

The 21st-century land grab

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- 1 Until the mid-20th century, many European countries grew rich on the resources of their colonies. Now, countries including China, Kuwait and Sweden are snapping up vast tracts of agricultural land in poorer nations, especially in Africa, to grow biofuels and food for themselves.
- 2 The land grabs have sparked accusations of neocolonialism and fears that the practice could worsen poverty. Yet some organisations think this could be a chance for poor countries to trade land and labour for the technology and investment vital for developing their own food and energy production.
- 3 As population growth and dwindling oil supplies make farmland the 14 that oilfields are now, the hunger for land looks set to increase. China has 20 per cent of the world's people and only 9 per cent of the farmland, and that is dwindling. According to a detailed analysis by the NGO Grain, Chinese companies and the government have since 2007 leased or purchased 2 million hectares of foreign farmland.
- 4 Financial firms have been quick to get in on the act too, and are moving their money from food to the land that produces it. The British hedge fund manager Dexion Capital, for instance, plans to invest

\$270 million in 1.2 million hectares in Australia, Russia and South America.

- 5 The question is whether incoming technology and investment can be harnessed to increase food production for the poorer countries themselves. Although the global financial crisis has halted the rise in food prices, this week International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) warned that the slowdown will also cut investment in farming, which will raise food prices by up to 27 per cent by 2020.
- 6 All foreign deals so far pledge to turn "unused" or "underutilised" land into farmland to yield food. This might sound good on paper, but the reality is not so clear-cut.
- 7 First, is the land really unused? Many analysts agree that most land that can be farmed is already in use, but some disagree. "Indeed Africa has lots", says Peter Hartmann, head of the non-profit International Institute for Tropical Agriculture in Ibadan, Nigeria. He says for every hectare of African farmland there are around 2.5 hectares of "equivalent rainfed arable land" unused for want of technology or capital. 17 seemingly unoccupied land is probably used for at least part of the year by someone, says Michael Taylor of the International Land Coalition (ILC), which groups 65 agencies, from local farm groups to the World Bank, concerned with land access.

- Nomadic herders, rarely a priority for governments, are being dispossessed by bioethanol developments in Kenya, he says, and they also depend on the “unused” land that Madagascar offered Daewoo. Ethiopia’s communal lands, such as grazing areas, are being leased to private investors, says anthropologist Marco Bassi of the University of Oxford. “This will destroy shifting cultivators and pastoralists.”
- 8 In many cases, land is used by such people because its soil or water is unsuitable for intensive cultivation. The danger, then, is that foreign leaseholders might extract what they can from these areas, then leave once soil and water resources have been exhausted.
- 9 Some people see upsides, though. “I could imagine such land use benefiting people,” says Hartmann. Foreign investors build roads, storage and port facilities that local farmers can also use to sell crops – a bottleneck in much of African agriculture.
- 10 “Such investments are not to be generally condemned,” says von Braun, head of the IFPRI in Washington DC. Leaseholders might press for better tax situations for farmers, while host countries could insist on local hiring. Some investors are even offering schools and healthcare facilities, although in the past such promises have notoriously not been kept.
- 11 The best option would be for foreign firms to contract local small farmers to grow crops for them, says Paul Mathieu of the FAO. “Investors could say, if you use this seed and follow our advice we promise to buy the crop. That could be a win-win situation.” German company Flora Eco Power produces biodiesel in Ethiopia in this way.
- 12 “These deals could provide more security and predictability for poor farmers than just selling crops on open markets,” agrees Duncan Green of Oxfam.
- 13 However, existing arrangements of this kind are generally “between partners with vastly unequal power”, says Green, and they offer few guarantees for locals. Hartmann and von Braun say **19** is needed, and that it must include provisions for local producers, property rights, sustainable management and transparent rules. The FAO is now trying to write such guidelines, says Mathieu.
- 14 They will be no good if no one uses them, though, and so far there is little sign that investors are keen to work with locals. Many Chinese projects, for example, bring in farmers from China. If the foreign-owned farms simply take the crops and run, offering nothing to local people, it could be a recipe – as Europe’s colonialists discovered – for trouble. ●

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Tekst 5 The 21st-century land grab

- 1p 12 Which of the following could conclude paragraph 1?
A History may be repeating itself.
B Modern agriculture may now reap what it has sown.
C So many countries, so many customs.
D There is no smoke without fire, however.
- 1p 13 Naar welke feitelijke situatie verwijst “this” in alinea 2?
- 1p 14 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 3?
A strategic resource
B unfortunate investment
C Utopia
- 1p 15 How does paragraph 4 connect to the phenomenon described in paragraph 3?
A It elaborates on the parties involved.
B It explains its nature.
C It shows how profitable it has already become.
- 1p 16 What becomes clear from paragraph 5?
A It is desirable that food is produced as cheaply as possible.
B Poor countries lack the expertise to modernise agriculture.
C Poor countries need help to step up their food production.
- 1p 17 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 7?
A And
B But
C For
- 2p 18 Geef van elk van de volgende beweringen aan of deze wel of niet overeenkomt met de inhoud van de alinea’s 9 tot en met 12.
1 Foreign investors might employ local people.
2 Foreign investors might negotiate tax relief for local people.
3 Local people might become business partners of foreign investors.
4 Local people might find it harder to sell their own crops.
Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door “wel” of “niet”.
- 1p 19 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 13?
A a code of conduct
B a food program
C an economic analysis
D a pragmatic vision

“so far there is little sign that investors are keen to work with locals”
(paragraph 14)

- 1p 20 Which of the following is in contrast with this statement?
- A “Nomadic herders, ... offered Daewoo.” (paragraph 7)
 - B “Foreign investors ... African agriculture.” (paragraph 9)
 - C “Leaseholders might ... local hiring.” (paragraph 10)
 - D “German company ... this way.” (paragraph 11)

Bronvermelding

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