
Interview: Fortunato Tirelli

U.S.-European trade war must be prevented, say Italian cattlemen

The following is an exclusive interview with Fortunato Tirelli, general secretary of the Associazione Italiana Allevatori (Italian Cattle Farmers Association) in Rome, which includes all cattle breeders associations nationwide. Fortunato Tirelli has a regular column on agriculture in the Italian daily La Stampa, and attended the Schiller Institute international conference on agricultural policy on Dec. 6 and 7, where he spoke on the Italian situation. EIR correspondent Liliana Celani interviewed him after the conference in Obernburg, West Germany.

EIR: Speaking at the international conference of the Schiller Institute in Obernburg you emphasized how Italy was forced by the European Community to slaughter 100,000 dairy cows in order to respect EC quotas, despite the fact that Italy has to import 40% of its meat consumption. How does such an absurdity reconcile with the thesis of "overproduction"?

Tirelli: Surpluses and deficits are two antithetical values, even if they do coexist inside the EC. The national plan to slaughter 100,000 cows was opposed by the Italian producers because for them it is unacceptable to reduce livestock production since, to cover the domestic demand, Italy has to import meat and milk for 10,000 million liras each year, corresponding to 40% of its consumption. More comforting were the conclusions of the recent EC agricultural summit, which acknowledged that Italy is a "deficit" country. The demand that Italy slaughter 900,000 more cows, however, was a bitter pill.

The measure will have no lasting effectiveness, by destroying those technical, technological, and genetic improvements which made it possible for the producers to increase their unit production, but also because the EC did not decide to stop importing the products in which Europe has a surplus. The EC silence on imitation production, on the fraud of reconstituted milk powders, which cause the expensive European surpluses, is not reassuring for the future.

EIR: In which way did these measures influence meat consumption in Italy, and are there other causes for the collapse in meat consumption which you indicated in *La Stampa*?

Tirelli: The collapse in consumption relates to beef, while there was a tendency to increase consumption of dairy products. The investigation into meat consumption by Eurisko indicated that one of the reasons was concerns about health. In other words, the cause was not the price, which has been stable for many years, or dietary choices, but health considerations. Some people have insinuated to consumers the suspicion that red meat consumption may lead to arteriosclerosis or that cattle breeders use substances which leave toxic residues in the meat which can provoke cancer.

EIR: How is the Associazione Italiana Allevatori (AIA) moving to relaunch meat production and consumption?

Tirelli: AIA is supporting those cattle breeders who are more sensitive to the needs of consumers, encouraging the creation of voluntary consortia among meat producers, with the aim of putting on the market "clean" meats, which means safe meats. Through such consortia, cattle designated for breeding are registered and marked, undergo a controlled feeding process, and receive from the veterinarian a certificate of their quality. This certificate accompanies the animal from the barn to the butcher shop, where the consumer can check where the meat comes from, and be reassured that it was not fed with substances which have a dubious effect on health.

In order to have the maximum effect from this initiative, promotional campaigns will be launched through mass media, conferences, panel discussions, promotional sales, and pamphlets to distribute, which put forward again the nutritional value of meat, and the importance of meat proteins for sustaining young people.

EIR: Which national and international measures do you think are necessary to end the present farm crisis?

Tirelli: Nationally, the most important measure is of a political character. The importance of the "primary" sector has to be reestablished, which today has nothing "primary" about it, since it has been surpassed by the secondary and tertiary sectors in number of employees, and also for the reduced attention it is getting.

We have to make sure that agriculture is not considered only a reserve, or that its role is thought important only for environmental and ecological reasons. Farm producers are convinced that by developing agriculture, and therefore agricultural production, they contribute concretely to upgrading the environment and safeguarding the ecological balance. We have to avoid having this order turned upside down, putting agriculture after the environment and ecology. This must be said to the public and to the "greenies," who often demonstrate that they do not know agriculture and its needs, by imposing limitations which are unacceptable for farmers or cattle breeders.

Sure, certain dangers derive from the uncontrolled use of pesticides or fertilizers, but the real ones to blame are not farmers, but the people who produce and sell these products without due experimentation.

EIR: At the last conference of Coldiretti, the biggest Italian farmers association, its president, Lobianco, proposed for Italy an anti-trust law like the one existing in Great Britain to prevent any power concentration in the hands of cartels. Do you think that an anti-trust law would help to solve the situation? What role do the big cartels in Italy, such as Ferruzzi, play in cattle breeding and food distribution?

Tirelli: Lobianco did take the lid off the pot, emphasizing how professional effort, and technical and genetic development, no longer assure a decent income to producers, because the effective advantages have gone from the production phase, to the processing and commercialization phase, because of cultural and organizing problems. The agricultural industry increased the problem by filling this gap with its presence, and risking the marginalization of agriculture, with an unacceptable division of labor.

The agricultural world showed that it understood this problem, and will hopefully find the men and the means to change this situation, by bringing about a significant and effective presence.

EIR: How do you judge the trade situation between Italy and Latin America? Are there potential markets there which Italy can develop?

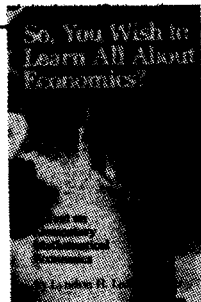
Tirelli: Trade relations between Italy and Latin America have never reached a consistent level. The creation of the European Community had as an obvious consequence the abandoning of traditional markets in favor of European markets. Despite this, exports to Latin America were maintained, particularly exports of semen and reproducers of special beef cattle breeds, such as the chianina breed or the romagnola

breed, which were used in Argentina and Brazil as cross-breeds, considered useful to produce finer-grained meat, which is more appreciated by consumers.

EIR: There is a lot of talk these days about a trade war between the United States and Europe in the agricultural market. Do you think such a trade war is justified, and how could it be avoided?

Tirelli: I think that a U.S.A.-EC "war" is something we should avoid, and the declarations of war which have been made already are not justified, and have no logic, since there is only one market, the world market. Trying to take over a market by developing artificial competition means paying out enormous compensations to farmers without any guarantee of continuity. It would be better to face the situation together and organize production, avoiding having the U.S.A. (grain) and the EC (soya-growing) bleed each other to sustain products which are abundant on the market. We always stated that autarchy does not pay off, and it would be absurd to make mistakes, which producers would pay for.

We should all sit down around a table, in a spirit of open cooperation, and find realistic solutions in order to use the so-called "surpluses" by fighting the anachronism of their destruction and the quota policy, and putting an end to the reduction of production.



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