

CALL FOR SOLIDARITY WITH MILK PRODUCERS

EUROPE NEEDS TO CHANGE COURSE TO PUT AN END TO THE CRISIS

Agricultural organisations and milk producers' unions from Africa, together with development NGOs, are supporting the European milk producers proposing regulatory measures for the milk market, in order to protect small-scale family farming and guarantee decent income for producers in Europe and Africa.

European milk producers are sounding the alarm once again. For the third time since 2009, they are facing extremely low prices. They can choose to either sell at a loss or disappear.

In addition to the Russian embargo, the European milk policy led by the European Commission is also playing the major part. The crisis is a direct result of the decisions to abolish milk supply management measures (primarily lift the milk quotas) and to further support its export oriented development. These measures have led to significant growth in milk production in Europe, similarly to what happened in the other main exporting countries. In this context of fierce international competition, Europe is maintaining its policy of producing more for a lower price. This increase in overproduction of a few percent (2% in one year) has caused milk prices and, therefore, revenues to plunge to levels that no other sector would accept (-25% in one year in Belgium). The true goal of the European Commission's deregulation is to force milk production to be concentrated among the more competitive large farms, so that they can deliver raw materials at discounted prices to dairies and the processing industry. This is something that European citizens do not want. Such measures destroy family farming and jobs, as well as the environment in Europe and the countries of the South.

The milk crisis is the result of an "export-focused" European policy that is luring dairies with the promise of hypothetical lucrative markets in China and Africa, the preferred destination for European exports. According to the European Commission's estimates, skimmed milk powder exports have almost quadrupled since the crisis of 2009, rising from 176,000 tonnes in 2008 to 646,000 tonnes in 2014, but at farm gate prices that are lower than production costs. Powder milk exports to Africa are booming, with Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands as the exporters. Agricultural policies and trade agreements - such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States - tend to promote such exports at low prices, which prevent local milk production channels from thriving. This counteracts the efforts of African producers - supported by Belgian and European cooperation policies - to feed Africa.

We support the demands of European milk producers, who are calling for profitable prices through production being regulated at a level corresponding to European needs.

As in 2009, we support the demand for the volumes produced to be reduced in order to maintain a sizeable number of diversified family farms spread throughout different regions, without jeopardising the development of production channels in Africa.

We oppose those who are taking advantage of the crisis to claim that the solution is to expand and mechanise in order to resist low prices. We must not forget that expanding means swallowing up your neighbour and further concentrating production. In 35 years, Belgium has lost more than two thirds of its farms. This path must be abandoned. It is a solution from the last century, which fails to take into account environmental, climatic and social impacts, as well the fact that energy resources are not inexhaustible.

The volatility and devaluation of milk prices are not inevitable. They are the result of political choices. Other policies are possible and, together with organisations of producers from the South, we support the proposals for market regulation that are mutually supportive, as demanded by the milk producers of the European Milk Board.

What we need is solidarity among producers, among countries, and between producers and consumers, as well as production regulation that can guarantee fair prices. We need to preserve sustainable, small-scale, diversified production that allows every region of the world to develop its own food systems, whilst respecting the right to food and food sovereignty. Will this course of action be costly for consumers? It will surely bear a lower cost than the damage that the low-cost policy is causing to all our populations, and particularly to farmers and milk producers.

This call for solidarity is supported by:

CNCD-11.11.11

Oxfam-in-Belgium

SOS-Faim

Veterinarians Without Borders

FIAN-Belgium

Broederlijk Delen

Entraide et Fraternité

Aide au Développement Gembloux (ADG)

Voedselteams

Boerenforum

VELT

Réseau Foi et Justice Europe-Afrique, Antenne belge

Wervel

Associations 21

Rencontre des Continents

Solidaris (Mutualités Socialistes)

Quinoa

Solidagro (NL)

Misereor (D)

Agronomes et Vétérinaires sans Frontières (FR)

SIVtro – Veterinari Senza Frontiere Italia

Veterináři bez hranic ČR (Czech Republic)

Call supported by the African Producers organisations and NGOs :

Réseau des Organisations, d'Éleveurs et de Pasteurs d'Afrique 'Billital Marobé' (RMB)

Association pour la promotion de l'élevage au Sahel et en savane (APESS)

Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux (CNCR), Sénégal

Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes (CNOP), Mali

Plateforme Nationale des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs Agricoles (PNOPPA), Benin

Plateforme Paysanne du Niger (PFPN)

Confédération Paysanne du Faso (CPF), Burkina Faso

Coordination Togolaise des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles - CTOP

Association pour la redynamisation de l'élevage au Niger (AREN)

Union Nationale des Mini-laiteries et des Producteurs de lait du Burkina Faso (UMPL-B)

Fédération Malienne des Producteurs de Lait (Mali)

Conseil des Organisations Non Gouvernementales d'Appui au Développement (CONGAD), Sénégal

Réseau Africain pour le Droit à l'Alimentation (RAPDA), Sénégal

Organisation des Jeunes Panafricaines, Sénégal

La Panafricaine pour l'Education au Développement, Sénégal

Forum Social Sénégalais

Union pour la Solidarité et l'Entraide (USE), Sénégal