maintain those high yields, causing farmers to go into debt and eventually migrate from their land.<sup>(67)</sup>

Yet today, farmer-led development groups (such as the *Campesino a Campesino* Movement presented in this film) are reversing that trend by practicing new farming methods and building healthy agroecosystems. They are re-planting forests, creating terraces to control erosion, using organic fertilizers such as compost to gradually replace the fertile topsoil that has been lost, and reviving traditional cropping practices that minimize pests and diseases without the use of chemicals. Over the past three decades, these farmers have reclaimed thousands of acres of forest and cropland, and have succeeded in vastly increasing their harvests.<sup>(68)</sup>

But such advances will only help reduce migration if combined with new economic opportunities in the countryside. Because most farmers produce raw materials that require some form of processing before consumption, the future growth of direct marketing systems will require new infrastructure for local farmer-owned processing. By setting up grain mills, dairy processing facilities, tortilla factories, and storage/retail facilities that are owned and run by farmers *themselves*, these people will be able to claim a larger share of the value chain, and hence a larger portion of the profits, for the foods they produce.<sup>(69)</sup>

Such alternatives fall under the concept of food sovereignty, a model in which the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food are not controlled by transnational corporations, but by communities and nations themselves with the freedom to define their own agricultural and food policies based on the needs of their own producers and consumers. While food sovereignty does not negate trade altogether, it promotes trade practices that are rooted in the pursuit of domestic and local food security, as opposed to solely profit-driven motives.<sup>(65)</sup> In simple terms, food sovereignty is the right of people to produce their own food on their own land, in ways appropriate for their own environment and culture.<sup>(62, 63, 64)</sup> The farmer organizations presented in this film promote food sovereignty as a solution to the Mexican migration crisis.

## Agrofuels and the global food crisis

Global food prices have risen dramatically since 2005, with many countries' grain prices doubling or tripling within the last year.<sup>(70)</sup> In Mexico, high prices threaten the diets of over 44 million people who live below the official poverty line with incomes of only \$1.60 to \$5.50 a day.<sup>(76)</sup> Worldwide, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that 850 million people already face famine or malnutrition, and that rising food and fuel prices could push the number over one billion.<sup>(71)</sup> Ironically, many of those threatened by the crisis are farmers themselves, who receive little to none of the higher price paid by consumers. (The additional profits are reaped by intermediaries, such as large processors and distributors... and even in the few cases in which farmers receive higher prices for their crops, they too must pay higher prices for food, fuel, and fertilizer.)<sup>(70)</sup> With growing numbers of people unable to feed their families, massive riots and protests have erupted in countries throughout the world.<sup>(72, 73)</sup>

Most analysts have attributed the crisis to the following causes:

- growing demand for agrofuels\*, prompting the diversion of cropland from food to fuel production<sup>(72)</sup>
- a spike in oil prices, which has raised the cost of fertilizer and of transporting food<sup>(72)</sup>
- adverse weather conditions such as drought in Australia, freezes in China, and floods in West Africa<sup>(72)</sup>
- shrinking supplies on the global market, as countries prepare for a shortage by exporting less grain<sup>(73)</sup>
- commodity speculation <sup>(76)</sup>

One of the first signs of the impending crisis took place in Mexico during early 2007, when tens of thousands marched in the streets to protest a 60% increase in the price of corn tortillas, the country's staple food.<sup>(71)</sup> At first, analysts blamed the situation on a grain shortage due to agrofuels, as a growing portion of U.S. corn was being used for ethanol. Later investigations discovered large supplies of corn in industry warehouses, where grain brokers and agribusiness corporations had been storing it on the

\*Some have questioned whether rising demand for agrofuels could actually *benefit* Mexican agriculture, by diverting the U.S. corn surplus to ethanol and allowing Mexican farmers to resume selling corn in their own domestic market but in reality, millions of farmers have already left rural Mexico and their production systems (i.e. basic equipment, mills and storage facilities, distribution channels, and local markets) have been largely dismantled, so it would take a large investment for these people to return and begin farming again. Based on current trends, it is unlikely that the government or private investors would willingly finance such a resurgence of small-scale agriculture.<sup>(80, 81)</sup> In addition, the consolidation of the food industry would make it difficult for small farmers to re-enter the market, as large corporations now own the majority of seed and input suppliers, mills, processing plants, and distribution networks, preferring to work with large-scale producers rather than with peasant farmers. So even with a greater demand for their corn, small farmers may be unable to get it onto the market. (They, too, will be *purchasing* food at higher prices!) This leads Sitna Quiroz of the UK-based Overseas Development Institute to conclude that unless the underlying problems of land distribution and marginalization of small farmers are addressed, agrofuels will continue to have a negative impact on the Mexican countryside.<sup>(81)</sup>

assumption that prices would soon rise. Even though Mexican corn stocks were at record highs, such hoarding activity created an *artificial* shortage that boosted prices in Mexico far above international prices. The main actors in this speculation were four large transnational companies (Cargill, Agroinsa, Maseca/Archer Daniels Midland, and Minsa/Arancia Corn Products International) which are the main buyers of Mexican corn and the main importers of U.S. corn into Mexico. A virtual monopoly on transport and storage facilities enabled these companies to purchase corn in early 2006 and release it months later at more than double the original price. As people struggled to afford food, Archer Daniels Midland's profits in 2007 soared from \$363 million to \$517 million.<sup>(75, 76)</sup>

This suggests a deeper (and less often cited) origin of the tortilla crisis, namely Mexico's dependence on imports and a few corporations for its food supply. These companies control nearly all of the country's food processing, marketing, and distribution, which gives them tremendous power to manipulate the national food supply and prices to their own advantage.<sup>(71)</sup> Moreover, the government has eliminated programs that once regulated the market and prevented major price fluctuations for basic foods. Such changes in recent decades have occurred not only in Mexico but throughout the world, as many formerly self-sufficient countries became dependent on food imports and distribution networks that did not accommodate small producers. Since the 1980's, millions of farmers worldwide have lost access to the domestic markets they once supplied,<sup>(71)</sup> forcing them to produce cash crops for export while buying imported staple foods for their families.<sup>(70)</sup> With rising prices and the inherent volatility of global food markets,<sup>(71)</sup> this system has left farmers more *vulnerable* to the economic and environmental factors on which the food crisis is blamed.<sup>(73)</sup>

Yet governments and industries have tended to ignore these underlying factors, promoting more of the same policies that created such instability in the first place.<sup>(71)</sup> At the June 2008 FAO World Food Summit and the annual G8 Summit in July of 2008, many proposals focused on expanding trade and agricultural yields, despite a recent report from the *Economist* stating that in most places there are no absolute food shortages.<sup>(74, 79)</sup> In the words of farmer activist Yoshitaka Mashima, "We do not understand why the G8 leaders pretend to solve the food crisis with more free trade, while it is the liberalization of agriculture and food markets that continue to lead us to the current crisis. People need to eat local food to protect themselves from the instability of world markets."<sup>(78)</sup>

In February 2007, a group of Mexican farmers' organizations released the Chilpancingo Declaration, voicing their own set of policy recommendations to address the food crisis. These include the elimination of subsidies to corporate producers and processors, credit programs to create *campesino*-owned corn storage and distribution businesses, renegotiation of the agriculture chapter of NAFTA, a floor price for corn that compensates farmers for the costs of production, and government regulation of the price and supply of basic foods. With such policies, the Chilpancingo authors (along with many other peasant organizations worldwide) believe that small farmers could easily produce enough--at an affordable and stable price--to support themselves and to feed the world.<sup>(70, 74)</sup>

## Organizational Partners for “Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail” video

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Called one of the county's “most established food think tanks” by the New York Times, the Institute for Food and Development Policy, also known as Food First, is a “people's” think tank. Their mission is to end the injustices that cause hunger, poverty and environmental degradation throughout the world. They believe a world free of hunger is possible if farmers and communities take back control of the food systems presently dominated by transnational agri-foods industries. They carry out research, analysis, advocacy and education for informed citizen engagement with the institutions and policies that control production, distribution and access to food. Their work both informs and amplifies the voices of social movements fighting for food sovereignty: people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems—at home and abroad.

Phonograph Films LLC  
220 Meridian Avenue Suite 11  
Miami Beach, Florida 33139  
Phone: (305)753-3316  
<http://www.phonographfilms.com/phonographfilms/phonographfilms.html>

Phonograph Films is a media production and exhibition company founded by Juan Carlos Zaldívar in 1986. It is now based in Miami, Florida, USA. Phonograph Films is interested in building community and developing new, creative ways to use film and art as tools for social change. We work with documentaries as well as fiction, hybrid, experimental and alternative media as well as visual and performance artists. We provide consultations, create strategies and produce educational materials and web tools that allow organizations and independent filmmakers to maximize the impact of their films. To this end, we also organize exhibitions and civic engagement events around films, art and media. We provide a one-stop production service facility for foundations, non-profit organizations and independent filmmakers who share our mission.

Frente Democrático Campesino (FDC)

13 y Jiménez 2208  
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Mexico

<http://www.farmworkers.org/fdchpage.html>

The FDC is the result of a wide social movement that took place in the State of Chihuahua during the winters of 1985-1986 and 1987-1988, when the peasants decided to organize independently to demand fair prices for corn and beans. The FDC continues to lead the struggle of the poor and small producers who are facing a current economic crisis in rural communities. The FDC is an organization deeply rooted in the collective action of its members, providing direct assistance to its members, negotiating credits and loans for agricultural production, housing improvements, and working to improve the overall conditions of people in rural communities.

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<http://www.mujerobrera.org/index.html>

For over 25 years, in the midst of the economic restructuring generated by NAFTA and globalization, La Mujer Obrera has worked to transform the conditions of Mexican immigrant women on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Sin Fronteras Organizing Project

201 East Ninth Avenue  
El Paso, Texas 79901  
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<http://www.farmworkers.org/sinfreng.html>

Sin Fronteras is a non-profit organization founded February 23, 1983, to fight against the injustices and inequalities faced by the farmworker community of West Texas and Southern New Mexico. Sin Fronteras Organizing Project is one of the most important and active farmworkers' efforts on the United States-México border. This organizing effort is part of a growing farm labor movement. Born of decades of neglect and poverty in the fields of America, this movement is a response to the need for social change. When this goal is accomplished, farmworkers will then be able to live with dignity and peace.

Union of Organizations of the Sierra Juarez of Oaxaca  
Oaxaca, México

(UNOSJO) is a Zapotec indigenous organization, established in 1990 by 26 regional and community-based indigenous campesino organizations in Oaxaca's Juarez Mountains. The Zapotecs are one of the largest indigenous groups in the region. UNOSJO works to promote the rights of the Zapotec people and has been the leading organization defending forests from illegal logging, protecting watersheds and access to water and defending collective indigenous land rights as well as unmasking the presence of genetically-modified (GM) corn in the Oaxacan countryside. UNOSJO is an active participant in the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), the Network in Defense of Corn, and the Mexican Coalition in Defense of Water (COMDA).

El Grupo Vicente Guerrero  
Ejido Vicente Guerrero  
Municipio Españita, Tlaxcala, CP 90292  
Municipality Españita, Tlaxcala, PO Box 90292  
México  
Phone booth: 01 (241) 8 04 72.

This farmer to farmer (Campesino a Campesino) group of **promotores** formed after a group of five farmers from Vicente Guerrero traveled for training to Chimaltenango, Guatemala in 1978. Inspired by what they learned, they came back to Vicente Guerrero and began experiments, planting trees on steep hillsides, building contour terraces, composting, and renewing traditional companion plantings of corn, beans and squash. Currently they are actively promoting seed exchanges and continue to offer training in farmer-led sustainable agriculture at their Vicente Guerrero training center.

CEDI-CAM (Center for Intergral Campesino Development of the Mixteca)  
México

Formed in the early 80s by three young Mixtec campesinos (along with two Kaqchikel farmers from the Campesino a Campesino Movement from Guatemala) to restore some of the most eroded and impoverished lands in southern Mexico. They started their own tree nursery, planted several million trees, and replaced and repaired ancient contour ditches on badly eroded hillsides. Jesús León Santos, a member of CEDI-CAM, received a 2008 Goldman Environmental Prize in recognition of the inspiring restoration work accomplished by CEDI-CAM over the past two and a half decades.

<http://www.goldmanprize.org/2008/northamerica>

**NOTE: Additional resources, including suggested reading materials, are available in our Resource Guide document included in the CD-ROM folder of your "Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail" DVD.**

## General Questions for "Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail" video

### Pre-viewing

- Why do you think people migrate from Mexico to the U.S. to work? Do you think they are successful here and have a better standard of living than back home?
- Do you think that building a high-security fence along the U.S.-Mexico border will effectively stem illegal immigration from Mexico into the U.S.?
- What changes do you think will need to happen in Mexico, in order for people to stop migrating across the border?

### Post-viewing Questions

- Have your ideas in response to the pre-viewing questions changed, since watching the film?
- What aspects of the film were most impacting or revealing to you?
- What questions do you have, after watching this film?

## Discussion Guide

### Migrant Labor in the U.S.

Do you think agriculture requires an under-paid labor force of desperate people lacking other opportunities? What will have to change in our agriculture and food system, in order for farm workers to have a better standard of living?

Guillermo Glenn, from the Border Farm Workers Center in El Paso, believes that even if undocumented workers were legalized, they would still be treated like "slaves." What do you think about this? Do you think that changing U.S. immigration policies and giving legal status to migrant workers would improve their lives? What other impacts might it have? Do you have ideas for how to improve conditions for migrant workers in this country?

Do you think the presence of an undocumented immigrant workforce pushes labor standards and wages down? If the underground labor market ceased to exist and working conditions were improved, do you think more U.S. citizens would take those jobs?

### NAFTA

Laura Carlsen of the Americas Program says we often neglect to ask "what is the relationship between trade and the well-being of the population in general." What do you think? Does increased trade in and of itself correlate with improved standard of living?

Dino Cervantes' chile farm in New Mexico is struggling to compete with growers in Mexico and other countries, where labor is cheaper. "NAFTA really forced those changes on a lot of us," he says. Do you think free trade has the same disadvantage for other farmers in the U.S. as well? Who benefits from NAFTA and who doesn't?

What do you think of Victor Quintana's idea that agriculture should not have been included in NAFTA? How do you think the situation in the Mexican countryside might be different today if the Mexican government could still restrict imports of staple foods like corn and beans?

Food First director Eric Holt-Giménez explains that Europe brought all countries to a similar economic footing before opening its borders to free trade, thereby preventing any large migration of labor force from one country to another. What do you think about this idea? What would it take to bring Mexico to the same economic level as the U.S.? What are some possible consequences? Do you think it's feasible for all countries in the world to become similar, economically, to the United States and Europe?

## The Situation for Farmers in Mexico

The corn farmer Primo Sanchez says that we must "revalue" the work done in the countryside. How do you think this might happen? How could the government, and/or the public, support farmers more, so they could stay and make a living on their land?

The farmer Emiliano Juárez says, "I think one of the solutions is to open a dialogue with companies and directly with consumers, so that farmers can negotiate directly with those who buy our products... avoid the middlemen who keep most of our profits." How is this similar to the local food movement happening in the United States, with farmers markets and subscription farms and "buy local" campaigns? Do you think some of the strategies that are helping small farmers in the U.S. could also work for small farmers in Mexico?

Mexican congress member Susana Monreal Avila says that "The people of the countryside do not want to leave. . . If we give farmers another opportunity, with infrastructure, financial support, increased prices for their products... they would have no reason to go to the U.S." Based on what you know from watching this film, would you agree?

Rogelio Ruelas describes a project (growing fodder to produce high-quality beef) that he hopes will eventually support all 20 members of his ejido (ranch). Rogelio explains how the farmers must provide 40% of the start-up costs, and the government will provide the other 60%. Do you think such an investment is worthwhile in the long run? What do you think might happen if credit became more available and affordable for small- and medium-scale farmers in Mexico?

## Exploring our Connection

None of the fifty-two members of El Ranchero Solidario Co-operative have needed to migrate, because they can now earn an income in their community. What would happen, hypothetically, if all communities in Mexico achieved such a thing? What do you think would happen to the U.S. economy and our supply of goods and services?

Do you think the U.S. demand for cheap labor helps to fuel immigration? If so, what do you think would have to happen to change that?

How can we support grassroots efforts, such as El Ranchero Solidario Cooperative, that are creating alternatives to migration? As people in rural Mexico find ways to support themselves through local/regional markets instead of migrating to work in fields and factories north of the border, what can we do in our own communities, to reduce our dependency on exploited migrant labor?



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