

Bamako, Dakar, N'Djamena, Niamey, Nouakchott, Ouagadougou – 1 June 2019

To Mr Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture,

"Fake news and misinformation" – these are the words you chose to discredit our statements and research on the competition effect of milk powder and blends of skimmed milk and vegetable fats on the local dairy sector in West Africa.

We, producers, processors and stakeholders who are part of the local dairy sector in 6 West-African countries, came to Brussels to provide a first-hand account of our daily reality and to initiate a much-needed dialogue with Europe on what recent developments have shown to be common challenges. We know that the main objective of the European Union's development policy is to eradicate poverty. We are familiar with the situation in the Sahel as well as with the European Union's support as a partner. That is why, these words in apparent contradiction with the same commitments have greatly surprised and shocked us.

Mr Hogan, local milk is crucial for our agro-pastoral economies and should be at the heart of well-intentioned regional policies.

West Africa has been an important pastoral and milk-producing region for many years. Pastoralism and agro-pastoralism are the life, source of income, and guarantee for food security for over 48 million pastoralists and agro-pastoralists.

Without targeted policies by West-African countries to optimise milk production and processing, unfair competition from milk powder or substitutes with vegetable fats becomes an obstacle in the development of local dairy sectors, which, in turn, benefits significant and growing imports.

Yes, Mr Hogan, competition from milk powder and blends made from milk and vegetable fats is a reality on the local dairy market and is holding back the development of local milk production.

Be it in shops in Ouagadougou and Bamako, or while negotiating milk prices with dairies, our products are being undercut by European exports.

Different studies, including those carried out by renowned organisations like CIRAD and GRET, have shown how for many years now, the classic milk powder varieties have put pressure on local milk and that today, skimmed milk-vegetable fat blends further amplify this effect because they are sold to consumers at prices that are 30% lower than those of whole milk powder.

Since 2015, West Africa has been importing more powdered skimmed milk-vegetable fat blends than skimmed milk and whole milk powder combined. According to our estimates, West Africa imported 276,892 tonnes of skimmed milk-vegetable fat blended powder in 2018, which is 24% more than in 2016 and 234% more than in 2008. Considering the scale of milk production in Europe, denying the problem by saying that only a very small percentage of the production is exported, as your representatives proudly declared during our discussions, does not reflect the real consequences of this trade on our region.

We have also noted that there is a lack of consolidated data, especially for the highly opaque export of vegetable-fat blends. It is this gap in information that fed into your statements. We ask for transparency to be ensured, in particular by including these flows in the mandate of the European Milk Market Observatory or in mechanisms that guarantee accountability in the Common Agricultural Policy toward third countries.

Mr Hogan, the West-African market is of strategic importance for the current CAP and for European companies.

The CAP reform has targeted growth in the dairy sector for ten years now and envisages a 2% increase in exports every year till 2030. Drawn by a West-African market that is growing steadily, European dairy companies are investing heavily in processing and marketing in the region.

As things stand, investments by these European companies do not favour local milk. Only 20% of these companies collect local milk and that too in meagre quantities: only about 30,000 litres per day for West Africa as a whole.

Your services explained to us that the survival of European milk producers was contingent on their access to export markets. We, however, do not believe that increased European exports go hand in hand with improving the situation of our European counterparts. The survival of the European dairy sector cannot be at the cost of the development of our local dairy sectors in West Africa.

Mr Hogan, you are mistaken when you say that we are advocating a policy of starvation!

We therefore demand stronger protection of West-African markets from cheap imports, together with policies to favour the development of the local dairy sector. We, the producers of West Africa, should be allowed to make a living.

In Kenya, a protectionist policy with ambitious tariffs (60%) has allowed the country to become self-sufficient in terms of milk, and has only strengthened their food security. Today, milk powder and skimmed milk-vegetable fat blends imported to West Africa do not feed the rural populations that are, nonetheless, some of the most vulnerable in the region (this is done by local milk!). Quite the contrary – they limit their chances of transitioning toward a more dynamic sector.

We call on the European Union to support and promote a political, economic and trade context that would push the development of the local dairy sector and effectively include it in industrial processing circuits.

Mr Hogan, we are not just here to serve the interests of European producers; we want to be participants in and drivers of the sustainable development of our own agricultural activity.

Some of your services said that we are being instigated and used by our European colleagues. Our aim is to make a decent living from our work and to contribute to the sustainable development of our agricultural sectors and our regions. We are working on the development of local, fair milk in Africa and are striving to change policies so that they can help us achieve this objective.

The export of these blends made from skimmed milk and vegetable fats is the most harmful consequence of a malfunctioning European policy. A policy that is constantly driving increased production at the lowest possible price. This European dairy policy contradicts the European Union's efforts in the form of public development aid. We have spoken with our European colleagues; we have visited their farms. They have shown us how they too are finding it difficult to make a decent living.

That is why we have created an alliance with European producers through the "My Milk is Local" campaign in West Africa and the "Let's Not Export our Problems" campaign in Europe. We therefore call on the European Union to implement the measures laid out in the 72h of Milk declaration presented in Brussels.

Mr Hogan, you have a pivotal role to play in creating to a framework that would promote the development of the local dairy sector in West Africa.

We, the producers and other dairy-sector stakeholders of West Africa, are aware of the key role to be played by our countries in the development of local milk, and our primary efforts are directed at them. We are very happy to see that ECOWAS has decided to implement a regional offensive to promote local dairy sectors. We therefore call on ECOWAS and our highest political representatives to put these words into action.

In light of the strategic partnership between the West-African region and the region of origin for majority of the milk powder and skimmed milk-vegetable fat blends coming to our countries, the European Union shoulders a significant responsibility.

Your claims of "fake news and misinformation" have done nothing to change what is our daily reality.

The declaration we signed on 10 April summarises our proposals. We came to Europe. Today, on World Milk Day, we, the stakeholders of the local dairy sector in West Africa, invite you to come and visit our farms, our micro-dairies, our factories and our countries. We would like to give you a chance to see for yourself with we are faced with and to engage constructively with the concerned actors.



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