

Ugandan dairy farmers should learn from Canadian counterparts

EDITOR: The current 'war' between Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau and US President Donald Trump that has since sucked in other powerful G7 leaders (UK, Italy, France, Japan, Germany) plus (Canada & US) was caused by milk.

Canadian dairy farmers just like their Ugandan counterparts are very influential in national politics.

As a result of the influence exerted on Canadian government by dairy farmers, the government put trade barriers to protect them against US dairy farmers.

Canada charges US a 270% tariff on US dairy products in order to protect its farmers. As a result, a Canadian farmer earns C\$0.79 per litre a US farmer gets C\$0.49 per litre of milk.

This is disturbing Trump. Dairy farmers from Wisconsin (US's equivalent of Kashaari of Uganda in

terms of milk production) are closing shop because of milk over production. Wisconsin dairy farmers and other US dairy farmers are putting Trump administration on pressure to negotiate better markets for their dairy products.

Ugandan dairy farmers like their Canadian counterparts, have considerable influence in national politics. The cattle corridor plus other milk producing villages have a number of policy makers.

The question is, why can't our political dairy farmers influence policy and stabilise the price of milk? Why should a litre of milk from Bwizibwera-Kashaari, Uganda compete favourably with a litre of milk from Githunguri-Kiambu, Kenya in Kyanja Supermarket? Why should we continue to allow in (milk from Kenya, apples from South Africa, maize from Brazil...) without

imposing serious tax to help us boost our tax base rather than taxing social media?

Unlike Canada, dairy farmers who translate their numbers and political influence beyond ballot boxes and influence government policies to work their way, Ugandan dairy farmers are meek. They lack the nerve to influence policy and have good policies that favour them.

Of course I am aware that Uganda has signed a number of bi-lateral and multilateral trade agreements, but there are still bright ways of gently traversing through the labyrinth. One way is to take Canada-US' example, where as both Canada and US have enough milk and they have agreements that allow milk products to cross the borders, while Canada chose to put a high tariff on US dairy products,

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it imports 10% of its dairy products from US, on the other hand, despite US having excess milk, it imports dairy products from Canada only 3% of dairy products from Canada despite having low tariffs.

The arrangement helps to balance the equation and prevent dumping of goods on either side of the border. This is the equation we need to balance with our trade partners.

It is not enough to allow free trade across borders, there must be calculations to know what we want and how tactfully to regulate what we don't want without causing diplomatic tension.

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