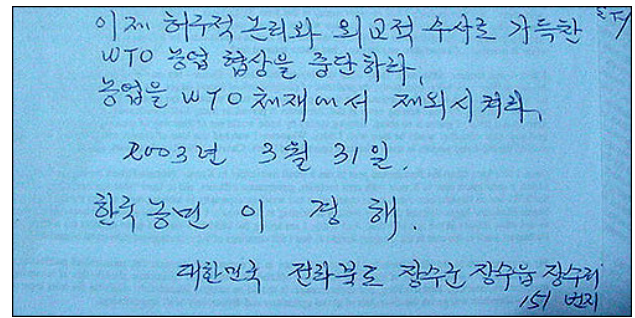


■ Lee's Protest Letter to WTO

Here is his protest letter presented to WTO in March, 2003 staging a hunger strike before WTO headquarters in Geneva.

(This letter is from the web of Korean Advanced Farmers Federation: www.kaff.or.kr and translated on 15th March 2003.)



"Say the Truth, and Exclude the Agriculture from WTO !"

I was born in a farm, and was a young farmer who developed a dairy farm with his hands on a harsh mountainous land after graduating agricultural high school and university in Korea. At the down valley, I also had small paddy land for rice farming that was transferred from my father. With other fellow farmers in the group, I have tried to contribute to my village, community and to my country in carrying my lovely occupation - farming. With such small hope and dream, we worked hard from dawn to moon rising, and was not lazy to learn the innovative technologies and managements. We had succeeded somehow to our goals, and re-invested from that success for the continuous growths. We had the pride, as young prospective farmers, in believing ourselves as the important role-takers of contributing to country's food security and the rural vitality. (What about now? My dairy farm was closed because of my debts, but a part of paddy land remains.)



However, after knowing the possible impacts of the UR Agreement, our innocent and small hearts were put into a pot of boiling fears. We couldn't sleep, and decided to come Geneva and met Mr. Arthur Dunkel, the former WTO Director General. To him, we talked earnestly but very carefully of our difficulties. Of course, our request was cordially rejected by diplomatic words. Our voices were so small and timid to breaking out the great walls in fronting us. At that moment suddenly, I felt in a flight of the imagination in that I was looking a mass of my fellow farmers who were in

the strike on the street. Unconsciously, my hand of holding a knife (a Swiss Army knife I think) was cutting my abdomen. Anyway, I had regretted this kind of irritating and uncontrolled action. However again for me, it is so unfortunate to watch the very same situation - untruthfulness of WTO talks which have closed totally in listening farmers sufferings and warnings. **What shall I do?**

Let me go back to the story about the situation in Korea. Our fears came into reality in the marketplace. We soon realized that our efforts could never meet the importing prices. At the same manner, we had to be aware that our farm size (1.3ha in average) is mere one-hundredth of the largely exporting countries. Imported products were flooding in the market everywhere, and we had to run from crops to crops in search of other niche markets. But almost always, we met the same friends who produced same crop with us.

It is true that Korean agricultural reform programs increased the productivity of individual

farms. However it is also fact that increased productivity simply added another volume to over-supplied market in which imported goods occupied the lowest price portion. Since then, we never be paid over our production costs. Sometime, price drop recorded as four-times of the normal trend in a sudden. **How would be your emotional reaction if your salary drops suddenly to a half without knowing clearly the reason?**



One part, those farmers who gave up earlier his farming went to urban slum. The others who had tried to escape from the vicious cycle had to meet bankruptcy with accumulated debts mostly. Of course, some fortunate peoples could come further but not all of them may go longer, I suspect. For me, I couldn't do anything but just looking around his vacant house of old and eroding. What I could do was to check sometimes his house with hoping him back. Once I run to a house where a farmer abandoned his life by drinking a toxic chemical because of his uncontrollable debts. I also could do nothing but hearing the howling of his wife. **If you were me, how you feel?**

Once, I became a Provincial (Jeollabuk-do) Congressman in representing farm sector. In there, I had many opportunities to talk with consumers unions. What I learned from them was that consumers want safe and good quality (mostly looking-good in fact) and not always welcome the imported cheap. For them, the major reason lies in that consumers price, especially of fresh one, are already cheap to their living cost. For example, consumers price of one bowl of cooked rice is same as a pack of chewing gum; and the price of 1.75 kilogram of tomato is same as one cup of coffee and so on. Therefore, they said that except restaurant-owners and food processors, most consumers wish to search for the safe one, in terms of many sources from - pesticides, dioxin, microbial agents, BSE, GMO etc.



All right ! We went back to our farm and put more time (by cutting our night sleeps) and cost for producing safe-safe one. But sorry to say that consumers could not separate the safe one unless packed distinctly and labeled with big-big characters. Beef has been the worst case simply because we can do labelling on meats. In the metro Seoul where about one-fourth of Korean population reside, new establishments are largely for the restaurant and fast-food chains, especially at crowded places. Consumers can seek, in fact, conveniences rather

than others. **Who shall keep our food safety?**

If you walk into Korea rural villages, we may firstly see many ruined structures- mostly livestock shelters and green (mostly glass) houses, which swallowed such big amount of money. If you get into some houses, you can easily meet old-aged peoples who suffer from illness in most cases. Rural amenities can be felt, at a glance, only in riding on your car in the road. In fact, good road systems of being paved widely pulls large apartments(a thousand people live in it usually), buildings and factories in Korea. Those lands paved now mostly were the paddies that constructed for the generations of thousand years and provided the daily lives - foods and materials in the past. Now in the contemporary society, the



environmental functions of paddies, ecologically and hydrologically are even more crucial. **Who shall keep our rural vitality, community traditions, amenities and environment?**

I don't have much time to talk the story about the farmers right on seeds and the issues on the WTOs Intellectual Property Agreement on Life Forms. But to say one regretful thing is that Korean sold the domestic seed companies of six majors to the multinationals in accepting the recommendation of IMF at the time of the financial crisis of 1998. **Who shall keep our genetic heritages?**

By the help of a farmers union, I had the chance to travel abroad to see how farmers outside are doing for their competitiveness or for survival at least. It was good to see that European Union farmers kept their prides in keeping their community settings, foods, traditional heritages and cultures. To see their strong feels in social responsibility, union-ship, and a high social supports including of the government, I was aware that they would not easily give up tilling their lands. So far they were efficient enough to manage such size with limited family labours. But without the supports, they may not continue farming otherwise going to tourism. Difficulties of small farmers were similar with us.

Farmer in U.S were looked as big and more calculating but looked more risky in other part. While they wanted exporting more, they worried about their possible bankruptcy always. I was wonder why they were not so happy with this big farms and good machines. Many of them told me that in the situation that price drooping has continued long, they just have earned their agricultural labours salary no matter the statistics keep saying ever-increasing export. Besides, stomachs of our business partners (grain dealers, agro-industries, processors) became bigger and bigger, they said. In conclusion, they told me that many farmers in U.S. shall meet bankruptcy soon, if there would no additional subsidies be avail because of their possible failures in paying the interests for the loan in increasing their size and inputs.

I had the interest to go Australia too not only because to answer the questions that I carried, but also for my personally imagination that I saw in the movie- the wild wild south. But unfortunately I had no more money at that time. Since Japan is in near distance, I had



been there from time to time, and confirmed the similar situation with us - same ecology, similar farming system and structure and farmers difficulties. Exception was very well systemized (but looked sophisticated for me) approaches by sensible work of civil servants.
Competition may be good, but whose interest for?

I believe that farmers situation of many other developing countries be similar - but may be from different sources of internal problems. However commonly, the problems of dumping-priced import surges, lacking government budgets, and too many populations be the background. For them, protection by tariff would be the practical solution. I have been so sorry for watching TVs and hearing news in that starvation is prevail in many Less Developed Countries although the international price of grains is so cheap. Earning money by trade would not of their way of securing food. But securing land and water resources would be their way, I think. Whenever I watched this kind of disaster unto human, I naturally recalled the big-fatted peoples in some urbanized countries of North. Charity ? **No! Let them work again!**

Once, I also have taken the Presidential post to run a small newspaper in Korea-Farmers-Fishers Newspaper. At that period, I spent much time to discuss with civil societies, government officials, and to know what was happening around the WTO and its negotiations. From those observation and watches, especially in learning some behind stories about the Seattle Ministers happening and the story about arm-twisting in the Doha's, I again saw the gloomy pictures coming unto us and other fellows in the rest of world. And today, I am seeing the children's numeric game again in the text of Mr. Harbinson, same as the case in the Uruguay Round to that I felt cheatings of big exporting-and-developed countries.

My warning goes to the all citizens that human beings are in an endangered situation that uncontrolled multinational corporations and a small number of big WTO Members officials are leading an undesirable globalisation of inhumane, environment-distorting, farmer-killing, and undemocratic. It should be stopped immediately otherwise the false logic of the neo-liberalism will perish the diversities of global agriculture and disastrously to all human beings.

I am saying definitely - **Uruguay Round was a fraudulent-gambling party of ambitious group of politicians who needed to throw away their head-aching problem to other countries, together with multinational corporations and some single-eyed scholarly persons.**

Say the truth now, and go back to the start to exclude agriculture from WTO.

- March 2003 at the WTO front gate - (translated/ 15 March 2003)

■ **Who is Lee Kyung Hae, Korean Farmer?**

- Born in Jangsu, Jeollabuk-do in 1947
- Graduated from Jeonju Agricultural High School and Seoul Industrial University
- Devoted his life to livestock and rice production by establishing "Seoul Farm" in 1974
- Inaugurated as the 2nd chairman of the National Succeeding Farmers and Fishers Association(predecessor of KAFF) in 1988
- Disembowelment trial to object to the Uruguay Round in Geneva, Switzerland, in November, 1990
- Underwent a one-month hunger strike in Geneva in early 2003
- Died in Cancun, Mexico, in September 11th 2003