

Community Comment
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Fair trade and local success

I have long thought that Ross Perot was correct when he said of NAFTA, the fair trade agreement signed by Bill Clinton in the 90's, that we would hear the job loss from the US like a sucking sound. I still don't generally think we have fared well on some of the trade deals we have made. But like so many issues and problems we face, the loss of manufacturing jobs to other countries is way more complex than that.

According to Robert Reich, a liberal Berkeley Economist, the numbers are interesting. Factory jobs in places like Ohio and Michigan are down by about a third since 2000. From 2000 to 2007 we lost close to 1 million manufacturing jobs to China; the total loss in those years being about 3 million jobs. Was it all due to bad deals?

We can't look at this issue without taking in to account advances in technology. In many factories, technology alone has been responsible for a huge drop in the need for people. And the people that are needed are skilled in the appropriate technology in their field. I once had a local mill owner tell me that a mill that used to require 100 people to operate was down to 10. Computers ran the mill and very few people were needed to run the computers. Computers also allow us to ship products from all parts of the globe with amazing efficiency.

Factory workers with a high school diploma could work for as high as 50 dollars an hour counting benefits. Those days are over. Even with this loss, free trade has increased the real incomes of the middle class by 29 percent and more for those with lower incomes. For those with more education and higher skill levels, free trade has given you better access to global markets places where your skills are needed.

It is clear to me that we can not and will not stop technological advances. This means that education and high skills are the job requirements now and in the future. We cannot keep our heads in the sand about this reality. Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders are both wrong on this issue. The solution is more about keeping a balance of our economic core intact. As a country we need to be as independent as possible if the need arises. Short of that, we need to be part of the global economy that may lift all of us out of poverty.

On the local scene, I had the pleasure and ability to attend a special event the other night. Sun Valley Floral Farms hosted the event and had a dinner party for 150 people. This event was not cheap. The people whose business is producing cut flowers calls this event American Grown Field to Vase. Ten such events will be held across the country this year. This was the first of the year and in the most rural area of any. People came from all over the state and from as far away as Virginia and Florida. The central idea is to celebrate the

growing of flowers for our tables in the US. We were told that SunValley is the largest producer of cut flowers in North America. The event was fun, the food and wine were local, and we were in the company of about 1.4 million tulips. Folie Duece and Brio did the food, Faye ^{Zierker-Krause} did the flower arrangements, and Star Gazer provided the wine. Sun Valley provides the flowers and many jobs here and elsewhere. This was a good event for Humboldt County.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.