

## Persimmon politicking may end up burning Ma

Written by Allen Houng 侯安

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Over the past few days, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has maintained a barrage of attacks against Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) over a photograph in one of her campaign flyers showing the wrong type of persimmon. Ma's camp says that drawing attention to falling fruit prices is damaging to farmers, that the flyer might cause farmers to lose out and therefore contributed to their problems.

Ma has gone overboard trying to squeeze every last drop of political gain out of the persimmon issue. The vast majority of agricultural experts, farmers and farmers' rights groups agree that the low price for persimmons reflects a supply and demand imbalance for the industry as a whole. It is a problem that has steadily worsened ever since Ma took office and has now reached the stage where fruit farmers are finding it difficult to earn a living.

Ma would have the public believe the culprit for all of this is Tsai's flyer and its incorrect photo. Could it really be that this fruit flyer is behind the Council of Agriculture's inability to deal with the supply and demand problems that have cropped up during the past three-and-a-half years?

Many feel that Tsai should take responsibility for the photo. Who, though, is going to take responsibility for the more deep-seated supply and demand problems? Why is this government always looking to pass the buck? What is this mysterious power the flyer has that it can paralyze the council? Doesn't Council of Agriculture Minister Chen Wu-hsiung (陳武雄) have the resources and power to find a solution?

If it was true that this imbalance was caused solely to Tsai's flyer, surely the problem would be easy enough to deal with. Ma eagerly seized on the DPP slip-up and has kept up the pressure, but anyone with a bit of common sense can see right through him.

After his sustained barrage, the public is beginning to say: "Come now, enough is enough. Stop blaming others for your own incompetence."

Take astringent persimmons from Chiayi County as an example. The county government was already seeing warning signs of a supply imbalance in September and issued a request on Oct.

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25 asking the council to purchase some of the excess fruit. On Nov. 2 the council replied, asking the county to accept a third of the cost of any purchase. Since these purchases are generally paid for by the central government, the county asked the council to pay the full amount, but it refused.

Almost a month later, people began wondering whether Ma allowed the president's state affairs fund to be used to buy up non-astringent persimmons because they have maintained adequate price levels. Ma then hurriedly announced the government would buy up all the less popular astringent persimmons from Chiayi. Why the change in tune?

A month ago the government made things difficult for Chiayi, but now the growing season is almost over and astringent persimmons are already dropping from the trees. What good does this do for farmers? What have farmers done to deserve this?

Ma has milked this issue for all it is worth, but the public will see through him. Who is responsible for the poor state of the agricultural sector? Who is to take the blame for imbalances of supply and demand?

Clearly it is not the fault of the DPP's flyer. Ma should not play with fire because if he isn't careful, he'll end up getting burned.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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