

'Danish farmers' hopes of conquering the Common Market' from Le Monde

Caption: On 26 January 1971, in its coverage of negotiations on Denmark's accession to the European common market, French daily newspaper Le Monde paints a detailed picture of Danish agriculture.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. FAUVET, Jacques. 26.01.1971, n° 8 098; 28e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Les paysans danois espèrent conquérir le Marché commun", auteur:Olsen, Camille , p. 17.

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Danish farmers' hopes of conquering the Common Market

From our own correspondent

Copenhagen. — The French Cabinet reshuffle will mean that the official visit to Copenhagen by Jacques Duhamel, in his capacity as Minister for Agriculture, planned for mid-January will have to be cancelled. It now seems highly unlikely that his successor will be able to visit Copenhagen in the immediate future.

This indefinite postponement of the visit has disappointed Danish politicians and economists who had hoped that the French Minister's presence would help resolve some of the agricultural problems connected with Denmark's proposed entry into the Common Market. These problems are more complex than might appear at first glance. It is, above all, Denmark's farmers — three-quarters of whose production is exported — who have been the most fervent supporters of their country's signing the Treaty of Rome.

They proffer a series of arguments to justify their choice. 'As soon as we join the EEC', claims their spokesman, 'our wholesale prices, which have up to now been considerably lower than those of the Six, will rise to match those of our partners, which will mean that we earn an additional three thousand million crowns annually (some 2.25 thousand million francs). That sum more or less corresponds to our balance of payments deficit. So, by joining the Common Market, Denmark will be able to balance its payments. And Danish taxpayers will no longer have to provide the two thousand million crowns (1.5 thousand million francs) that the State spends on agricultural subsidies.'

Keeping British markets

Moreover, the United Kingdom is the Danish farmers' main customer, taking almost 42 % of their exports. If the UK and Denmark join the Common Market at the same time, it will, so Denmark's farmers hope, be possible to 'keep and consolidate traditional markets'. At the same time, cattle and poultry breeders hope to win back another equally established customer in the form of the Federal Republic of Germany, where demand for Danish meat and eggs has recently begun to fall steadily. Moreover, Danish farmers are sufficiently convinced of the superior quality of their products that they hope to conquer part of the EEC's markets, which have hitherto been closed to them, without any difficulty.

All of those arguments are logical in their own way. However, since Brussels and Copenhagen began negotiations, experts in various disciplines have begun to cast doubt on them.

The liveliest debate centres on the famous three thousand million crowns profit. Some deduct from this princely sum the total contributions payable to the structural fund of the European Communities, the European Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF). A former Social Democrat Foreign Minister has published calculations that the farming community would be lucky to make a profit of 500 million crowns (some 370 million francs) in the process. The opponents of Common Market membership have been arguing since then that such a small profit is not worthwhile, especially given the considerable legal, ethical and cultural commitments that it would entail.

And are Denmark's producers not being a little too optimistic in supposing that, within an enlarged Community, they would remain the favoured suppliers of Britain's housewives? This sort of semi-monopoly, which has been built up over a century, results from a combination of circumstances that is likely to disappear soon. Bacon production, in particular, is a field in which Danish producers have gained an undeniable edge. Half of all British families eat Danish products for breakfast every day.

This is not something that has happened by accident. Producers in Jutland have spent years developing, through scientific cross-breeding, a 'lean-meat pig', with flat flanks and three or four more pairs of ribs than the ordinary round-bellied pig. The resulting meat is exported to the United Kingdom, where it meets with consumer acclaim. The secret of the new pig's pedigree is closely guarded, and the export of breeding stock is prohibited in law. Yet it goes without saying that it will become impossible to maintain that exclusivity as soon as the Danish Government initials the Treaty of Rome.

Danish Brie and Port Salut

And will Danish dairies be able to continue selling cheeses under the name of ‘Danish Camembert’, ‘Danish Brie’ or ‘Danish Port Salut’? Despite numerous complaints from France, they have persisted in this practice. But the Common Market countries would not allow them the same freedom in labelling.

There is also a danger that the Danes are over-optimistic as regards their chances of penetrating the markets of the Six. There is no doubt that their farms are models of order and cleanliness and that their produce meets the highest health standards. Yet, while their somewhat bland flavour and their texture are popular with Swedish, Norwegian and British housewives, they do not really meet the demands of the southern palate. To give just one example, the bright red, tasty-looking Danish sausages, which contain flour or other ingredients, have a lower meat content than Frankfurters or Strasbourg sausages.

‘They’ do not eat butter

In sum, Danish farmers’ leaders would do well to study the traditional products and tastes of other European countries. That would help them to avoid making comments of the kind recently heard from their President. Following a trip to France, he spoke enthusiastically of the capacity for Danish dairies to sell their produce in Provence and Languedoc where, he said, ‘people have not yet discovered real butter’.

But these are essentially just the finer points. There are other, more important areas in which Danish producers themselves admit that their knowledge of European specialities is very limited. They have become aware that the farmers of the Six are not entirely happy about the way ‘Green Europe’ is developing. They also know that some of their products will not survive. Horticulture, for example, is one successful Danish industry that will undoubtedly be seen off by the competition from the warmer climes of France and Italy.

Finally — and this is perhaps what alarms Danish farmers the most — they are afraid that their German counterparts, with more money to spend, may slowly buy up the land that has for generations been owned, cultivated and defended by their ancestors ...

Camille Olsen