

Health and food safety: same stakes, same challenges. The risk of a major food crisis as a consequence of Covid-19? - 2020.05.04  
Jacques Brulhet and Dr Papa Abdoulaye Seck, French Academy of Agriculture

*Covid-19 has caused a global health crisis unprecedented in its rapid spread and evolution. Jacques Brulhet, Vice-President of the French Academy of Agriculture<sup>1</sup>, and Papa Abdoulaye Seck, former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Equipment of Senegal and member of the French Academy of Agriculture, fear that this health crisis could lead to an even more serious food and humanitarian crisis, particularly for the countries of the South, and question the "survival" of the globalization of agricultural markets. They also express concern that interdependence will be sacrificed, and the lack of solidarity between countries will become the norm.*



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### Why?

Containment measures are causing a sudden halt to most economic activities and a global recession. It will be the poorest and most fragile populations who will have the most difficulty in coping with the crisis, especially in the vital function of feeding themselves.

In addition, major disruptions in agri-food supply chains, combined with the limitation of international trade, will have serious consequences for a large number of countries:

- Some agricultural production for export will suffer sharp declines, leading to a **loss of income for producers** in both Europe and Africa.

- Conversely, food imports will be severely disrupted (especially in countries that no longer export to preserve their resources), with obvious risks of undersupply of domestic markets in importing countries and **possible hunger revolts**, like the 2008 agricultural crisis in some capitals.

It is in the light of this alarming prospect that we propose a proactive approach, based on our experiences of situations in the South, in Africa, and in the North, in France.

<sup>1</sup> Available on : <https://www.academie-agriculture.fr/academie/presentation/english-presentation>

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## What are our proposals?

### Seeking self-sufficiency for strategic products

Africa is still far too much of an importing continent to provide the volumes of cereals and animal proteins needed to feed its population. Numerous development programmes have made it possible, just about everywhere, to increase food production, but we must give new scope and greater ambition to projects that make it possible to increase local production of wheat, rice, corn, millet, fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, etc., while respecting the imperatives of sustainable development.

In Europe, some productions are still too dependent on the outside world, above-ground breeding being a good example. Why shouldn't Europe decide to have a "Common Food Policy" instead of the CAP (Common Agriculture Policy), which is increasingly criticized?



### TOWARDS A COMMON FOOD POLICY FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

THE POLICY REFORM AND REALIGNMENT THAT IS REQUIRED TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN EUROPE



In Africa, the size of the countries, the richness of the ecosystems and the existing weak financial capacities seem to us to militate in favour of a policy of continental food self-sufficiency, based on the exploitation of complementarities.

Obviously, in this case, ways and means would have to be found to significantly reduce transaction costs in order to promote product mobility and fair prices.

### Developing targeted development programs

The huge budgets already announced to limit the economic effects of the Covid-19 crisis would have been much more useful and better used to finance preventive actions or development programmes.

In the field of epidemiological risk management, it would have been inexpensive to have provided for the stocks of equipment needed for the rapid and effective management of this type of pandemic.

***"Similarly, the budgets allocated by States or international organizations to develop agriculture now seem derisory compared to the hundreds of billions of euros proposed to bail out the world economy."***

Solutions can be put in place. The notion of a Territorial Agricultural System, proposed by other academic colleagues, is one such solution; it is, moreover, entirely applicable in African and European agriculture. Agro-ecology is often presented as an interesting and fertile alternative to satisfy our needs and allow future generations to do the same.

### Restoring the attractiveness of agricultural professions

In Africa, but also in Europe, it will be necessary to restore the attractiveness of the agricultural, food-processing and rural world professions that they have lost. This is of prime importance to help the younger generations who have a bad image of agricultural professions.

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It is abnormal that on our two continents the peasants are globally discredited. We give them negative images of them, when we do not accuse them of being poisoners and polluters.

In the African context, there is an urgent need to transform job seekers into project leaders and to focus on technological innovation. This objective calls for major reforms, especially in education, which must be a framework preparing for working life rather than a system tending towards the training of future employees.

Moreover, an African agriculture that is free of complexes and emancipated implies positive discrimination for young people, women and disabled people, particularly with regard to subsidies for factors of production and access to land.



*Banking on Africa's youth to build sustainable agriculture*

### Strengthening scientific and technical research

This health crisis reminds us of the importance of expertise and research work, but it also shows the limits of science faced with the hazards of nature.

On this point, it seems essential to considerably strengthen exchanges and shared research work between Europe and Africa. On these two continents, which are very close to each other, we

have an invaluable natural and domestic, plant and animal heritage. To ensure the development of sustainable agriculture, the conservation of this genetic richness is a major asset.

***"Scientific research must be more downstream-driven, interdisciplinary, participatory and forward-looking."***

In other words, there must be a quality search involving all users.

Furthermore, humanity must refuse to be involved in emergency management. To do so, it must arm research, financially and morally, instead of urgently calling on it every time it is confronted with serious and unexpected problems.

### Ensuring precautionary food storage

The first weeks of the Covid-19 crisis showed how important it is to have the necessary equipment and products available everywhere.

Our world must learn to avoid food waste, reduce post-harvest losses and build up large safety stocks to cope with uncertainty.



'War for masks' since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis

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We must manage today with tomorrow in mind: not only must human life be preserved, but it must be better.

In less than 12 years, our world has been surprised by the economic and financial crisis of 2008 and then by the coronavirus in 2020.

Once this Covid-19 is defeated, what will be the next challenge for our humanity? In any case, **the**

**food issue must, imperatively and without delay, be better taken care of.**

To this end, if tomorrow must be better than today, there must be **generational agricultural solidarity** in each country and, at world level, a consensual **code of good agricultural conduct**, which we would like to see put in place. This is an essential prerequisite for ensuring the advent of sustainable, productive and fair food systems.