

Are we quitting subsidies as well, after Paris?

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History was made at the recent Climate Summit in Paris. In the words of the Dutch State Secretary for the Environment, this is something that comes to known as "green history". Members of the delegations fell into each other's arms, tears in their eyes, followed by an ovation lasting several minutes. It was great to see the effect that news as good as this has on people. The most important aspect of this highly ambitious and binding agreement is that everyone was in agreement with it. And that in itself, is a step forward.

But does this mean that things are actually about to change?

This spring, the IMF calculated that energy produced using fossil fuels receives annual subsidies to the tune of 5300 billion US dollars (before and after tax subsidies*). Does this mean that we will now stop providing subsidies or capped subsidies for energy produced using fossil fuels?

The European Union spends 40% of its budget subsidizing agriculture. This equates to over one billion euros a day and also leads to massive production surpluses, which are then dumped on markets including this in North Africa. A cost of a Spanish tomato is then only one-third the price of locally-grown products. This means that a local African farmer is unable to feed his family and then seeks his fortune in Europe. So will we therefore be stop providing agricultural subsidies?

To feed our livestock, we import soya from Brazil. That soya is grown on land that was previously rainforest and was cleared by burning. Not exactly the best type of soil in which to grow soya, but it's so marvellously cheap! Nowadays, we are paying subsidies to farmers in Europe to leave their land fallow. Will these types of subsidies cease too?

India is the world's second largest producer of wheat. And yet over 200 million people in India are going hungry. The wheat grown in India is exported to Europe. In Vienna, the quantity of bread thrown away each day would be large enough to feed all of the people in Graz, Austria's second city. Each year, we throw away around 350 billion euros' worth of food. Are we going to take action to prevent such waste?

A pork cutlet for one euro. How many pigs per square meter need to be kept in order to achieve a cost price as low as that? And will we finally say goodbye to shops offering cheaply priced meat?

Probably not. Nothing will change for as long as we continue to perpetuate a system that ultimately helps maximise the profit of the 500 largest multinationals. After all, many of those multinationals have absolutely no interest in making the world a better place. The bizarre thing is that you then realize that those multinationals, from sectors such as the oil, weapons, agricultural and pharmaceuticals industries are providing a large proportion of the finance behind the election campaigns of the presidential candidates in the United States of America to the tune of billions of dollars and that as sponsors, they will be seeking to get something back for their money! And so nothing will change ...

Isn't that a nice thought, just before you tuck in to your Christmas dinner?

Fortunately, however, there is also some good news. Businesses are now gradually realizing that doing nothing is not an option. "Taking no action will probably be more costly than actually taking measures!" "Ultimately, if you are a company and you have to make the switch, it is actually going to cost you more if you don't do it". Not in order to make the world a better place, but for reasons of simple business economics. Something is finally about to happen!

We are increasingly realizing that it is simply untrue that by 2050, there will be too little food left in the world to feed its entire population. As things stand today, we already have sufficient agricultural and horticultural land on this earth to feed a global population numbering 12 billion

people. Especially if the right cultivation methods are used the world over and we were to select the right crops. And if we stopped eating meat, there would even be enough food for 40 billion people!

I wish you a happy holiday season, with lots of tasty and healthy fresh vegetables!

Meiny Prins

*Source: www.duurzaamnieuws.nl/over-echte-overbodige-en-verkeerde-subsidies-op-fossiele-energie/