

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 6, 2011

Washington, DC

Contact: Dana Brown, US Office on Colombia, 202-232-8090

### **A Message from Colombia's small farmers: Vote Against the Free Trade Agreement**

Nelly Velandia comes to Washington, DC with a message from rural women and small farmers in Colombia: Vote "No" on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Colombia. Ms. Velandia is a leader of the Colombian Rural Women's Advocacy Roundtable, an organization which staunchly opposes the FTA based on the adverse effects it would have on Colombia's rural population and rural women in particular. The poverty rate in rural areas of Colombia is already over 50% and as a [2009 study](#) shows, small-scale farmers would see their net income fall by a further 16 percent due to the FTA. Even worse, 30% of these farmers whose corn, bean and wheat crops most heavily compete with subsidized US exports would see a staggering 48-70% net loss in their income after implementation of the FTA. Ms. Velandia, whose visit to Washington is sponsored by the US Office on Colombia and Oxfam, is meeting with Congressmen and women this week to let them know that rural women, who are often heads of household and produce much of Colombia's basic food supply, would suffer terrible consequences under the FTA. If the FTA is passed, "the rural economy will be greatly affected and it will be the end of small-scale farmers, especially women farmers who produce food for Colombia and the world," [says Velandia](#).

The 2011 United Nations Development Program report on Human Development in Colombia that was released last week underlines the grave situation that rural women face in Colombia and states that transformative rural reform is needed for the country to be able to resolve its ongoing internal conflict. "Unfortunately, the terms of the FTA with the United States would only exacerbate an already dire situation in which 1.3% of Colombians own 70% of the land and small farmers are left with no alternative to coca production as farming licit crops would no longer generate enough income for them to subsist," says Dana Brown, Executive Director of the US Office on Colombia. Small farmers—who tend to be located in conflict zones and who have already been oppressed by the ongoing armed conflict—will certainly not be able to compete domestically with exports from the United States. As Ms. Velandia hopes Congress will realize, farmers' difficulties in competing with the US market will decrease food security for all Colombians and prove crippling for rural women and small-scale farmers.

Ms. Velandia's message is clear: The FTA may benefit some, but those most vulnerable populations that already live in precarious situations will suffer unduly if the FTA is passed.