

Increased meat consumption in India, China driving global food prices: EU

The European Union Tuesday joined the debate on the reason for spiralling food prices worldwide, saying India and China were consuming more meat which was driving global food prices up.

EU Commissioner for agriculture and rural development Mariann Fischer Boel said here Tuesday that the change of dietary habits in China and India and bad weather are driving food prices high worldwide, reported EuAsiaNews.

'Those who see biofuels as the driving force behind recent food price increases have overlooked not just one elephant standing right in front of them, but two,' she said in a speech at the European Policy Centre, a think-tank in Brussels.

'The first elephant is the huge increase in demand from emerging countries like China and India. These countries are eating more meat. It takes about 4 kg of cereals to produce one kg of pork, and about two kg of cereals to make one kg of poultry meat. So a dietary shift towards meat in countries with populations of over 1 billion people each has an enormous impact on commodity markets,' noted the Danish commissioner.

The second elephant is the weather, and its effect on production, said Boel. In 2006, bad weather hit cereal production in the US, the European Union, Canada, Russia, Ukraine and Australia. In 2007, the same thing happened again, except in the US. 'This is not a recipe for low prices,' she said.

'However, long-term price rises are not an entirely bad thing. They could be good news for the 70 to 80 percent of the world's poorest who live in rural areas and depend on farming for their livelihood. Here, we can do much better with our development aid,' she added.

Meanwhile, Jeffrey Sachs, special adviser to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, said the current policy of promoting bio-fuels must be rethought.

These programmes were 'understandable at a time when food prices were lower but not any more', he told a meeting of the European Parliament's Development Committee on Monday.

He noted that a third of the US maize crop in 2008 would be used to fill petrol tanks.

Sachs also criticised the World Bank for encouraging developing countries to focus on export goods, thus neglecting agriculture and starting to import most of their food.

The European Parliament is due to adopt a resolution on rising food prices at its plenary session May 22.

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