

## Making a pig's ear of African agriculture

By Karin Ulmer

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### **The EU should stop dumping pigmeat on the African market.**

After frozen chicken, the EU is now dumping huge quantities of pork in Africa. Export subsidies introduced last December are making things far worse, and threatening the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of small farmers. This European-made misery is the latest chapter in a wearisomely familiar story of intensive lobbying by EU farmers caught in a vicious circle of high animal-feed prices and over-production.

The solution to their problem has been to visit a disaster on their counterparts in Africa.

Last year, export subsidies of up to 54 cent per kilo were quietly agreed, provided the destination of the pigmeat was outside the EU. This was despite a crystal-clear commitment to end such subsidies by 2013 as part of Europe's contribution to the Doha round of World Trade Organization (WTO) talks.

The reintroduction of subsidies in this area is blatant hypocrisy given the free-trade mantra deployed by Peter Mandelson, the European commissioner for trade, to push through the (unequal) Economic Partnership Agreements. And it is also irresponsible at a time of large-scale, and spreading, food riots across the globe.

This triumph of the EU farm lobby has done nothing to shore up the EU's shrinking credibility among developing countries. When the EU's Management Committee on Pigmeat meets this Thursday, 22 May, it should defy the lobbyists and end export subsidies.

Even before the subsidies kicked in at the end of last year, the Central and West African market had become completely distorted, with pigmeat exports from Europe tripling in six years.

The trade is now exploding.

According to the most recent EU figures, subsidised pigmeat exports to Africa have soared by 21%. In 2007, a total of 146,000 tonnes were dumped – mostly in Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Angola and Liberia – at prices averaging 50 cent a kilo. These exports now also include better-quality meat, such as ham and sausages – cheap, thanks to the new subsidies.

A piquant aspect of this made-in-Europe catastrophe is that many of the ruined small-scale pig farmers were refugees from the poultry markets devastated by Europe's mass exports of frozen chicken-bits.

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What is also striking is that the subsidies make very little difference to European farmers' problems, but do a great deal to worsen the global food crisis. Indeed, the EU needs to go further than merely ending subsidies.

Farming in Africa above all requires help to reform itself, which means investing in small-scale farmers and local food systems, in greater diversity of production methods, better access to land and local markets, and encouraging traditional biodiversity.

Mantras about trade liberalisation, more aid, more technology, genetically-modified breeds and seeds, have the smell of abstract theory, and of smart laboratories funded by the GM industry, and out of reach of African farmers. The tendency is towards a wholly inappropriate Western industrialised model: farming without farmers.

The effect is to shore up the dependency culture that the EU theoretically wishes to end, outlined in the European Commission's Communication on Advancing African Agriculture Policy, but belied by the hammer-blow now delivered thanks to pressure from the EU farm lobby.

Basic food security, the ability to feed itself, is fundamental to any country.

Yet, apart from the absurdity of subsidising meat-dumping, the current Interim Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are making things worse by restricting any serious new options for agricultural development, preventing effective safeguard measures to protect home industries and imposing a freezing on tariffs on all trade between the parties, whether or not products are the subject of trade-liberalisation talks.

Such I-EPA provisions are unacceptable for African farmers. It would be surprising if Africa's pig farmers were not to follow the example of Cameroonian poultry farmers, who two years ago launched a mass protest campaign against the dumping of frozen chickens from Europe which had driven so many of them into penury. Yaoundé's response was to halt poultry imports from Europe. Other African governments might not now do the same, as they would be in breach of the I-EPAs, but, if the EU is serious about helping Africa and about the food crisis, it should heed the anger of African farmers.

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