

Communications & Opinions



CAP could be model for food security in Africa

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Letters

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CAP could be model for food security in Africa

From Mr Michel Barnier.

Sir, May I take strong exception to your editorial "Barnier's barriers" (April 28), which is based on inaccuracies and misinterpretation of my comments.

Claiming that the future of the world's poorest populations lies in their capacity to export to richer parts of the world is a double denial of reality. First of all, because the least developed countries already benefit from free market access to the world's biggest market, that of the European Union and its 450m consumers. Second, because it is precisely the choice of an export-oriented agriculture that has ruined subsistence farming and local production in the world's poorest countries.

You say that I wish to deny developing countries access to world markets. What I say is that food security can be achieved neither by protectionism nor by trade alone. The answer to global shortages must lie in

developing production capacity throughout the world, and not only where it is most profitable. In this context, the losers of the Doha round will inevitably be the world's hungry and poor, as we were recently reminded by your own newspaper (April 3) and by economists of the World Bank and of the Carnegie Endowment.

And there is no need for the European Union to blush for what we have put on the table: an average reduction of import tariffs in agriculture of more than half and an end to all export subsidies. Alleging that we wish to raise tariffs, citing the notion of community preference, is plainly incorrect.

At the same time, what are the proposals of our major trading partners? In the face of the crisis the big agro exporters, such as Brazil and Argentina, take measures to limit their exports whereas the US, which is at present consolidating its

farm bill, will pursue its indirect export aids regardless of their long-term distortive effects on developing countries.

I have never proposed "food autarky". What I am championing, however, is a drive for more agricultural policy and regulation across homogenous regional blocs. Trying to help poor farmers, who already lag behind competitively, by exposing them to free competition makes no sense at all. In practice it amounts to a denial of a minimum of food security in Africa in the foreseeable future and would discourage the only viable solution: the creation of a favourable climate for investment in agriculture over the long run, which is the only way to reduce poverty and eradicate famine.

In this respect, the Common Agricultural Policy can be a model.

Michel Barnier,
Minister for Agriculture, France

EU's move is

Biofuel is a triumph for the statisticians