



CAFTA won't hammer La. sugar prices

Re Oct. 24 article by Gerard Shields "Bush, Kerry differences could affect state's future," Mr. Shields, The Advocate's Washington correspondent, painted a very one-sided picture of the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Despite the rhetoric of the sugar lobby, it must be understood that sugar represents only 20 percent of agricultural production in Louisiana. The other 80 percent all stands to gain substantially from CAFTA.

Some telling statistics: \$800 million in goods is exported annually from Louisiana to Central America. Besides export cotton and corn benefiting from the agreement, Louisiana's rice sector stands to gain. Currently, there is a 15 percent to 60 percent tariff levied on rice exports. Soybeans carry up to a 15 percent tariff; poultry, up to 164 percent; and chemicals and paper products from 1 percent to 15 percent.

All these Louisiana sectors will benefit from CAFTA, while sugar is only going to be impacted with a 99,000 metric ton annual window, well within the 300,000 metric ton "cushion" allowed by Congress. But the sugar interests would have one believe that it is the end of the world as the allotments will rise an additional 40,000 metric tons later in the agreement. This is certainly not going to result in a wholesale reduction in sugar prices when 99,000 metric tons represents only one day's supply of the nation's sugar.

John T. Hyatt, Metairie