

*Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*

**Letters to the Editor**

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**Don't confuse 'free' and 'fair' trade**

"Fair trade." "Free trade." These terms couldn't be more different.

Free trade agreements between countries (such as NAFTA) eliminate tariffs, quotas and preferences on most goods and services traded between them. While it allows easy exchange of goods between member nations, it has had devastating effects on small producers and farmers and the environment in many poor countries. These producers simply cannot compete with high-tech agriculture and manufacturing industries in developed nations, like the United States, where many industries are also government-subsidized.

Fair trade, in contrast, is a system of exchange working with farmers and artisans in developing countries so their products can compete in the world market. It guarantees a fair wage in the local context and safe working conditions. It builds long-term trade relationships. Financial, technical and marketing assistance is provided.

Free trade member-countries tend to shop for cheap labor and resources, giving rise to sweatshops, and regardless of effect on the environment.

Fair trade, meanwhile, ensures that working conditions are safe and environmentally sustainable practices are encouraged.

In a nutshell, free trade is not necessarily fair.

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