

## IH - The meat of the 'global land grab' debate

Theme: Access to land and land rights  
Moderator: Rob Bleijerveld (Supermacht.nl)  
Speaker: Dr. Mindi Schneider (International Institute of Social Studies - Erasmus University Rotterdam)

### Report

Rob introduced Mindi and her topic. Global rising meat consumption demands ever more land and resources (feed production and animal keeping). The 'Meat Grabbing' concept points to hunger, social inequalities and environmental injustice. Rob proposes Dutch and Belgian campaigns should use 'Meat Grabbing' against huge national feed imports and pig meat exports.

Mindi started by stating that she took the example of China not to demonize the country (NB. US and Rabobank are responsible for even more crossborder land grabbing). The worldwide increased industrial meat production is top driver for land grabs - and not financial investments or food security policy as is the general view. It is wrong to justify land grabbing for increased industrial meat production ('meat grabbing') as a positive issue: it is not about food security, but about feeding urban middle class, agribusiness profits and state legitimacy. Statistics disregard the amount of land and water that becomes unusable and toxic because of feed cultivation or stocking of animals.

She added that industrial meat production is very resource intensive and greenhouse gas extensive and that it's the fastest growing form of food production, while meat consumption is very uneven worldwide. Next she elaborated on China. After the Chinese market opened up for animal feed imports in 1978 home meat production boomed. China's example shows that the concept of nutrition transition is not a 'developmental' or natural process, but a political choice. Important questions are: What are the entrenched forms of power behind the increased meat consumption and dietary change? Who benefits and sets the agenda?

Chinese industrial meat regime is structured through 'dragonheads' (state-supported, processing enterprises). In 1990 the state opened the market for soybeans import in order to boost Chinese pig production, mobilizing the population with this slogan: 'Pork is Progress' (more money = more meat). Still there are big differences in rural and urban consumption levels (class and accessibility) and the number of diseases related to change of diet rises.

Finally, Mindi summarized the main problems related to meat grabbing. First is the amount of land and resources used for feed production. Secondly the amount of land and water that is used for industrial meat production and contaminated by CAFOs (pigsties), reducing land and water resources for other farmers, fishers and citizens. Thirdly the key beneficiaries are agribusiness companies.

Several issues came up in the discussed after the lecture, like the growing vulnerability of Kenian small scale farmers because of lack of land security, or the change in Western meat consumption that causes shortage of beans and other food in Brazil, and the fact that meat labels don't inform consumers of the carbon footprint, water use, social impact or where the meat was produced. Other topics were the growing awareness on diseases and health effects of meat consumption in the West, less so in China. And the immense, but ignored, effects of depleted soils and 'nutrient drift' through meat production for export. Also the fact that meat substitutes and vegetarianism are wrapped up in same political-economic relationship as meat grabbing.

Exposing contrasting views amongst the participants was a discussion about what prevails in the context of influencing political decision making: the power of consumers or the power of agribusiness. Some relevant statements:

- "Citizens power is necessary to influence politicians".
- "Food production system is based upon inequalities between haves and have-nots. Consumers with money and market access have power, but majority of world population has no choice".
- "It is dangerous to polarize this way: consider synergy by using consumer buying power to change markets, also to benefit of have-nots".
- "Corporate power is superior to consumer power. Research methods and political lobbying by large corporations are used to influence consumer choice."
- "There is need of spreading knowledge and convincing people through public lobbying to make healthy choices".
- "The assumption that education and awareness are the drivers for positive change is false. Many are aware of environmental impacts of food production and yet do not make different choices".

The China example shows that standard setting and other important choices about food are taken by industry and the state long before consumers can buy the food in market or store!

### **Outcomes**

1. Meat grabbing discussion is being framed to regard increasing meat production and consumption as a natural process. We need to politicize the discussion about meat and recognize that political choices are backing up the current system.
2. Differences of opinion over extent of power of consumers over (changing) production and distribution processes.
3. Family farms need support with integration of traditional knowledge and new techniques in animal keeping and small scale sustainable meat production to counter the risk of landgrabs.

### **More information**

- Website Supermacht, <https://www.supermacht.nl/?p=5579>
- Contact information Dr. Mindi Schneider, <http://www.iss.nl/schneider>
- Report 'Meat Atlas', <https://www.foeeurope.org/meat-atlas>