

The CAP & Global Impact of EU Agriculture

The Global Impact of EU Agriculture

In the past, EU agriculture policies like the CAP have stimulated the production of surpluses which have often been dumped in third countries. Although some (not all) of these direct dumping problems have been mitigated, reforms only tackled part of the EU's global agricultural impact¹.

The EU also has a strong reliance on imported animal feed², especially high protein soybeans³ for its intensive livestock production, and other commodities like maize⁴.

The amount of industrially produced food we eat can be linked to the destruction of rainforests, wildlife and rural communities in South America and beyond. This is accompanied by farming practices which have clear negative impacts on the animals' welfare⁵. The European over dependence on imported feed also leaves European farmers vulnerable to fluctuating global market prices. This system is propped up by the EU's current trade and agricultural policies as factory farms get indirect subsidies through the support to cereals, the lack of environmental controls, the externalization of environmental costs and the lack of support for grazing systems⁶.

On top of that, the hidden subsidies for factory farmed products are bringing down prices and increase our consumption, which have health effects like obesity and heart diseases⁷.



© World Bank

Facts & figures

- Protectionism and subsidies by industrialised nations cost developing countries around US\$24 billion annually in lost agricultural and agro-industrial income⁸.
- Since 1996, the land area used to produce soy for the EU market is roughly equal to the area of deforestation in Brazilian forests⁹.
- The world market price of soy has had a direct impact on the rate of Amazon deforestation¹⁰.
- Soil carbon represents 89% of agriculture's GHG mitigation potential but is being degraded through global land use change, driven in part by EU demand for key commodities¹¹.
- Livestock is responsible for 85% of total GHG emissions from the EU's agricultural sector¹².
- The costs for the EU from the excess of nitrogen in the environment is up to 320 billion euro a year, with the livestock sector consuming around 85% of nitrogen in crops harvested or imported into the EU¹³.

Recommendation

The CAP needs profound change to support the kinds of farming Europe needs in the 21st century. Public money must support public goods. Taxpayers must see real value for the billions they invest in the CAP. Those who farm sustainably must be effectively supported while those who harm the environment should receive no public money.

If politicians are serious about the global impact of EU agriculture they must support a fundamental CAP reform now.



The CAP & Global Footprint

pic1: © Creative Commons (Flickr), pic2: © Sam Beebe, Creative Commons

Pat & Daphne Saunders case study¹⁴

The Saunders manage 566 hectares organically in the UK, with 350 milking cows and 700 cattle producing 1.8 million litres of milk per year and much of their own animal feed. A desire to reduce costs was a factor in choosing to go organic. Switching to organic production has saved more than £75,000 each year on fertilisers and pesticides and nineteen neighbouring farms have now followed their switch to organic.

Reducing soy feed within dairies is not straightforward as modern commercial breeds of dairy cows need a high-protein diet

and soy can provide this cheaply. However, the Saunders have met this challenge by producing a range of feeds on their own farm including wheat, oats, barley, peas, beans, and other legumes. All silage is grown and stored on site and some organic EU soy is added to the winter feed.

Europe could have more of these good examples like the Saunders family if it was more serious about promoting mixed and organic farming in Europe and tackling its feed import problem.

© Keven Law, Creative Commons



Environmental and economic advantages of a revival of legume crops in France

In January 2010 the General Commission for Sustainable Development in France published a study¹⁵ assessing the environmental and economic advantages of reviving legumes in France. It found that production of legumes, not requiring nitrate fertilisation, would reduce agricultural GHG emissions from fertilisers. Moreover, legumes are a source of protein, so their production in France would enable a reduction of imported soybean meal for animal feeds. According to one scenario, an increase in arable land used for legumes from 3 to 7% would require

reductions of 11 and 70% in the exports of cereals and rapeseed respectively.

This would suggest a change in agriculture policy is required to support more crop diversity in the EU, particularly for leguminous crops. It would require accompanying changes in the arable and animal farming sectors which would produce and utilise these legumes. The revival of legumes could compensate current levels of both nitrate fertilisers applied to our feed imports and national fertiliser production¹⁶.

© Sophie Cle, Creative Commons



© Andreas Johansson, Creative Commons

Foston pig farm proposal

Pig farmers across the UK are struggling to cope with rising input costs and low farm gate prices and often small and family farmers are particularly vulnerable. Many fear that plans for Britain's largest pig mega-farm pose a further threat to the livelihoods of small farmers as the market would become flooded with cheap pig meat. Proposals for the 25,000 pig unit in Foston, Derbyshire, have raised questions with the local community about their environment, particularly about groundwater pollution, and animal and human health due to the feared increase for disease and high levels of antibiotic

use on the farm. Should it go ahead, people fear the unit would undermine the livelihoods of small and family farmers with impacts for rural jobs in Derbyshire and beyond. Many people see that a sustainable and secure food future lies in diverse, small-scale, productive farms which provide more and better-skilled jobs¹⁷. EU policy makers should listen to these fears and try to help tackle the pressures that are pushing farmers in this direction while avoiding at all costs the direct or indirect subsidising of any type of unsustainable production.

Prepared by:

