

SARA SAMSON

American Consumer

I'm **Sara Samson**, a single mom busy raising two kids in Ohio. Given what I earn -- just above minimum wage -- I like the lower prices and sometimes better quality of goods that come from global trade.

As a cashier at WalMart, I earn about \$13,800 a year before taxes, so according to a US Department of Agriculture study of poverty in America, I'm one of those [31 million Americans who worries about getting enough food for the family every month](#) .

The store manager tells me that the [prices](#) on toys, TV's, clothes, shoes, energy, and food all [reflect more things coming from overseas, where workers often get paid less](#), sometimes a lot less. I have an old TV that came from Korea, and I buy clothes made in a Caribbean country, and shoes made in Indonesia. My little old Ford has a Japanese Mazda motor and was built in Mexico, so globalization is okay with me because the lower prices help my family survive. .

But I'm also aware that globalization may pose some problems. For example, I wonder if some of the mergers that I read about will raise costs. [BP/Amoco](#), British Petroleum, has bought out Amoco, an American oil company where I usually buy my gas. I know [OPEC](#) has a lot to say about setting oil prices, but I wonder if some of these so-called [Transnational Corporations \(TNC's\)](#) in a given industry, say energy, sometimes get together and also do some [price fixing](#). I'm not accusing BP/Amoco, mind you. I'm just curious. .

Sam, my 16 year old, is studying globalization at school. He says the Federal Trade Commission and other [federal regulatory agencies](#) are supposed to protect us from [monopolies](#), [cartels](#) and [oligopolies](#) fixing prices or limiting supplies to drive up prices. .

SAM.

Yeah, my social studies teacher said that the [price of energy](#), especially home heating oil, has gone up hugely this winter, and so has

gasoline. Energy prices affect everyone -- farmers, truckers, manufacturers, even the cost of travel for school teams. They had serious protests all over Europe when oil prices made gasoline prices shoot up. .

Anyway, mom said the cost of living ([CPI](#)) was going up about 3% a year, and she was hoping Congress would raise the minimum wage to help us keep up. So I got a part-time job at the grocery. Otherwise we wouldn't have enough money get by. .

In school I learned that when a cartel like [OPEC](#) sets oil prices from overseas, there's not a lot our government can do about it, unless we switch to some [alternate form of energy](#). Even a country as powerful as the US has trouble dealing effectively with [cartels](#) and (transnational Corporations([TNC's](#)), companies that operate out of many countries. .

At the store where I stock the deli section, the price of Roquefort cheese recently went way up because of a trade dispute between the US and [European Union \(EU\)](#) The newspaper says EU countries won't take our beef because it has hormones in it, and that a French farmer named Bove' tore up a McDonalds in protest against America's insistence on selling beef to the EU. He actually went to jail for it. .

So when the French block our beef sales, and Americans can't get the trade dispute settled, the US raises tariffs on a some things the French and the EU want to sell to us, like Roquefort cheese. The paper says that World Trade Organization ([WTO](#)) [rules](#) govern trade protests and disagreements. But I don't understand how the WTO rules work, and how [international trade disputes](#) get settled . .

Now I wonder if globalization affects the price of medicine, because my brother Eric has been sick a lot. For Christmas I'm thinking of getting mom a gift certificate at the pharmacy to help out with Eric's medicine. .

Sara, Eric, Sam's brother, is 13. He's has been in and out of school with an illness the doctors can't pin down. Two doctors think it has something to do with the pesticides, what they [call POPs \(persistent organic pollutants\)](#) either from our water or from what they spray on the crops here. Other children in Eric's school have come up with similar symptoms, what the doctors call endocrine problems. A lot of the parents are upset.

I'm going deeper into debt with Eric's health costs, but what else can I do? He has to have medical care. .

The pathologist at the hospital says he believes there was something wrong either with our water table or maybe even the tomato crops that came in from Mexico. We didn't know the tomatoes were from Mexico. If our water or the way crops are sprayed are making people sick, we have a major problem. Now the hospital has sent for a specialist from [the Centers for Disease control \(CDC\)](#) in Atlanta, and he's up here checking out the cause. The doctor says Mexico can use crop pesticides that have been outlawed in the US..

. So I'm upset about Eric's health, and whatever link it may have to international trade. I want to write my Congressional Representative about the US making sure our own water is pure, and to make sure as well that other countries can't use pesticides that will make American consumers sick. Sam says he learned at school that the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) and the [North American Free Trade Agreement \(NAFTA\)](#) agreements make it impossible for the US to force other countries like Mexico to change the pesticide regulations. .

QUESTIONS

Help me out here, won't you? Please explain to me:

1. Are there problems with pesticides or [POP's](#) in the drinking water in the US, and if so where and how seriously might they affect someone's health?
2. Global trade isn't always so smooth, not if the French reject American beef because of hormones in it, or crops from outside the US can ruin people's health. Can countries spray anything they want on the vegetables and fruit coming into the US, and the US can't stop them because of international agreements? .
3. If an agricultural company pollutes the water or a crop, do I have some protection from the US government to get back what they cost me and my son in health care expenses? .
4. In what ways is WalMart linked to globalization?

Underlined terms hold clues to the information that will help you find me some answers. Just go to them on the web and see where they lead you.