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Pakistan Flour Millers End Strike

Report Categories:

Grain and Feed

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Report Highlights:

On July 12th, the Pakistan Flour Millers Association (PFMA) ended its 5-day strike against restrictions imposed by the Sindh provincial government on the “import” of wheat and wheat products from Punjab. The strike was called off following assurances from the federal government that they would resolve the issue. The strike affected the food security interests of more than 25 million people in the provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan

Executive Summary:

General Information:

On July 8th, the Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) appealed to flour mills across the country to go on strike to protest against restrictions imposed on the movement of wheat and wheat products from Punjab to Sindh. The strike was called off after an agreement was reached between the PFMA and the federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture. Details of the agreement have not been made public.

The government of Sindh's ban on the "import" of wheat/products from Punjab rendered provincial wheat prices higher and served the interests of wealthy land-owners holding large supplies of wheat. In the end however, it would appear that the interests of PFMA, and the more than 25 million consumers in Sindh and Baluchistan who stand to benefit from lower wheat flour prices, were able to trump those of the landlords.

Restrictions on movement of wheat by provincial governments are not a new phenomena in Pakistan. Ensuring food security is the most popular justification for imposing these controls. Too often, however the results speak differently. Although a number of civil society groups claim that government policies regularly serve the interests of powerful cartels and not consumers, concrete counter actions are rare. The PFMA strike provides perhaps a notable example of new market forces challenging traditional vested interests. Whether these emerging forces are strong enough to affect real policy changes remains to be seen.