BUSINESS NEWS LESSONS

Rich farmland, poor farmers / more crops, less healthy food

3. Understanding the article

a. Students answer the questions using information from the article. You could turn this into a ‘closed book’ task by asking students not to look at the article again but, instead, to simply discuss their answers with a partner and come up with as much information as possible between them, only looking at the article when they think they’ve forgotten something.

Key: (suggested)
1. commercial farming on a massive scale / mass farming / monoculture in which only one crop is grown for maximum profit rather than for health benefits
2. In order to farm this way, farmers need vast areas of land (without trees, rocks, etc), large amounts of fertilisers, fuel, cheap grain, and machinery and presumably lots of water too. All of these things, especially on this scale, have a negative environmental impact.
3. The crops are unvaried and mostly grain or soyabeans, which are used for cattle feed. Fresh fruit and vegetables for human consumption are not part of this type of farming. Hence, most of the food sold in supermarkets in the farmland areas is calorie-rich but nutritionally poor and does not contribute to a healthy diet.
4. High fuel costs, customers who are used to cheap food, higher-than-inflation price increases on herbicides and fertiliser, and having to rely on just a few trading giants and multinationals – who are able to dictate terms – for their grain.
5. Despite often being victims of corporate greed, poorer, white farming communities struggling to survive in a failing agricultural system feel disenchanted and are ready to vote for those they think will look after their particular needs.
6. A hundred or so years ago, during the Great Depression, farmers were encouraged to grow food stuffs that could provide a starving population with as many calories as possible. This style of farming carries negative health consequences.

The New Deal (a series of programmes under President Roosevelt’s government in the 1930s) encouraged farmers to grow large amounts of food stuffs not for starving people but for the increasing numbers moving to urban areas.
Under President Reagan, the industry was consolidated so that large players were able to control much of the market.

President Clinton passed the ‘Freedom to Farm’ act which removed restrictions on production, leading to over-production and dumping.

4. Business language

Key:
1. price gouging (idiomatic) / price spike
2. trading giants (idiomatic)
3. urban dwellers
4. fertile ground (idiomatic)
5. corporate greed
6. disenchanted population
7. empty promises (idiomatic)
8. labour force
9. agricultural sector
10. input costs
11. raw commodity
12. price gouging (idiomatic) / price spike

5. Business language

Key:
1. overfed yet undernourished
2. in the black
3. hedge and hoard
4. supply and demand
5. boom and bust

6. Discussion questions

a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

7. Wider business theme – food production

a. Divide the farming styles up among (pairs of) students so that all of them get researched. Set a time limit for the research and then bring the group back together for a class discussion and debate about farming and food production.