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# Piggery lawyers object to "China" talk

EMERY P DALESIO AAP APRIL 10, 2015 12:08PM

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**LAWYERS for the world's largest pork producer say it is bad enough being told their product stinks, but it's going too far to mention that a Chinese company is behind it.**

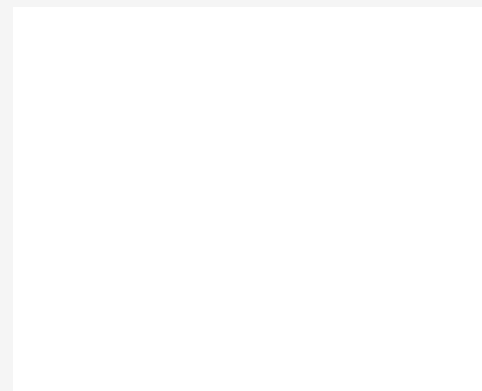
### WHO'S COMPLAINING?

More than 500 neighbours of industrial-scale pig operations across eastern North Carolina have filed 25 lawsuits since the last northern summer. Lawyers contend residents are forced to tolerate terrible smells and clouds of flies that have been unaddressed since the factory farms moved in during the 1990s.

### WHO'S GETTING THE BLAME?

The outdated image of pigs wallowing in farmyard mud before being butchered into hams, chops and joints is largely the purview of food artisans and hobbyists. Now, the vast majority of pork products come from factory farms, pioneered by Murphy-Brown LLC a generation ago.

Murphy-Brown was bought in 2000 by Virginia-based Smithfield Foods. Smithfield was then purchased by WH Group in 2013 - the largest takeover of a US company by a Chinese corporation.



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The WH Group buyout was motivated largely to provide the Communist-led country a steady supply of cheaper, untainted US-grown meat.

"This transaction creates a terrific opportunity through growth in exports for US hog farmers to expand production to meet the growing Chinese demand," Smithfield Chief Executive Officer C Larry Pope said at the time.

But the lawsuits contend Chinese demand for more North Carolina-sourced pork will only increase the nuisance for piggery neighbours.

### SAY WHAT?

Lawyers for Murphy-Brown argue in court documents that litigation over the stink of industrial-scale growing operations should be scrubbed of references to "the Chinese government, Chinese corporations, and Chinese demand for and purchases of pork".

The references are "scandalous and clearly designed to inflame the jury and the public while taking advantage of xenophobic biases in today's political landscape," the company's lawyers said, adding the lawsuits are a "platform for negative publicity ... that will harm Murphy-Brown's reputation".

The piggery's lawyers also object to suggestions that the company is subject to influence from Beijing politicians.

### CHINESE CONTROL?

The Smithfield Foods takeover was approved after a review by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, a federal interagency group.

Dartmouth University management professor Matthew Slaughter said in 2013 that Shuanghui - as WH Group was then called - wasn't like the state-owned companies commonly found in Communist economies. Slaughter said its shareholders included Goldman Sachs and Singapore's sovereign wealth fund.

But West Virginia University management professor Usha Haley said at the same US Senate committee hearing that Shuanghui's decisions wouldn't be entirely independent, noting that pork is so central to the Chinese diet that Beijing controls domestic pork prices with the world's only strategic stockpile of pork.

"The price of pigs is linked to China's social and political stability: When pork prices rise, Beijing assumes that discontent will follow," she wrote in prepared testimony.



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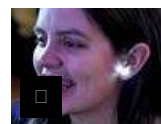
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