

## **CATTLE-FODDER: A DUTCH EXAMPLE**

As a Dutch vegetarian on a holiday in Spain, it appeared to be hardly possible to eat something different than tortilla de patates. Why didn't I ignore my principles and adapt to the traditional Spanish kitchen.

### **Cattle**

I remember having read an article in a newspaper about a conference concerning north-south relations. Representatives from different parts of the world were invited to the Netherlands in order to exchange ideas about development. During their visitation they traveled through the country and spoke with several Dutch people. They tried to understand our way of living.

What they found most surprising, almost shocking, was not so much the high level of urbanisation, nor the Dutch infrastructure, nor the material possessions of the people, but the enormous amounts of cattle. I had never realised that this was so extraordinary, until I started searching for data. After this investigation I finally understood what is meant with bio-industry.

On average every Dutchman possesses almost nine animals, not to mention dogs, cats and other small pets. Most of these animals are meant for consumption, whether within the Netherlands or in other parts of Europe. Data from 1980 point out the following amounts in millions.

Where does their food come from? In 1980 with effective methods two million hectares of Dutch agricultural land supplied (among other purposes) 20% of the cattle-fodder. The rest was imported from abroad. The Dutch cattle used six million hectares of foreign agricultural land. Given the growth of bio-industry, this number will be multiplied by now.

### **Starvation**

Every day 40.000 people, mainly children, die from starvation, every year almost 15 million. Susan George, an important expert in matters of mundial feeding-problems, calculated how much these people needed in order to survive. With the assumption that children demand as much calories as adults, she pointed out that 3.6 million tons of grain would suffice for all those 15 million people. This is only 0.2% of the worldproduction of grain, not very much compared with the 17 million tons that was just stocked in the Western world. Why do some people suffer from starvation, while others can swim in the grain at the same time?

### **Global trade**

This situation becomes even more hilarious when realising that large amounts of raw materials in poor countries are exported to western countries. With 6% of the world-population the United States use 35% of all worldly available raw materials. Rich countries in general (not even 25% of the world population) use between 66% and 75% of these materials, food included. Only the cattle in these countries eat about one third of the yearly worldproduction of grain: 165 times as much as is needed to feed the 15 million people that die from starvation every year.

During the same years that Ethiopia and Sudan suffered from their worst disasters and Bob Geldof organised Live Aid, the Sahel-countries exported between two and five times as much proteins to the West as they received from food-aids.

### **Neo-colonialism**

Often, mostly by western people, third world countries are accused of not being able to control their populations and, as a

consequence, of wasting scarce food. Birth-control is one of the main issues in the discussions about development. But is it true that food is scarce? Or is the food just not fairly shared among the inhabitants of the world?

Ever since colonialism started, the way the fertile land is used has reflected the demands of the imperialist countries. Guatemala produced in chronological order cacao, indigo (until synthetic paint was invented in 1850), coffee and cotton. Since the arrival of the United Fruit Company the land has been exploited for the production of bananas. Brazil's main export-products were first wood, then cotton, sugar, tobacco, rubber, coffee and finally soybeans. With the latter the export-rate of Brazil is considerably enlarged.

Soya is one of the most important kinds of cattle-fodder nowadays. The soybeans that are meant for the American and European cattle, occupy about nine million hectares of Brazil's fertile land (twenty times as much as in 1965). Formerly, this land was used by peasants who produced black beans, unions, rice and potatoes for the local population. The demands from the world-market, however, appeared to be so favourable that these peasants couldn't compete with the soya-enterprises anymore. Many traditional farmers sold their land to large-scale (American!) companies, which were financially supported by the Brazilian government. In some areas 22% of the population lost its occupation and was forced to make a living in the cities.

### **Vegetables or meat?**

Sometimes people ask me why I am a vegetarian. My answer usually refers to the unfair way the food of the world is divided. Though as an alternative to meat I sometimes eat soya. But is it fair to eat Brazilian soya or rice from Indonesia, while at the same time inhabitants of these countries die from starvation?

At least it is better than eating meat from the Netherlands. Indirectly this meat also comes from third world countries.

One hectare of agricultural land with vegetables can supply twelve people all the necessary proteins, while the same area used for the feeding of cattle can only feed two people. Vegetarian meals are six times as effective as meat-meals. Imagine: if all current Dutch agricultural land is used for vegetables, the whole Dutch population could be fed with this. With the foreign land, now used for the Dutch cattle, 60 million extra people could enjoy a daily meal.

R. Nahuis (1998), 'Pinso: un exemple Holandès' (Cattle fodder: a Dutch example), *Sakile*, 4, p. 33-34.