

## Haiti Doesn't Need Our Handouts

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to dump 500 metric tons (over 1 million pounds) of American peanuts into the country of Haiti. These peanuts have been dry roasted and packaged with the intent of feeding 140,000 malnourished Haitian school children.

We, a group of six students from Eastern Michigan University, traveled around the country of Haiti interviewing various groups and individuals who could potentially be impacted by the peanut dump. Among those interviewed were peasant farmers, peanut producers, manufacturers, and workers. Some interviews were also done with those not directly involved in the peanut industry. These other interviews were with representatives of organizations that deal with health, poverty, food security, and food sovereignty. They discussed the consequences of the peanut dump as well. These interviews revealed that the peanut dump will do greater harm than good for Haiti.

*Dèyè mòn gen mòn - Haitian proverb  
Beyond mountains there are mountains*

At first glance, Haiti may appear to be a country in need of US interventions, such as the dumping of peanuts. Upon further investigation one will find that this peanut dumping represents yet another intervention in a long line of interventions that have adverse long-term consequences for Haiti. Over the past 100 years, Haiti has been impacted by numerous American interventions, which have prohibited the country's economic growth and freedom. Among these impositions have been the Creole pig extermination, the rice dump, and now the pending peanut dump.

In the early 1980s, after an outbreak of the African Swine Fever in the Dominican Republic, USAID spearheaded an extermination campaign of the Haitian Creole pigs. USAID feared that the fever would spread to Haiti and then the United States, potentially destroying the American pork industry. Haitians used the Haitian Creole pig in various ways to pay for schooling, health care, and marriages, among other things. Following the extermination of the Haitian Creole pigs, school enrollment fell in the countryside. In response to the extermination of native pigs Haitians were forced to find other means of income. Many who lost their main source of income turned to making and selling charcoal. This exacerbated deforestation in the country, which causes soil erosion, stripping the soil of its nutrients, making the process of growing vegetation in the future difficult. Not only can deforestation cause soil erosion, but mudslides can occur, which have the potential to wipe out entire communities.

After the extermination of Haitian Creole pigs came the devastation of US rice subsidies which had, and continue to have, dire consequences. In the 1990s US rice flooded the Haitian market, undercutting the price of Haitian rice, thereby driving down Haitian rice production due to the inability to compete with US production and prices. Low tariffs on rice imported into Haiti has made it difficult for local Haitian farmers to compete as well.

This is especially damaging as aside from their agricultural work, these farmers have limited economic opportunities. Rice from the United States, known as “Miami rice,” now accounts for 90% of rice consumed in Haiti. Bill Clinton, himself, later apologized for the effects of the rice on the Haitian economy.

The history of US occupation, policies, and subsidies in Haiti has created an environment of economic dependency. In our travels we met with Chavannes Jean Baptiste, founder of Mouvman Peyizan Papay (MPP), an organization compiled of 60,000 peasant farmers. Baptiste explained, “anything subsidized will be sold at a price lower than local prices, and crush those businesses, and the US can come in and raise prices for their products again.” The same has been said of USDAs plan to dump peanuts in Haiti, the parallels are obvious to those that are informed of the history. Just like Haitian Creole pigs, Haitian peanuts are a major source of revenue for Haitian farmers, producers, manufacturers, and workers. Steve Werlin, the Co- Director of Chemen Lavi Miyò (CLM), a program for the ultra-poor through Fonkoze, Haiti’s largest microfinance institution, noted that once the peanuts are received they will be resold for money in the open market. Werlin said, “I can’t possibly imagine if they think they can regulate and control distribution once the peanuts hit the ground.”

Just as the Haitian Creole pigs were adapted specifically to their environment in Haiti, Haitian peanuts are perfect for the country’s climate. There are many varieties of peanuts adaptable to different climates, they are drought resistant, resistant to climate change, and have short growing seasons, meaning they can be harvested multiple times during the year.

Many have said that this peanut dump would be another poison in the country. Dr. Gardy Marius, founder of OSAPO- an organization that works with health, food security and community development, explained that as a result of the peanut dump, within a year, “the dumping will destroy the natural production. 40% of peanut producers will not be producing.”

Again, the purported intent of this dumping is to feed malnourished children in Haitian schools. However, the Center of Processing Transformation Agriculture of Duval (CETAD) revealed that some Haitian peanut farmers already have connections with their local schools. Peanuts from the US would only serve as competition, in effect blocking the contracts between the schools and local farmers. Women in the country sell peanut butter and kasava bread outside of schools everyday in efforts to earn enough money to feed their families and to send their children to school. MPP sells peanuts to the World Food Program (WFP), which feeds 3,000 Haitian school children daily. MPP’s Chavannes Jean Baptiste, revealed that he has been approached by the Ministry of Education, which hopes to mimic MPPs school lunch program on a national level, which would both provide more jobs for local peasant farmers and feed school children at the same time. The dumping of US peanuts would devastate this program’s national potential, as well as increase competition across all levels of the peanut industry; farmers, manufacturers, producers and workers. Furthermore, an interview

with Jean Josue, an agronomist at OSAPO, revealed that malnourished children in Haiti, the children most in need, are often in hiding rather than in schools; this underscores the illegitimacy of USDA's reasoning behind the peanut dump in Haiti.

Chavannes Jean Baptiste stressed the importance of food to a country. He explained that the subsidies destroy the traditions and food habits of the people and kill local agriculture production. Subsidies similar to the pending peanut subsidy, divide communities and encourage corruption because some people will receive the subsidies and some will not. This division creates conflict within communities. These subsidies promote food security through creating dependency on US food aid, a band-aid fix, rather than *food sovereignty*. Food sovereignty is the right of people to their own culture's food, through means that are sustainable and ecological, something that the US has prevented Haiti from achieving, through years of detrimental policy.

“One of the biggest things the US can do for [Haiti] is leave us alone,”  
—Dr. Gardy Marius

If the USDA intended to provide aid to Haiti without doing further harm, CETAD suggested that the USDA work with producers to organize and train them until they are up to par with American agricultural standards, as well as encourage supplementing peanut production in Haiti. They also noted that if they do decide to dump peanuts, that they should perform a survey to see how many peanuts the country needs. DieuGrande Jean Baptiste, the economic coordinator and agronomist at MPP, expressed that exporting and contracts with the United States would provide consistent work for peanut producers and merchants which would in turn boost the Haitian economy.

This issue reflects the long history of US intervention in Haiti, in which detrimental programs hinder the success and growth of a capable nation in the name of humanitarian aid. In relation to foreign aid, Chavannes Jean Baptiste stated, “it is used as a weapon to make poor countries bow down on their knees and submit to the rich.” Dr. Marius further expressed his opinion on the issue saying, the United States “has a history of caring for the ill, not the benefit of [Haiti]. They want you to feel that you are nothing”. It has become clear through our conversations with members of the Haitian community that the dumping would have catastrophic consequences for the country of Haiti. We strongly urge the USDA to reconsider their “donation.”

We invite those who need more information to read “An Open Letter to the USDA on Planned Peanut Shipment to Haiti” written by the Haitian Advocacy Working Group (HAWG), undersigned by 60 Haitian and US organizations.

**UPDATE:** After returning from our trip we began reaching out to USDA, WFP, and other organizations for more information on the current state of the peanut dumping. We

received a reply via email from WFP Regional Communications Officer Alejandro Chicheri, who provided their insight on the current situation. In part the email reads:

“It is important to note that the peanuts have not arrived and consequently [sic] have not been distributed as per today. If the contribution materializes, the peanuts will be distributed by WFP to targeted schools as a morning snack since many children arrive every morning without having eaten breakfast.

In coordination with the Government of Haiti, WFP aims to distribute this U.S. contribution to public schools in rural areas; the children receiving meals there, are among the most vulnerable in Haiti at this difficult time because of three years of severe drought exacerbated by El Niño . The families of these children would most likely not have the opportunity to purchase or consume peanuts unless they are provided to them in schools. WFP and its local partners will continuously monitor the situation to ensure this contribution is only used for the children’s snacks.”

Despite their assurance, we maintain that the peanut dump has the potential to become another harmful intervention on the part of US organizations, in line with the disastrous effects of the extermination of Haitian Creole pigs, and rice subsidies. We request greater transparency through this process, and an explanation of how WFP plans to monitor and control this situation once US peanuts hit Haiti. Going forward, we urge those who share our concerns to contact their representatives and express their opposition to US interventions in Haiti which further compromise the country’s self-sufficiency, economic independence, and food sovereignty. Instead we advocate for cooperative partnerships that work in the best interest of Haiti and her people.

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