



“Profits to the Danes, for us – Hog stench?” The campaign against Danish swine CAFOs in rural Lithuania

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The paper analyzes a grass-roots campaign to limit the expansion of Danish-owned industrial hog operator Saerimner in Lithuania. The industrialization of livestock production as well as local responses to the restructuring of meat production are interpreted within the broader context of the incorporation of peripheral regions into global agro-food markets. Unlike in Western Europe and North America where the industrialization of hog production is preceded by the displacement of small hog producers, in Eastern Europe the expansion of multinational corporations is occurring by the buying up, retrofitting and modernizing of factory-farms inherited from the socialist-era. It is argued that the bitter environmental legacy of Soviet-era factory farming has shaped rural population responses to the new wave of multinational acquisitions in the region. Anti-corporate hog campaigning is analyzed within the context of growing activism among rural constituencies displaced from commercial agriculture. The importance of effective organization and leadership in grass-roots activism is emphasized as well as the growing role of non-farming interests in shaping the rural policies of the country.

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1. Introduction

In recent years EU expansion to the East and the inclusion of the former socialist countries into the Union have begun to change the regional as well as global organization and division of labor in food production. One of these changes was the expansion of industrialized, large-scale hog production facilities to the East as European as well as North American agro-food corporations began relocating their production facilities to Eastern Europe in order to capitalize on the region's comparative advantages such as cheaper land and labor, lax environmental regulations, growing meat demand in the region, and access to EU markets.

As early as 1994 Danish hog farmers, in anticipation of Poland's pending membership of the European Union, began buying closed-down state farms in Poland through subsidiary Poldanor. By 2005 Poldanor operated 15 farms and 2 feed companies and produced 500,000 hogs annually. In 2004 Poldanor and Danish co-operative Tican established the meat processing company Prime Food located in north Poland, which currently processes about 36,000 hogs a month, mostly for bacon export to Denmark. In 2004 Danish Crown, the largest pork processor in the European Union, with a turnover of more than €5.2 billion a year, acquired the second largest Polish pork processor Sokolow, which currently operates six pig processing plants and produces up to 1 million hogs a year

(Nielsen and Kristensen, 2008, p. 91). In 1997 Finnish based HKScan began buying large Soviet-era meat processors in the Baltic states and started breeding pigs, producing feed, and processing pork for the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian markets (Borgström, 2008). In 2007 Swedish Meats announced plans to relocate its bacon production plant from Sweden to Poland.

These Scandinavian companies were not the only ones relocating and expanding their hog production facilities into Eastern Europe. In 1999 the US-based Smithfield corporation, the largest pig producer in the world, acquired Polish meat processor Animex, rapidly expanded its production and by 2009 was on target to produce and process around 3 million hogs a year, with 35–40% of the processed pork being exported mostly to other EU countries (ter Beek, 2007, pp. 27–28). In 2004 Smithfield expanded its operation to Romania, where it bought large Communist-era hog production facilities and announced plans to produce 4 million hogs and have sales of \$420 million annually by 2010 (Carvajal and Castle, 2009; Romanian Daily, 2006).

Although the expansion of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) to the mostly poor and underdeveloped rural areas of Eastern Europe does bring badly needed capital investment to the region, it also raises serious concerns because of the large-scale negative impacts on local ecosystems and communities associated with this type of livestock farming.

CAFOs or “assembly-line swine” operations as they are often referred by critics, are large-scale industrial facilities consisting of three essential parts: the hog house, the waste lagoon, and the

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sprayfield. On average, CAFOs contain 2000–5000 hogs, which produce between 1.7 and 4.25 thousand tons of solid hog waste a year. Solid hog waste is liquefied and stored in lagoons – open earthen pits of 7.5–9 m deep and several acres in surface area (Edwards and Driscoll, 2009, pp. 155–158). Throughout Eastern Europe, including the Baltic countries, only the newest lagoons have a clay liner, while the majority of them are just unlined big pits dug into the ground. When lagoons fill up with hog manure, the slurry is pumped out and sprayed on or plowed over in adjacent fields. Spray fields are usually planted with grasses that have no commercial value but are selected for their capacity to metabolize organic pollutants.

Numerous studies have shown that areas around large CAFOs tend to become semi-waste lands. The vast lakes of manure produced by hogs aerate ammonia, methane, hydrogen sulfide and other substances, producing sickening and irritating odors, leading to numerous symptoms such as burning eyes, headaches, dizziness, shortness of breath and vomiting and an increase in respiratory diseases among local residents; manure leakage from lagoons and sprayfield run-offs tend to contaminate waterways and local drinking water with pathogens and increased levels of nitrates (Cole et al., 2000; Donham et al., 2007; Hodne, 2004). The quality of life of rural communities tends to decline as residents become trapped in their houses – unable to open windows or go outside; property values in the vicinity of such farms tend to decline dramatically and selling homes becomes practically impossible; the development of large hog production facilities also tends to drive small hog farmers out of business and suppresses the development of alternative economic activities in rural health care and social service provision, crafts and tourism, and ecological farming (Kilpatrick, 2001; Palmquist et al., 1997).

Because of these large-scale environmental and social externalities, the development and operation of mass industrial livestock production facilities also tends to generate significant local discontent and mobilization. In this respect perhaps the most studied and best known are the pitched battles in rural America that in the last two decades were waged by local groups with other sectors such as environmentalists against hog corporations (Johnsen, 2003; Stull and Broadway, 2004; Stull et al., 1995; Thu and Durrenberger, 1998; Williams, 2006). Although the regulations and restrictions that anti-factory farm campaigns have produced vary significantly across locales and states, by the late 1990s citizen opposition to corporate hog production in the US was able either to put limits on, or stop the expansion of hog CAFOs (Haley et al., 1998; Ladd and Edwards, 2002).

Not unlike the situation in more developed countries, soon after the relocation of transnational industrial livestock production facilities to Eastern Europe, reports from the region began to appear indicating a rising (although varying in strength and scope) anti-corporate discontent and mobilization of local communities, environmentalists, and other civic groups. Anti-corporate hog farming sentiments were strongest and best organized in Poland, where Andrzej Lepper, a leader of a militant organization of Polish small farmers in coalition with the US-based environmental advocacy group Animal Welfare Institute was able to temporarily block the development of industrial farms by Smithfield (Juska and Edwards, 2005; Ottaway, 2000). Environmental groups, although relatively small, became actively involved in anti-corporate hog campaigns in North Eastern Poland. Recently, villagers in Romania in alliance with environmentalists began organizing in opposition to Smithfield's plans to build massive new hog farms in the Timisoara region (Dince, 2008).

Despite the growing number of reports on rising rural discontent and resistance to factory farming, very few studies exist analyzing the dynamics of anti-corporate livestock campaigns in Eastern Europe. This paper analyzes almost a decade-long and relatively successful grass-roots' campaign to limit the expansion of the

Danish-owned Saerimner industrial hog producer in Lithuania. In 1998 three hog farmers from Denmark used their own capital as well as loans from the European Development and Lithuanian banks to establish an industrial hog corporation – Saerimner. The Danes arrived in Lithuania with plans to buy decrepit Soviet-era hog farms, re-fit, modernize and significantly expand their production capacity suggesting that “Lithuania could easily produce 10 million hogs for export to other countries” (Povilaityte, 2006). However, by late 2008 Saerimner's leadership was forced to scale down its plans for expansion: the company became embroiled in half a dozen lawsuits, was facing protests from rural and environmental groups, growing negative publicity, and legal restrictions on the size of hog farms. Instead Saerimner began exploring opportunities for relocation to Latvia and the Russian Federation, where, its leadership claimed, a more pro-business environment prevails.

Existing anti-factory farm mobilization studies tend to draw on two overlapping areas of study. The first is political ecology, and especially those studies that examine the displacement of ecological hazards onto communities with less control capacity as well as the export of toxic waste and ecologically-hazardous production industries from the global North to the global South (Africa, Latin America, and South Asia) (Bullard, 2000; Faber, 2008; Girdner and Smith, 2002; Moyers, 1990; Pellow, 2007).

With the collapse of state socialism and EU expansion to the East there was also an increasing interest in examining the environmental impacts of both Western aid and the outsourcing and relocation of Western corporations to more permissive investment locations in poorer East European countries (Schwartz, 1999). In this respect, the relocation of corporate hog farms from core European countries to the East European periphery can be interpreted as a case of a broader trend of displacement of ecological hazards from West to East, which is revealing itself in a range of environmental inequalities or what Hungarian environmentalists have called Western “eco-colonialism” in the region (Harper, 2006, pp. 97–122).

The second area of studies has as its focus an analysis of social movements that arise to contest and resist the environmental inequality associated with the globalization of market economies. These vary from ethnographic studies of local and national campaigns to analyses of transnational social movement organizations and the transnational movement of networks (Brandy and Smith, 2005; Tarrow, 2005). Put simply, the political ecology approach focuses on an analysis of factors contributing to the displacement of ecological crisis (including the export of ecologically-hazardous industries such as factory farming) from the global North to underdeveloped regions as well as an examination of the disproportionate social and environmental impacts that the global restructuring of capitalism has on the poorest and most vulnerable communities. In comparison, the social movement perspective analyzes grass-root grievances and responses to toxic dumping and other forms of ecological appropriation as well as how social movement organizations are established and how and with what degree of success and/or effectiveness they engage in environmental justice campaigns.

For the purposes of this paper, political ecology studies, can, in turn, be differentiated according to assumptions they make about the relationship between modernity, environments, and inequalities. Adherents of ecological modernization believe in the positive role of modernity in transforming social and natural worlds and opening up possibilities for mediating and resolving the current ecological crisis by increasingly incorporating ecological criteria into the design, performance and evaluation of production processes (Andersen and Massa, 2000; Mol, 2001). Standing in opposition to the optimism of ecological modernization in regard to modernity's capacity to repair its pattern of institutionalized destruction of nature are “the treadmill of production” (Gould et al., 2008; Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994) and “the risk society” (Beck,

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