

**GREEN
EUROPEAN
JOURNAL**

Volume 5 March 2013



Food: the (agri)cultural revolution

GEF

**GREEN EUROPEAN
FOUNDATION**

www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu

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Another food system!



The food revolution is a cultural and social revolution, claims the Editorial Board of the Green European Journal, who introduce its fifth edition.

The politics of food is cultural and social, in addition to being ecological and economic. Therefore, the Greens who are at the forefront of the struggle against the agro-industry and its impact on people and the environment should not narrow down their solutions to a single dimension.

With its lasagne-layers of dubious origin, the horsemeat scandal might be dubbed the subprime crisis of the European food system. Although its consequences are less toxic, it once again casts doubt on the ability of the agro-industry to deliver healthy, tasty and sustainable nutrition. The failure of a system once based on the promise of Europe's food-sovereignty reveals ironically a dramatic sense of helplessness, shared all along the food chain from captive consumers and desperate farmers to cynical industrials and impotent politicians.

Bringing back to earth

There is urgent need for radical changes, not only in the food safety procedures but also in the whole European agriculture and food production. The good news is that there is a growing interest among the public towards the issue of food, most likely because beyond its physiological function, it represents a crucial link between our societies and their natural environments. Any food and agricultural policy that does not include a deeper understanding of this interaction is doomed to fail. In other words, it is about time to "bring back to earth" a food-chain that we once believed could be wholly emancipated from nature's contingency.

Our food system extends further than agriculture and the agro-industry. It does not only include the workers, agricultural produce, consumers and the consequences of their activities on health and the environment. The cultural and social dimensions and representations which differ from one European country to another should also be taken into account as they play a key role in its configuration. The politics of food is cultural and social, in addition to being ecological and economic. Therefore, the Greens who are at the forefront of the struggle against the agro-industry and its impact on people and the environment should not narrow down their solutions to a single dimension. As in the case of the economic and ecological crisis, systemic actions are strongly needed.

Indeed agriculture is responsible for more than 30% of greenhouse gas emissions on a global scale. But it would be inaccurate and ineffective to limit the growing urge for its transformation merely to this major ecological issue. Conversely, if we are of course as consumers all concerned by the quality of food, the Greens would make a major mistake in adopting a narrow consumerist approach by only focusing on cheaper, tastier and healthier food. Protecting our environment and health has to be simultaneously combined with the pursuit of enhanced enjoyment and social justice.

Just when the financial crisis and austerity policies force millions of Europeans to resort to food banks, public expenses generated by obesity and diabetic ailments are increasing dramatically.

Farmers at the centre of change

Above all, the transformation of our food system will never occur unless those most affected, farmers, are at the centre of such change. We need to strengthen every means of reconnecting the consumers to the producers and to the natural and social frameworks in which our food is produced. What is at stake in the Green prioritisation of local produce is quality improvement and transport cost reduction. Moreover, the Greens favour the opportunity of getting producers and consumers together to develop common responsibilities regarding the environment and of working towards common economic interests, even if they don't always converge.

The expansion of food cooperatives throughout Europe goes far beyond any sophisticated form of progressive consumerism. It is potentially one of the best ways of re-embedding agriculture and its workers in the very fabric of our societies – and literally re-ground our cities, families and collective practices in the earth. We will not succeed in transforming the food system without the development of new alliances between consumers and producers. This is precisely the objective of the cooperative movement almost throughout Europe.

A necessary reconnection

Food is what the anthropologists refer to as a “total social fact”, i.e. something that encompasses the institutions and aspects that structure our social life. It is the meeting point between culture and nature, the external nature, including non-human beings, and our own internal human nature, i.e. our relation

to our body and to other human beings. Beyond the growing success of TV programs dedicated to cooking and beyond the growing importance given to the quality and authenticity of the “products”, there might be more than just a hedonistic quest. What many Europeans are seeking is to reconnect with nature and with what the 19th century French gastronome Brillat-Savarin called “conviviality” which is probably just one of the most refined forms of sociability and altruism. Taking the time to cook for our family, friends and co-workers would probably help us to “redefine our prosperity” more than many complex policies of sustainability.

Developing a better food education might be one of the best ways of fighting the dramatic paradox: just when the financial crisis and austerity policies force millions of Europeans to resort to food banks, public expenses generated by obesity and diabetic ailments are increasing dramatically. Every study on the matter emphasises the link between the combined levels of education and income and potentially unsound food-behaviour. Fighting against those trends on a European and global level is a major issue of social justice and it should not be reduced to its economic dimension.

Olivier De Schutter, the special rapporteur of the UN on the right to food, has shown that in this century there are pragmatic agro-ecological methods that enable us to feed humankind in a sustainable way. We need to put an end to a system whose proportion of waste ranges between 30 and 50%; then it'll be possible to resist the sirens of the agro-industry,

chanting us into believing that only their junk can feed 10 billion humans. There are indeed Green alternatives to the current failing CAP, as they are for example developed by the Heinrich Böll Foundation or by the Greens in the European Parliament. Yet implementing them will not only be an institutional issue, but also a stimulating long-term cultural process. There will be no great leap forward towards sustainable agriculture. Instead, we are likely to witness millions of small actions undertaken on many levels. The Green revolution starts with our food. ■

The editorial board of the Green European Journal

Food for the soul, not just the stomach: the countryside's other role



Mark Simpson

A focus on food production and protecting biodiversity should not be at the expense of a third key function of the countryside, access to it by the people.

"One in ten young adults thinks eggs come from wheat!"¹

"15 per cent of adults think cows' milk comes from male cattle!"²

Poking fun at the sensationalism of right-wing newspapers like the *Daily Mail* is something of a national pastime for those in the UK whose politics lean more to the left.

But behind the headlines lies a serious issue of disconnect between sections of the public and the countryside that manifests in a lack of knowledge of nature as well as our food chain.

While negotiators working to shape the future of EU agriculture policy will understandably prioritise issues of food security, climate change mitigation and nature conservation, reconnecting the European population to rural areas must also be on the agenda. A first step to doing so is to ensure that citizens of all Member States have the opportunity to get into the countryside and experience it at first hand.

Some readers may ask why we should be concerned about facilitating visitors to the countryside as long as rural land plays its main roles of producing food and providing habitats. It can be argued that both these functions can be supported by providing access opportunities for leisure visitors.

Other contributors to this edition of the GEJ will make the case for improving both the quality and sustainability of the food we eat in Europe and the conditions under which animal products in particular are produced. These important objectives are undermined by lack of public knowledge of where their food comes from.

Information that is crucial

While the recent horse meat scandal³ may cause some individuals to think more carefully about where their food comes from, the fact is that someone who does not know that the milk they are drinking comes from a cow or that the egg they are eating comes from a hen is unlikely to be in a position to make an informed judgement as to the quality or ethics of their food, even if they wanted to.



An idyllic farm setting, but how close to reality is such an image?

1 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2159174/LEAF-survey-One-young-adults-think-eggs-come-wheat.html?ito=feeds-newsxml#axzz2KK8bqnW8>

2 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1395075/Are-Britons-nature-nitwits-1-5-dont-know-oak-trees-come-acorns.html#axzz2KK8bqnW8>

3 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/feb/08/how-horsemeat-scandal-unfolded-timeline>

The public at large will better appreciate the case for environmental controls if they feel they directly benefit.

Even those who know in general terms where their food comes from may have in their heads an image of a rural idyll populated by happy cattle in rolling meadows, chickens pecking for food along hedgerows, that may be completely at odds with the factory-farmed meat, eggs and dairy products many of us eat. The features that make an attractive countryside for visitors are often associated with traditional farming practices that give animals a more natural existence and leave more space for nature.

Striking a better balance between agriculture and nature is, of course, a stated aim of common agriculture policy reform. Within agriculture, as in other industries, environmental regulation has often been depicted as an unwelcome burden that prevents the real experts (farmers) managing their land as they see fit and creates extra costs for producers and consumers alike. However, there can be no doubt that although farming is directly responsible for the creation of many of our most prized landscapes, intensive agriculture also poses a potential threat to scenery and biodiversity alike and must be regulated accordingly.

Regulation can be justified in general, abstract or scientific terms. But the public at large will better appreciate the case for environmental controls if they feel they directly benefit. Two of the UK's largest

environmental NGOs argue strongly that, unless public access would fundamentally undermine conservation objectives, protected sites should be open to visitors so that they can experience for themselves just what is being protected and enjoy the exposure to nature.⁴ This model is now being applied to some extent in England, where more than half of all open access land falls within sites of special scientific interest⁵, although it is argued that much work remains to be done before the public feels truly reconnected to nature.⁶

The arguments in favour of increased access to the countryside do not end there. With small farmers across Europe facing difficulty in making ends meet and ever higher numbers of villages transforming into dormitories for commuters, countryside recreation offers a golden opportunity to inject money into the rural economy. Visitors to rural England have been estimated to spend £6.14 billion (€7.25 billion) per year and support some 245,000 jobs, while every pound invested in the upkeep of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path is said to result in gains of £57 to the Welsh economy.⁷

The endless benefits of access to the countryside

Enjoyment of the countryside can also make a major contribution to addressing the health crisis affecting many developed nations. In Northern Ireland,

4 <http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/crow/opencountry.aspx>; National Trust Open Country Report (1995).

5 Natural England Open Access Annual Monitoring Report 2007 (2008).

6 <http://www.countryfile.com/blog-post/report-natural-childhood-summit>

7 http://www.cncni.gov.uk/position_paper_on_access_to_ni_countryside__2a_.doc.pdf; Christie and Matthews, The Economic and Social Value of Walking in Rural England (2003).

As negotiations on reform of the common agricultural policy continue, the time is ripe to consider how public enjoyment of the countryside can be placed on the European agenda.

a small region of fewer than 2 million inhabitants, the economic cost of obesity and physical inactivity has been estimated at £500 million (€591 million) per year⁸ – it is impossible to put a price on the human cost. With “performance sport” lacking appeal among a large section of the population, the public bodies responsible for sport and leisure view the promotion of non-competitive outdoor activities as one of the best means of improving public health and wellbeing.

At present, different EU Member States – and even different regions within states – take very different approaches to recreational access to the countryside. Some, including Sweden and Germany, have preserved an extensive traditional ‘right to roam’ on unenclosed land. The UK has seen a century and a half of campaigning, and sometimes open conflict between ramblers and landowners as the urban working classes sought to assert their right to escape the ‘satanic mills’ of Greater Manchester and Yorkshire.⁹ Finally, Scotland and to a slightly lesser extent England and Wales introduced a statutory right of access to large areas of rural land at the start of the 21st century.

Other states, including the Netherlands, France, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland take a much less liberal approach. Legal access rights in these countries are confined to a sometimes extremely limited network of public rights of way (only 313km in Northern Ireland) and some additional paths created by contractual agreement, usually for a limited number of years, with landowners. Recreational users are only

able to visit many prized areas through trespassing or informal tolerance on the part of landowners.

As negotiations on reform of the common agricultural policy continue, the time is ripe to consider how public enjoyment of the countryside can be placed on the European agenda.

The UK’s attempts in the 1990s to open up more opportunities to access set-aside through agri-environment payments were notably unsuccessful. However, the High Court’s ruling in 2007 that it is permissible to include direct payments under CAP conditional on non-obstruction of existing public rights of way under cross-compliance rules may point to a way forward.

Tying an element of the financial support the EU provides to farmers to the preservation of existing rights to countryside recreation, with further incentives for the provision of further opportunities, could have a very significant impact on the ability of the public to access the countryside.

Perhaps then, in time, headlines about people’s lack of knowledge of where their food comes from will become a thing of the past. ■

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⁸ DCAL/Sport NI, Sport Matters: the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019 (2009).

⁹ <http://www.kindertrespass.com/>

Food without the go-between



Katarzyna Słoboda

Food cooperatives are a way of ensuring a supply of local and socially sustainable food. However the barriers to their development should not be underestimated, including opposition from middlemen who have the most to lose. Looking at experiences in Brazil, Poland and the US, Katarzyna Słoboda charts a way forward. This article first appeared in the Polish green magazine “Zielone Wiadomości”.

The nature of a food cooperative is that it is an association open for all, an arch-enemy of all monopolies and restrictions, a truly peoples' grouping.

Edward Abramowski

In 1993 the newly elected government of Belo Horizonte, the capital of Brazilian Minas Gerais state, declared that food was a right of citizenship. The new mayor, Patrus Ananias de Souza, started implementing this right by creating a council of 20 citizens of the city, including workers, business and church leaders, with an objective of creating a new food policy. New markets with agricultural goods have been created, where local small farmers could sell their crops directly to the people. Small landowners were encouraged to create local ABC shops ("Food for a small price" in Portuguese), in which prices for several basic products coming from local producers have been regulated by the city authorities. "People's restaurants" were opening up city, where no meal was more expensive than 1 Brazilian real (ca. 1,5 złoty or 40 euro cents). The plan of local authorities also included education on healthy eating and controlling the quality of the food sold in shops around Belo Horizonte. Information regarding ways of having a cheap meal has been put in public spaces, such as bus stops.

Such a systemic approach would be a dream come true for members of food cooperatives, for whom self-organisation for getting cheap and healthy food is a main goal. There are 10 such initiatives around Poland in cities such as Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, Gdańsk, Opole, Wrocław or Kraków. Supply is done with different regularity, usually (and sadly) just at local markets, which guarantee access to fresh food only on a seasonal basis, while other goods are imported or produced with chemicals under greenhouses. They don't always succeed in ignoring

the middlemen of the production and distribution processes. Some efforts in connecting with local farmers producing organic food are being pursued, but it's also hard to pass through the problem with food certification, which automatically increases prices. Another problem with having regular cooperation with local producers comes with the fact that food cooperatives are an informal structure with no hierarchy and high rotation among its members, often continuing thanks to the efforts of just a few engaged people.

"The nature of a food cooperative is that it is an association open for all, an arch-enemy of all monopolies and restrictions, a truly peoples' grouping. Having an obligation to directly buy the goods, it in essence tends to bring together all of the consumers, that is all people, and therefore to rule the whole domestic market and to organise and change the market for the needs of the people" - wrote Edward Abramowski, Polish left-libertarian author on the turn of 19th and 20th century. One of his influences on modern cooperatives in Poland is a "group fund" - a sort of internal, 10% tax on shopping activity paid by each member. It is usually used for supporting local initiatives for social justice or - when needed - acts as a sort of insurance for its members. According to another cooperative author, Romuald Mielczarski, this fund was meant to be a common profit of the group that would be later invested, i.e. in infrastructure. That's the way that in 1907 the Społem association in Łódź came into life - a group comprised of smaller cooperatives.



Why should supermarket chains be the only way to distribute food?

Ensuring the system works for cooperatives

The main challenge that Polish food cooperatives face is having access to healthy, fresh and cheap products that don't have to be restricted just to the middle class, as is often the case with certified, organic food. One of the possibilities is direct support of food producers on a regular basis – be it financial, logistical or through working on the farm during different parts of the production process, according to the rule, that “you do not pay for food, you pay for agriculture”. Such a system of Community Supported Agriculture is based on sharing not only the crops, but also the responsibilities and risks related to potentially bad harvests. In 2011 the citizens of Sedgwick in Maine, USA decided to pass a law according to which local farmers would have the possibility of selling their

crops directly, which defied state law. Months later such motions have been supported by other cities and towns in Maine – Penobscot, Blue Hill, Trenton, Hope, Plymouth, Appleton and Livermore. “We declare that we have a right to produce, process, sell, buy and consume local food, in this way supporting self-sufficiency, caring for family farms and local food traditions. The right to have a local food system is connected with our undeniable right of self-governance” – states the motion passed in Penobscot. In Poland it is the food cooperatives that should be promoting the discussion on consumer habits, and more – a civic engagement in creating agricultural and food policies. ■

Katarzyna Słoboda is a curator in the Art Museum in Łódź, where she leads the “City Ecologies” programme together with Aleksandra Jach. She is also a member of a food cooperative in Łódź.



Antti Möller

Finland, land of developing agriculture

Development continues and the overall number of farms declines. What is it like to be a farmer in today's Finland? Will the sector still attract new entrepreneurs in the future?

In Finland in the 1940s,
agriculture employed
about half the work force,
today it employs fewer
than 4%.

Urbanisation is a global phenomenon that has long affected Finland. People are moving to towns and cities with an ever diminishing number working in agriculture. In Finland in the 1940s, agriculture employed about half the work force, today it employs fewer than 4%.

At the same time the number of working farms has collapsed. It fell by over 50,000 in the 1990s. Although the rate of decrease has been considerably slower during the 2000s, the trajectory of change is still clear: in the year 2011 the country lost about 1,200 farms. Last year there were 61,000 farms in Finland, and their average size keeps growing.

Despite the general trend towards centralisation and the shift into other economic sectors, we do still have an agricultural sector in Finland which is around 54,000 businesses strong.

What is it like working and progressing in the sector, which produces food for the Finnish population? *Vihreä Tuuma* interviewed two farmers.

Lauri Hantula, 45, raises livestock and farms land in western Finland. Aittomäki farm, located near Seinäjoki, has about 75,000 chickens and 400 pigs. The arable land of 250 hectares is planted with barley and wheat. The farm has been involved in experimental methods under the auspices of Finland's environmental administration for nine years, the most recent project being an investigation into how to reduce nutrient loading in the soil.

"I come from a farming family. This is a family farm and my mother's home that I'm trying to take forward as respectfully as I can. My brother has his own farm next door."

The permanent staff are Lauri and his wife Jutta, and one non-family employee. In addition, eight or nine temporary workers help with seasonal work on the fields and in the henhouse. Hantula, who has a qualification in agricultural science, concentrates on his main work and leaves things like repairing machinery to other professionals.

Atte Hermansson, 32, leases an organic and biodynamic farm in Sipoo's Majvik. He too got a taste of farming at an early age. When he was little his family moved to Kirkkonummi where his father started producing garden plants and barley on a small plot of land.

As an adult Hermansson worked in technology for about a decade before realising he wanted a change. He visited Majvik to find out more and when he noticed that a vocational school in Uusimaa was offering training courses in organic gardening, his decision was made. Hermansson was among the first to graduate from the course this year, and he plans to take over the farm in his own name soon. He will move there with his partner and two children in the spring.



Atte Hermansson displays the fruits of his labour that are for sale on his farm

No guaranteed holiday

Majvik hosts a diversity of activities on its 20 hectares of land. The main crop is potatoes, but the yield also includes spelt, wheat, rye and many root vegetables and herbs. Additionally, there are four cows and a calf in the cowshed. The work is mostly structured according to the seasons: winter is for selling the previous year's crop, tending the forest and catching up with today's "indoor chores", in other words, paperwork. In spring nature awakens and with that comes ground preparations and seed sowing.

"I liked the farm's social side and its buzz, since mostly the work here is powered by people. In the winter we get by on our own but in the spring we have many interns and volunteers, and even the customers sometimes lend a hand", Hermansson explains.

On Aittomäki farm, the winter lull in agricultural work is used for additional training, for construction and repair work and for seed care. The livestock side, in contrast, follows the same pattern through the whole year. The day begins at around six in the morning with three or four hours of work.

The afternoon consists of the same tasks of looking after the animals, and between these hours there is time for other activities. An evening check-up is done at around nine.

Whatever the job, it would be good to have a holiday from time to time. Farming, however, is fundamentally a vocation where the calendar year and the demands of the livestock set a very tight schedule. The pace of work in livestock management is rather similar throughout the year, which is why a holiday and stand-in scheme has been devised. In practice it means that a farm relief worker takes care of the farm temporarily, giving the farmer's family a break from work.

The idea is good, but the service could be improved. A lack of relief workers, and ensuring the required level of expertise, create significant challenges.

"The relief worker who looks after the pigs comes to us via the municipality, but even though we put in our requests two years in advance, we seem not to get the relief at our preferred time. And if the relief worker isn't familiar with the feeding machinery, you can't leave them alone with the pigs", Hantula says.

From time to time the question is raised about whether it is worth practising agriculture at all in the Nordic countries.

Hermansson is also part of the holiday and stand-in scheme, but because of the many overlapping activities that go on on the farm, it seems impossible to find a competent stand-in for everything. Because there is so little livestock, the amount of relief services tends to be small, despite the fact that there is plenty of agricultural work to be done throughout the year.

“Daylight time is working time, always. Sundays we try to keep free.”

Shortly before the interview Hantula had taken a fall on the ice and, due to a dislocated shoulder, for a while was not fit for work. Short periods of sick leave like this can be covered with the help of the usual workers, but over a longer time, the load on them would be too much.



A farm in Finland; what does the future have in store for the industry?

Reliant on subsidies and on nature

These days the market economy is pervasive, which means that food production is concentrated. It is concentrated internally within a state but also between countries. From time to time the question is raised about whether it is worth practising agriculture at all in the Nordic countries.

Thinking about the role of agriculture in Finland in the 2010s, both interviewees agree that local production and some level of self sufficiency is a priority. This is important for coping with crises and because of the increased cost of transport, among other things. Domestic production is also something that consumers value.

Hantula raises the point of respecting the environment as a precondition for producing not just a good quality crop, but ambitious quantities.

“You have to work in balance with nature, and that’s why I went for experimental farming. We have achieved good results, and the greater the yield, the easier it is to reduce nutrient loading in the soil”, Hantula explains.

In practice the biodynamic farming practised by Hermansson means organic farming with a few extras; for example, paying more attention to closing the cycle of nutrients within the farm. At Majvik this has made it possible for the farm and the land area to stay the same for almost a hundred years. Their small tractors are from years gone by, newer technologies, such as potato harvesters, are not used at all.

The bureaucracy is a little too heavy and is bound to be a force that prevents many producers from making the shift to organic”.

Atte Hermansson

Meanwhile within conventional farming the development from the smallholding model to the modern and mechanised labour practices of the 2000s, has been enormous. Even on Aittomäki farm the scale of operations is quite different from what it used to be.

“When this land was still in my parents’ hands in the 1960s, it was 17 hectares of land and eight cows. That’s where it started. The whole time we have tried to keep up with developments, because if we don’t, things will go wrong, and that would bring the story of this farm and this business to an end.”

It was on this basis that the broiler-chicken business was started in 1986, with significant investments in the technology. At the moment expectations of growth are focussed on the arable side. The farm makes use, for instance, of precision agriculture, where a GPS-system on a tractor collects information about the fields. The data is collected onto a computer, which automatically guides sowing and the amount of fertiliser to be used on any part of the land. The system, which enhances profitability, is precise up to the scale of twenty square metres.

The direction of developments is largely dictated by the broader economic framework.

“Without agricultural subsidies this work would not be profitable in Finland. Though it certainly produces a lot of paperwork. I use about a day a week just for that”, Hantula says.

In the same vein Hermansson uses one fifth of each working day for filling forms. He has thought a lot about the attractiveness of farming, because it is largely done on zero margins. At Majvik the proportion of subsidies is about half of the bottom line.

“Organic farming makes economic sense in Finland. Still, this year has been challenging because of the wet summer.”

Both men have several ideas for developing the system of subsidies. Hermansson has already discovered that a small organic farmer’s daily routine can be difficult from time to time.

“The daily auditing of the production cycle that’s required for organic inspection is really tough on a small producer, particularly since we do direct sales from the farm and because our range is so varied. The bureaucracy is a little too heavy and is bound to be a force that prevents many producers from making the shift to organic”.

Hantula would change the way conventional farm subsidies are allocated.

“Subsidies should somehow also be directed at quantity. That way you would be rewarded for work that aims at producing a better yield from the same area of land.”

Towards the future

As the conversation shifts to expectations of the future, Lauri Hantula becomes thoughtful. He is worried about the future, which is influenced by so many factors. Today farming is a political hot potato, and decisions that affect the sector are constantly being made that pull it first this way then that. Disagreements between the responsible departments also create headaches for agricultural entrepreneurs, who find themselves between a rock and a hard place.

“If we want there to be agriculture in Finland in the future, then the sector needs to be a more inviting option in relation to other jobs. Even now it tends to be difficult to find the entrepreneurs, and the worst nightmare scenario is that farmers will disappear.”

Atte Hermansson also avoids complacent fantasies about the future; rather he sees it as a huge challenge. Still, his choice of profession is not something he regrets.

“I am confident, and certain that this will become a sociable livelihood and a going concern as a farm. This is a way of life, where you are constantly meeting friends, customers and neighbours”, Hermansson sums up.

Farming may be demanding work but it’s also rewarding.

“The best thing is when you walk into the open fields of Pohjanmaa just before harvest time. That smell of a harvestable crop coming up from the beautifully waving fields. These are things that you can’t convert into money”, Hantula says. ■

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- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Agricultural Statistics (www.maataloustilastot.fi)

Antti Möller is editor-in-chief of Vihreä Tuuma, the online journal of the Finnish Green foundation Visili.



Natalie Gandais

France: Epicentre of the '*malbouffe*' crisis

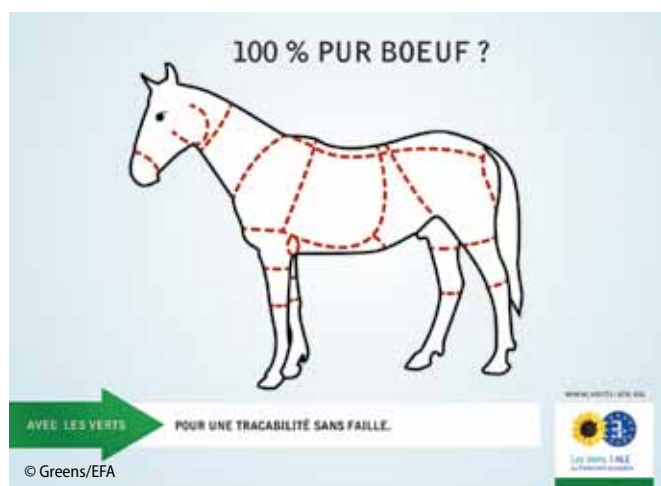


Alain Lipietz

The changes to agriculture in post-war France have had a devastating impact on the environment and on public health. Such changes were the product of international trade agreements and big agri-business, meaning solutions are unlikely to come from the top down. For Gandais and Lipietz, it must be local and small produces that come to the rescue.

The industrialisation of agriculture, like all of the previous steps in the history of rural France, was managed by the "profession", which for centuries has enjoyed considerable clout in French politics.

France is the largest agricultural power in the European Union. UNESCO has promoted its gastronomic heritage. And yet it is at the intersection of two of its agrifood firms that the most recent scandal of globalised "*malbouffe*" (junk food) has erupted: lasagnes containing Romanian horsemeat, travelled via brokers in Holland and Cyprus and ended up in the deepfreezes of a Swedish firm in the UK. The scandal is all the more shocking when we consider that that Spanghero, the company accused of selling mislabelled horsemeat, comes from an agricultural cooperative based in a good food paradise – the Béarn and the Basque Country regions of France. Behind these scandals, there is a long process of degradation of French food, resulting from the dynamic of the liberal and productivist system in crisis. France is extremely representative of this crisis, which has taken the form of a food crisis in the countries of the Global South, and a health crisis of "*malbouffe*" in Europe. How on earth did we end up here?



The industrialisation of food

At the end of the Second World War, France rebuilt its agricultural system along the lines of US agriculture: mechanisation and fixed specialisation between cropland, "sugar plants" and breeding. The old mixed farming unit was broken. The 1992 Blair House Agreement between the European Union and the United States condemned Europe to import protein rich feed (soybean), which, mixed with corn, became soymeal, the basis of cattle feed.¹

The result? Croplands, with more and more fantastical yields, absorb staggering quantities of water, energy and chemical fertilisers. Livestock areas pollute the whole environment with a tide of unusable nitrate-rich manure, all topped off with a fog of pesticides that are carcinogenic, mutagenic and toxic to reproduction. Cancer rates in these areas are equivalent to those of people living in heavily industrialised regions like the Ruhr Valley. The prevalence of Parkinson's disease among farmers who handle pesticides is twice as high as the national average.² This widespread pollution now affects all consumers, despite the warnings of whistle blowers who face fierce denials and repression from representatives of the "agricultural profession".

The industrialisation of agriculture, like all of the previous steps in the history of rural France, was managed by the "profession", which for centuries has enjoyed considerable clout in French politics.

1 <http://gandais.net/spip.php?article45>

2 http://www.upmc.fr/fr/recherche/pole_4/pesticides_un_facteur_de_risque_de_maladie_de_parkinson.html

The young modernising and productivity-focused farmers of the 1950s often formed cooperatives and jointly managed this mutation in cahoots with the State, at the expense of the majority of farmers and at the price of a violent rural exodus.

With the arrival of the "neo-liberal" 1980s these cooperatives evolved into "normal" (i.e. carnivorous) agrifood businesses. Meanwhile, food distribution is concentrated in a few globalised supermarket chains that retain a dominant market position and are able to impose excessive industrialisation and fix prices.

This monopoly-holding agrifood bloc has profoundly marked French diplomacy regarding the European Union, leaving it ready to sacrifice all for a Common Agricultural Policy that assures large subsidies not to working farmers, but for volume of food produced. This policy certainly assured Europe's food security and a reduced cost of food, but at the price of high dependence on imported energy and protein. At the cost, also, of "malbouffe" and its hidden costs to public health. At the cost too, finally, of over-production, initially contained by export subsidies that were as ruinous for European finances as they were for the farmers of the Third World, until the 1990s, when the total amount of subsidies were frozen at a set level for each hectare of European land. This is the astonishing model that initiated, from 2006 onwards, the food component of the global crisis of liberal productivism.

Food in the crisis

France is a good example of this. Firstly, as in the rest of the world, urbanisation has devoured good agricultural land: a landmass equivalent to the size of one French department is covered in concrete every seven years. Then the remaining shrinking surface area is threatened by extreme climate incidents that are themselves on the rise (the intense heat wave of summer 2003, the once in a thousand years storms that have decimated French forests, etc.). Finally, the remaining usable agricultural land is torn between four necessary uses: the "Food-Feed-Fuel-Forest" conflict. Production of "food" for human consumption vies for first place with animal "feed", and producing animal protein needs ten times more space than producing plant protein does. "Fuel" accounts for bio-fuels, a productivist reaction to the climate and energy crisis. In France, wheat, corn and rapeseed are increasingly diverted into the production of fuel for cars. The most endangered use of land is for "forest" use - which symbolises the protection of bio-diversity. In fact, France is unable to enforce the *Natura 2000* European program at all.



Chemicals and industrialisation have transformed how food is produced, with profound consequences

A study on the link between obesity and supermarket selection (from the most "middle class" to the most "discount") shows a strong correlation between low cost and obesity in all classes.

Finally, like in the rest of the world, food waste has reached 40% in France. Food in France is discarded mostly at the agro-industrial and retail levels (to conserve optimum appearances and to simplify inventory management) and at the consumer level (by over-purchasing in the supermarket, poor menu design in canteens, the lost art of leftovers, etc.). Of course, the country remains such a food-exporting giant that the downward trend of its per capita food production has not caused famine! But, as in the United States, the poorest are finding that their income no longer allows them to purchase healthy food.

At the end of 2011, according to a CSA poll, three-quarters of the French population had the feeling that their purchasing power had declined in recent months. As a consequence, 33% of them had considered reducing their food budget, mostly by choosing discount products, those that grabbed their children's attention: various highly-processed "minerals", packaged in garishly bright colours, laden with salt, sugar and fats which add flavour and are addictive. Hence the acceleration of obesity across all social classes, and the macabre cortege of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancers that accompanies it.

In reality, the obesity epidemic is the expression of the industrialisation of food, and the persuasive force of the food industry and supermarkets (TV ad campaigns aired at primetime). Government

propaganda in favour of fruit and vegetables has only reduced its impact in the top 10% of high earners. One may wonder whether for the 90% of "willing victims of *malbouffe*" it is an economic necessity or cultural fact. It is probably both.

Even before the beginning of the crisis, sociologist Christine César showed that if it were possible to eat a perfectly balanced diet in France for €3.50 a day, minimum wage recipients could only spend €2.60 and, rationally, prioritised the most urgently needed items: carbohydrates (bread, pasta) and fats that provide energy, but do not provide enough to build their bodies.³ A study on the link between obesity and supermarket selection (from the most "middle class" to the most "discount") shows a strong correlation between low cost and obesity in all classes, except for university-educated women, who frequent discount supermarkets and still feed themselves wisely.⁴

The social inequalities of food-related ill health of are not purely economic in origin. Admittedly, all things being equal, "organic" food is more expensive. But it suffices to reduce excessive meat consumption to create balanced and healthy organic menus for the same price. The food crisis is not a direct product of poverty; it is the product of a deadly system of food production that manipulates consumer behaviour and habits to the detriment of their health.

3 <http://www.inpes.sante.fr/slh/articles/396/05.htm>

4 <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0032908>

The expression "malbouffe" was born from the convergence between consumers who have revolted, farmers who have resisted the model farmers in small farmers unions – like the *Confédération paysanne* and *Coordination rurale* and environmentalists.

The health crisis

Some studies estimate that 30% of cancers could be avoided through better diet, 25% for avoidable cardiovascular diseases and up to 66% of diabetes.⁵ In 2007, there were 2.5 million diabetic patients, an increase of almost 40% on the 2001 figure of 1.8 million. Health care repayments for diabetic patients amounted to 12.5 billion euros, or an increase of 5.4 billion relative to 2001. They alone represent 9% of global health insurance expenditure. Each year, health insurance expenditure for the care of these patients increases by about one billion euros.

According to the *Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study 2010*, deaths attributable to "malbouffe" have now surpassed those who die from hunger.⁶ But the cost of "malbouffe" on social security expenditure is not a negligible one in the sovereign debt crisis. The cost of diabetes care represents 0.8% of French GDP. For care related to obesity: 2% of GDP. And for the far more conventional health costs related to alcohol: 2.4% of GDP. This is while each successive austerity plan struggles to get government deficits (including social security) below 3%!

Resistance

The expression "malbouffe" was born from the convergence between consumers who have revolted, farmers who have resisted the model (farmers in small farmers unions – like the *Confédération paysanne* and *Coordination rurale*) and environmentalists. The most emblematic expression of this movement was José Bové! But today the issue

of "malbouffe" has invaded all forms of media. Not a week goes by without the release of yet another documentary reporting on food waste or the abnormalities of the agrifood system.



The likes of José Bové were once minority voices in resisting industrial agriculture

A new development: the whistle blowers – the journalists, doctors, and agronomists – having published several books or alarmist documentaries now publish advocacy tracts on how to "get us out of this mess". The recipe is always the same: a return to "organic" agriculture, which presupposes that on the same budget that we will consume less meat: after all vegetarian lasagnas are better and just as nourishing! In sum, to return to the good old days of the classic French meals so beloved by UNESCO, even to perhaps change the menu to a Cretan one (which will include, never

⁵ <http://www.worldwatch.org/system/files/EWP150.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.healthmetricsandevaluation.org/gbd/research/project/global-burden-diseases-injuries-and-risk-factors-study-2010>

you fear, two glasses of wine...) or to an Indian one – with meat reduced to the role of a condiment that will accompany cereal or vegetable centered meals.

On the consumer's side, the fight has taken three different directions.

- Direct initiatives, like the Associations for the Preservation of Peasant Agriculture (AMAP). This is about linking up with one or two nearby famers to get weekly fresh, organic, seasonal food "baskets" delivered directly to your home by the producer.
- A call to local cooperatives to serve only organic food in schools. This is 100% the case in a small town like Mouhans-Sartoux (whose Mayor is a member of the Green party) and 40% the case in a mid-sized city like Auxerre, but which would of course be much more difficult in a megalopolis like Paris, where each remaining piece of agricultural land has to be defended tooth and nail from property developers. There, the demand for "local" agriculture must be put into perspective where demand is such that the entirety of the structure of agricultural production that needs to be addressed.
- In line with the introduction of organic produce, the provision of vegetarian alternatives in large-scale canteens for ethical, environmental, philosophical and even religious reasons should be catered for.

And at this moment in time, the very possibility of resolving the FFFF conflict exists: feeding humans,

while feeding fewer animals, conserving our biodiversity reserves and making the earth itself contribute by the capture and storage of solar energy, in the guise of next generation biofuels.

The response of specialists, like those from *Négawatt* who are attempting to solve the climate and energy crisis by leaving both nuclear and oil based energy behind, and those from the *Afterres*⁷ project that are evaluating the possibility of France providing sufficient food and energy for itself, and even the same reply of the Academy of Science in September 2011, in *Demography, Climate and Global Food*⁸ which posed the same question on a global scale, is unanimous. Yes, the earth can feed humanity – be it on a French, a Euro-Mediterranean or global scale, all the while capturing all of the energy that it needs. But this requires a war on waste, a change of food habits, and a sophisticated form of mixed farming, ecological and intensive agriculture, with up to six crops on the same soil, a link with trees/crops/livestock, etc.

Here we enter into the realm of science fiction. But it is a fiction that we have little time left to transform into reality. ■

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7 <http://www.solagro.org/site/393.html>

8 <http://www.academie-sciences.fr/activite/rapport/rst32.htm>



Rebeka Szabó

Hungarian land-grabbing: family farmers vs. politically backed oligarchs

Often thought of as a problem in developing nations, land-grabbing is a reality in contemporary Hungary. The problem of private hoarding of land began after the fall of Communism in 1990, but the current government is making the situation worse. Through a corrupt relationship between power and agri-business, more and more land is falling into the possession of a powerful few, with devastating consequences for society and the environment.

The phenomenon that has given rise to increasing social tensions in the Hungarian countryside is rather being driven by “national oligarchs” who have forged close ties with the country’s political elite over the last two decades.

Foreign investors acquired at least 35 million hectares of land in 66 countries over the past few years according to GRAIN, a non-profit organisation based in Barcelona. So far, the phenomenon referred to as land-grabbing could be observed mostly in African and South American countries. The term usually refers to the acquisition of land by non-local actors who exploit it with the aim of generating agricultural profit without regard to the interests of the local community (in particular small farmers) or the environment. In this article I will focus on a variety of land-grabbing that is currently occurring in Central and Eastern European and has been largely overlooked by Western European media and pressure groups.

While Western Europe often protects family farms and strongly limits the maximum cultivable land size, the position of small producers struggling to make ends meet is becoming desperately vulnerable in the countries that used to belong to the socialist Eastern Block, where democratic institutions and political culture are developing all too slowly and citizens often stand powerless in the face of aggressive capital interests. In what follows I focus on one crucial aspect of the transformation in the agricultural sphere in the post-socialist period: the struggle for the control of cultivable land.

There are important similarities in the way giant estates (frequently exceeding several thousand hectares) were created in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Serbia. What is particular to Hungary is that the process I describe as land-grabbing is not driven by foreign investors, since the purchase of land by

non-Hungarian citizens has been prohibited by a moratorium that does not expire until 2014. The phenomenon that has given rise to increasing social tensions in the Hungarian countryside is rather being driven by “national oligarchs” who have forged close ties with the country’s political elite over the last two decades. This narrow group has exploited these ties to acquire a significant part of the land fit for profitable exploitation as well as the European agricultural subsidies that accompany it.

“The land belongs to those who work it” – at least according to a political slogan that appeared throughout the course of 20th century Hungarian history. It is based on this idea that the agricultural population was granted land ownership several times over the last century. Despite this over the past 500 years Hungarian farm structure has always been characterised by an opposition between ‘dwarf’ and ‘giant’ estates. After the regime change of 1990 the large socialist cooperatives that had dominated the sector were dismantled, with the exception of a few. State-owned farms were broken up and offered for purchase or long-term land lease at a discount price. This procedure favoured actors who had access to capital. These were typically not those who were actually working the land but bankers and managers, who lived in the cities and used the land as an investment. The process therefore contributed to a decrease in the number of economic actors operating in the agricultural sector. More-and-more villages were deserted, the country’s food self-sufficiency was damaged, and the farming population is ageing because fewer and fewer people

Cheap long-term land lease could have slowed the abandonment of villages, regenerated local communities, while also curbing the expansion of large-scale monoculture-based agriculture.

go into agriculture (given the shortage of capital and uncertain conditions in the food-market). The result of this process is what we call land concentration which in Hungary translates into the strengthening of duality (that is polarisation between 'dwarfs' and 'giants') in the agricultural sector – as revealed by the fact that the average size of so-called "large estates" in Hungary is one of the largest in Europe: about 3,200 hectares.

The latest corrupt chapter

This complex set of problems could have been at least partly mitigated through the leasing of land that remained in the possession of the state. Faithful to its election promises, the government elected in 2010 published a tender for land lease with the professed aim of strengthening family farms. The scheme would have entitled small-scale producers and family farms to lease land for 20 years at relatively low prices. Cheap long-term land lease could have slowed the abandonment of villages, regenerated local communities, while also curbing the expansion of large-scale monoculture-based agriculture. These goals, however, were not met in the end. The series of scandals that erupted right after the announcement of the results of the first round of tenders showed that, contrary to the government's promises, its land lease project actually furthered the interests of certain Hungarian agro-businessmen: those who entertained good relations with the governing party received significant swaths of land for 20 years. The new land lease legislation is full of loopholes. Tender applications are kept secret, no justification is given for their rejection, big city dwellers are often preferred to local inhabitants and one can easily

bypass land size limits provided they apply for an umpteenth piece of land in the name of a sibling or a spouse. Furthermore, candidates with applications that are much weaker from a professional point of view may nevertheless easily win because 40% of the scoring is awarded on the basis of subjective criteria. Practice has shown that legislation loopholes were quickly taken advantage of and land-grabbing is occurring at an accelerating pace.

Frustration and anger have by now replaced the positive expectations that were widespread among farmers after the change of government. It is no coincidence: many farmers feel that the ruling party (Fidesz) betrayed them. Campaign promises pledged that land priority would be given to local farming families and small and medium-sized farms in hope that this would create more jobs in small communities. The pledge was largely legitimised through the personality of professor and union activist József Ángyán who was nominated secretary of state responsible for agriculture. Confronted with the outcome of the first round of tenders and the immediate eruption of scandals he decided to resign in protest and speak out against the push of the "national oligarchs".

This uncommon display of integrity and commitment also made an impact in the communities which had been disadvantaged by the agro-business lobby. This was the case in Kajászó, a Transdanubian village that has since become a symbol of the abuses related to the public land lease tenders. Local applicant family farmers received not a single inch of land from the pastures and arable fields surrounding

In a symbolic land-seizing gesture the farmers ploughed a stretch of the land that has been leased – in their judgment, illegitimately – to the winner of the tender and symbolically placed the land under the authority of the local farmers' council.

their village. Instead, to the amazement of the local community, a single candidate from another village won all 428 acres of public land without having any farming experience at all. Community members turned to the relevant institutions to seek remedy, but their complaints – echoed by journalists and my own speeches in the Parliament – were simply ignored. In response, Kajászó's farmers decided to organise themselves with the objective of ensuring local control of land and securing the rights of farmers in the new land law that is still in preparation. Their tactics were inspired by José Bové's visit to Kajászó that was carried out as a joint project of the European and Hungarian Greens. In a symbolic land-seizing gesture the farmers ploughed a stretch of the land that has been leased – in their judgment, illegitimately – to the winner of the tender and symbolically placed the land under the authority of the local farmers' council. Besides this, they encouraged other farmers in the country to establish local farmers' councils of their own. In order to efficiently represent their interests they founded the grassroots Association of Farmers' Councils, with the main objective of enabling small-scale producers to stand up for their own interests in an organised manner. The new farmers' organisation intends to ensure that the government develops a new tender structure for public land lease with the participation of farmers so that "local producers" will really mean residents of the local community as opposed to people living as far as 20 kilometres away (possibly in another village or town). These demands were echoed in the amendments I proposed to the land law.



Dialogue for Hungary MP Rebeka Szabó protesting against land-grabbing

As a result of the land-grabbing I described above a significant part of agricultural land in Hungary is now concentrated in the hands of a small number of individuals and interest groups. The astonishingly high concentration characterising both access to land and agricultural subsidies has been publicised by the site www.farmsubsidy.org. A quick browse reveals that the three largest agricultural interest groups received an astonishing 10 billion HUF (app. €35 million) in subsidies in 2011. The website also shows that one of these (Boly Ltd., belonging to OTP Bank President and CEO Sándor Csányi) received the second largest direct agricultural subsidy in the EU since 2008: an amount of €15,549,278.

Large land proprietors employ only one-sixth of agricultural workers. While they extract approximately 500 billion HUF (€1,75 billion) annually

from the agricultural sector, they only minimally engage in value-added commodity production and leave behind an excessive ecological footprint. Moreover, the half a dozen large landowners who (as the land lease tenders clearly show) control the country's agriculture can more easily evade taxation, as revealed by the case of Mr. Csányi, who according to media reports channels significant portions of this income into Singapore, a well-known tax haven. It is because of these reasons that I see the current trends and structures as unsustainable from an environmental, economic and social point of view.

A growing resistance

At present it is difficult to respond with optimism to the question regarding the chances of an ecologically and socially sustainable agriculture in Hungary. Along with 141 environmental and conservation NGOs, farmers associations with pro-government affiliations have signed a position paper that urges, among other demands, acceptance of the amendments of PM (Dialogue for Hungary) and making the land law, presently favouring large estates, more sustainable. Though the debate on the new law is still under way the prospects are rather dim. The present proposal could only be safeguarded from the influence of oligarchs if the majority of the proposed amendments will be adopted – the chances of which are limited in light of parliamentary mathematics and the governing parties' well-documented reticence to change their stance in response to grassroots concerns. Nonetheless, the Hungarian

government has got itself into a situation where it will have to fight on two fronts. While small-scale producers will continue to push for the protection of their livelihoods, large land owners will criticise the government on the grounds that the land law under construction could ruin large estates (and that this will also hurt the government because agricultural exports will decline). While this collision of interests was unavoidable from the start the government could have avoided the current tensions (and retained its credibility) if it had used its two-thirds majority to draw up an implementable strategy rather than silently boycotting the reforms proposed by József Ángyán.

The fact that the farmers started to organise and that cracks are beginning to appear in the formerly monolithic block of the right-wing ruling parties are encouraging signs. As delegates of PM – Dialogue for Hungary, our job is to stand up for the interests of the family farmers and ecological principles. The battle can only be won if the support of the public is secured – for this, however, we need even those whose income is not dependent on agriculture to understand what the stakes are: the security of the food supply, the sustainability of the countryside, and thus the future of the whole country. ■

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Greens and farmers: the new alliance



José Bové

The Greens want to change the trajectory of the CAP to make European agriculture “greener” as this is the only way in which it will have a future. An urgent and long-term project against the conservative agribusiness model, and one which should be developed in cooperation with the first people affected: the farmers. Interview with José Bové, Greens/EFA MEP.

GEJ: In Europe there has, without a doubt, never been such a broad consensus on the need to transform agriculture and change our eating habits. However, there is very strong resistance to change from the agribusiness model. How do you explain this paradoxical situation?

Bové: There is a wide gap between European citizens and policy-makers. Even though the Commission, the Member States, and the vast majority of the Parliament are largely conservative when it comes to agriculture, all of the opinion polls suggest that consumers feel quite the opposite. More than 75% of people reject GMOs and the majority prefer local food supply chains, high-quality products, agriculture that is respectful of the environment, and support for small and medium-sized farms. The majority of consumer and environmental organisations share this sentiment. In July 2009 a meeting organised by the European Agricultural Commissioner resulted in a broad consensus that the direction of agriculture should be changed. The Commissioner also used this meeting as an occasion to propose a transformation of the CAP. However, the conservatives committed to the agribusiness model continue to dominate the Commission. The agribusiness model is also defended by large retailers and organisations of industrial producers such as COPA-COGECA. And the Member States take the same stance also. Their reasoning for this is solely based on market shares; not at all on land development, the preservation of farmers, or listening to consumers' demands.

They are completely out of step with public opinion. They neither understand how to act nor respond when faced with health or food crises. Today, for

example, they are trying to get permission from the EU to introduce GMOs into the supply chain or allow the sale of cloned meat at a European level. This would be catastrophic.

GEJ: What are the most important points in the debate surrounding the future of the CAP?

Bové: There are four key points. Firstly, the CAP has to be legitimate. We have to put our money in the right hands. Will we be able to reduce wastage from the distribution of direct aid? The Greens want to cap subsidies at €100,000 per farm. This would only affect 3 in 4000 farms out of a total of 12 million in the EU. However, the Council and the conservatives within the European Parliament refuse to accept this as illustrated recently by the European Parliament's position adopted on 13 March 2013. Our second test: will we be able to distribute the aid equally to small farmers and continue to support farms whose total amount of land makes up less than the national average? The third, very important point, is the idea of "greening". The CAP should combat global warming, the deterioration of soil and water, and the weakening of biodiversity. It should also reduce the agricultural trade deficit within the EU. The measure proposed by the Greens is a crop rotation to: encourage the predominance of vegetable proteins which fix nitrogen from the air, use fewer fertilisers and pesticides, and reduce soya imports from North and South America. Unfortunately, most of these forward-looking elements - and the crop rotation measure in particular - have been rejected by the European Parliament, under the influence of a conservative majority.

GEJ: Would it not be both logical and common sense to make savings in the CAP budget which still accounts for almost 40% of the European budget?

Bové: The scandal is not that the CAP makes up 40% of the budget of the EU; it is that the budget of the EU only represents 1% of European GDP! The CAP budget accounts for less than 0.5% of the GDP in the EU. For a policy that remains essential for our future, this is a ridiculous amount when you compare it with the likes of the US or Brazil. However, the Council's proposal would imply an 11% reduction of the budget. The first pillar which accounts for 80% of funds and finances direct aid would be affected less than the second pillar where necessary cuts would have to be made. However, the latter is responsible for financing the entire rural development and land support policy, as well as all incentives associated with "greening". In other words, the agribusiness lobby will have won.



Greens/EFA José Bové has been to the forefront of campaigns for greener, more local and more sustainable food production

GEJ: Should the Greens not be making more of an issue of this?

Bové: The Greens have always been the first to denounce health scandals. In France, I called for a boycott of farmed fish which were not labelled as being "meat-and-bone meal free". But perhaps we need something spectacular. A political movement cannot gain legitimacy without taking risks. In any case, when it comes to voting on the budget, increased pressure must be exerted on the MEPs, particularly online.

GEJ: When faced with the current crisis, are issues surrounding the quality of food really still on the agenda? Certain people, such as the German Minister for Development Dirk Niebel, are calling for ready-made meals containing horse meat to be given to the poor.

Bové: It is the very same people who are making such shameful demands that are also opposed to informing people about what is in the food they are eating. Who decides to reduce the aid given to the most vulnerable of our society by more than a billion? The Council! Today, one of the main challenges in giving aid to the most vulnerable of our society, is not only to increase the volume, but also to shorten the supply chains so that support comes from their closest producers. In France, networks have already been established between solidarity food stores and farmers in difficulty who receive both an outlet for their produce and guaranteed remuneration; a portion of the CAP subsidies could go towards this.

Today, as the Doha Round is at an impasse, the EU has signed a number of free trade agreements with countries or groups of countries. This always has devastating consequences for farmers.

GEJ: Faced with resistance from the conservatives active at a European level, have you never thought about quitting the world of institutional politics and focusing more on civil society issues?

Bové: The thought never really crosses my mind! I have been a farmer for 35 years. As a trade unionist, I fought hard to raise local awareness of global issues such as junk food. My decision to be at the European Parliament was also guided by my desire to serve as the link between civil society and the institutions.

GEJ: Is the relationship between the Greens and farmers in the process of changing?

Bové: In Belgium, Ecolo's response at the time of the dairy crisis was clearly very well received by farmers. And as a former trade unionist for the agricultural sector, I contributed towards political movements which have had consequences. For the Greens it is crucial not to be perceived as people coming from the city and telling the farmers what they have to do.

GEJ: Are the agricultural proposals put forward by the Greens not sometimes a little unrealistic for the farming world?

Bové: You have to be very careful. The proposals put forward by the Greens should not be consumer or environmentalist proposals. They should be proposals for a comprehensive food model which incorporates the very first people to be affected – the farmers. An agricultural project without farmers would be

impossible. The first thing we need to do is get away from the CAP framework and redefine its objectives. After that, we need to use the tools available to us on a national and regional level; things such as local abattoirs, institutional catering, and agricultural schools for young people, so that they do not reproduce the old model. We also need to change the land legislation to allow access to land and to prevent its "artificialisation". It is a gradual process that will take at least 10 or 15 years.

GEJ: What is your view of the challenges for the free trade negotiations with the US?

Bové: From 1986 to 1995, the Uruguay Round brought agriculture into international trade negotiations. This gave rise to three reforms of the CAP in 1992, 1999 and 2003, with dire consequences for European farmers. The internal market prices were aligned with those of the global market. The subsidies for products turned into subsidies per hectare. Afterwards, the CAP budget could no longer be funded by trade tariffs (which accounted for 70-75% of its funds). Today, as the Doha Round is at an impasse, the EU has signed a number of free trade agreements with countries or groups of countries. This always has devastating consequences for farmers. The free trade agreement with Morocco, which has allowed for an increase of export quotas for Moroccan tomatoes, does not benefit small Moroccan farmers, but rather three companies: "Les Domaines Agricoles" which belongs to the King of Morocco, and the two companies Idyl and AZURA

The Commission has made already its first concession by allowing cattle carcasses treated with lactic acid to enter the EU. Tomorrow, it will be chlorine to clean chicken carcasses and who knows what else.

which are based in France.¹ In exchange, Moroccan farmers have to endure their market being opened for cereals, meat and dairy products. Furthermore, a portion of these tomatoes are produced by pumping from deep non-renewable water tables which are located in Western Sahara. What's more, the risk is so great that discussions relating to a free trade agreement between Europe and the US are exerting intense pressure on European agricultural standards, whether these relate to GMOs, pesticides, patents, or health standards. The Commission has made already its first concession by allowing cattle carcasses treated with lactic acid to enter the EU. Tomorrow, it will be chlorine to clean chicken carcasses and who knows what else.

GEJ: We know that we must question free trade mechanisms if we want to successfully re-localise production and pave the way towards a form of food sovereignty. But is this really possible?

Bové: I find that the free trade model for agriculture and food regularly reveals its own flaws. Effects of global warming such as the pressure on food prices, particularly for countries in the South, will sooner or later pose a real problem. Furthermore, many large countries such as China, India and Indonesia do not ask questions and want to preserve their agriculture. They all have a stake in it. An agricultural and food crisis therefore lies ahead of us. The pressure is going to become stronger and stronger. But there will come a time when things start to regulate themselves,

at least if European citizens lobby for a re-localisation of production. If we continue to fight for food sovereignty, local trade, and local supply chains, whether this is for the environment, food, or society, this will move us in the right direction.

GEJ: Is this challenge not fundamentally a cultural one? Should we not be doing everything we can to support food as a cultural phenomenon?

Bové: On a political level, we defend the idea that European culture is a common ideal shared by all Europeans. But we accredit this culture to arts such as music, literature or cinema, and cuisine is overlooked. Yet for me, this was the very first expression of culture, even before the birth of literature. Long before people even began painting on cave walls, the ways in which people ate and started to cook food gave rise to a culture of taste which has developed ever since. Today, this culture represents a phenomenal wealth of different cuisines. Europe has the greatest culinary diversity in the world. But this part of our culture is not as valued as it should be. There are, of course, networks of activists such as "slowfood" and others, but it is important that citizens now reclaim this culture. We need to dispel the idea that food solely serves the purpose of satisfying a biological need. One thing that is essential when it comes to food, aside from the cultural aspect that I have already mentioned, is being able to enjoy it with others. Mealtimes are where relationships are forged; a time for us to

¹ www.lindependant.fr/2013/01/23/l-accord-ue-maroc-sur-les-tomates-fâche-la-france-et-l-espagne,1720786.php

come together. And this is the same in almost every country. The problem nowadays is that people accept junk food as part of their daily diet, but are still happy to “splash out” for special occasions. In the US, for example, the most important celebration is not Independence Day but Thanksgiving. Americans celebrate this day – a day on which the first settlers struggled to survive without food and were taught how to grow their own food by Indians – by cooking a feast. It is very surprising to see a country such as the US which we view as being so different from our culture, dedicating a day of celebration to the enjoyment of food.



Eating as a social, communal experience is on the way out, with consequences for how we see food

GEJ: Can you imagine there being a European day to celebrate food?

Bové: I’m not sure that it would work by creating such a day on artificial premises. On the other hand, I believe that making a real effort to develop the cultural and political aspects is important. A number of initiatives already exist but perhaps we need to combine these on a European level. It is clear that there are very strong cultural differences within the EU today. These differences also shine through in the European Parliament when it comes to debate surrounding the issue of food; people look at you in astonishment when you defend good food. Funnily enough, they are often the same people who dine in restaurants. But they disassociate the biological need from the festive, social and cultural aspects of food. I believe that we have to reunite these two dimensions. ■

Getting a taste for it



Esther Boukema

In the Netherlands, one organisation is making a breakthrough in encouraging a better relationship between people and food. The secret – start young. An interview with Esther Boukema, founder of 'De Smaak te Pakken' (Getting a Taste for it)

Nutrition is a particular area where individual choices are strongly bound up with social phenomena like speed, convenience, individualism, instant foods and tiny kitchens.

Around nine years ago, the Amsterdam graphic designer Esther Boukema developed a mobile culinary laboratory where children could learn, hands-on, everything about food – flavours, colours, where it comes from and when it's in season. She erected her round tent-kitchen on public squares and empty plots, mainly in deprived urban areas. The tent would usually soon be swarming with curious children, who would emerge shortly afterwards bearing various tidbits and morsels to surprise their proud parents with their culinary efforts and new-found knowledge. She later added a more serious teaching programme for primary schoolchildren, to be carried out with her team in school gardens. This initiative, titled *De Smaak te Pakken* ("Getting a Taste for It"), enjoyed growing recognition, and now forms part of a collaboration called *Mijn eten* ("My Food"). The latter integrated educational project aims to make nutrition a systematic part of the primary curriculum.

Meijers: Who, in your view, is responsible for what people eat?

Boukema: I'm always strongly in favour of a right to self-determination, and I think we should respect parents' own preferences even if we don't share them. But the individual doesn't live in isolation from the community. Without a good breakfast, a child can't do well at school.

Nutrition is a particular area where individual choices are strongly bound up with social phenomena like speed, convenience, individualism, instant foods and tiny kitchens. Concern for nutrition inevitably declines

when fast food is available wherever people go. This tends to discourage cooking at home. Knowledge about healthy eating is often couched in terms like calcium and omega-3, instead of appealing to common sense. In other words, the knowledge that a varied diet full of fresh, recognisable natural foods, together with moderation and plenty of exercise, is often enough to fight diet-related problems like obesity, heart disease and clogged arteries. Food is an industry dominated by powerful business interests which are often at odds with this mentality. It says a lot that the Chinese CEO of a soft-drinks corporation tops the world income list.

People's taste and dietary preferences are largely determined before they are old enough to choose for themselves. There is a huge worldwide diversity in family standards and values regarding food. Nutrition is therefore an accessible topic (everyone eats food) but a complicated one, lacking ready-made answers on the responsibilities of the individual and of society as a whole."

Meijers: It sounds as though our choices are limited.

Boukema: You may indeed wonder how far we really have free choice about what we eat. The borderline of self-determination lies, in my view, with those parents who bring up children eating too much, too little or unsuitable food; and when the child becomes ill as a result, they expect the public sector to foot the bill. By that time, it is often too late to prevent permanent health damage anyway. Curing obesity is much more

Still, I think and hope that in these times of crisis, people will again start recognising the value of putting effort into nutrition, as well as the value of eating together and the importance of a good breakfast.

complex than preventing it. That especially is why I try to inspire children and parents to work together in the kitchen and to rediscover food. It's a perfect tactic because parents nowadays tend to know as little about nutrition as their children.

Still, I think and hope that in these times of crisis, people will again start recognising the value of putting effort into nutrition, as well as the value of eating together and the importance of a good breakfast.

There already seems to be a tendency for schools to be stricter about what children bring along to school. A national campaign called *Gezonde School* ("Healthy School") aims among other things to rid schools of confectionary and soft drink vending machines. The attitude of unlimited tolerance seems to be waning. Some schools are already setting standards for self-brought lunches and treats. In that respect, the government is already exerting an influence on what people do at home.

Meijers: Is it, as with so many other issues, the schools that hold the key?

Boukema: Not only the schools, for sure, although they naturally have an important part to play. You learn to eat what you eat at an early age. I try to plant a seed of awareness in children's minds, one that is consistent with their teaching, and which isn't pedantic or censorial, but all the same isn't noncommittal.

I'm hoping that schools will really turn into "healthy schools" and that nutritional education will become a regular part of the primary school curriculum. I hope too that student primary-school teachers will get some healthy nutrition training. And I also hope that parents will look at themselves in the mirror more often. To sum up, improvement must come from all directions. Otherwise nothing will change.

Look, I started from the bottom, entirely on my own initiative. But I am all in favour of cooperation because it combines the individual qualities special to different people. *De Smaak te Pakken* has recently joined up with *Mijn eten*, together with the Municipal Health Department, the Hortus botanical garden, Amsterdam educational farms, and school gardens. *Mijn eten* is in turn part of the Amsterdam Core Group for Nutritional Education. This consists further of the Amsterdam Environment and Education Centre, the city Spatial Planning Department, Louise Fresco, Jaap Seidell (Vrije Universiteit), the Primary Education Council, Rabobank and political organisations including Partij voor de Dieren and GroenLinks. *Mijn eten* is recognised in this context as an exemplary project for the future, because it is integral and treats nutrition as a wide-ranging, cohesive issue. This group, guided by the Food Cabinet, completed its "vision on nutrition" paper in late December. It will soon be presented to the city and then become part of the Amsterdam's *voedselvisienota* ("Nutrition Vision Report") in June 2013. ■

Principles of *De Smaak te Pakken* in primary education

- Establishing a link between Nature and the human body.
- Attentively preparing food together, because food can be a way of expressing care and affection towards others.
- Making acquaintance with fresh, recognisably local ingredients, with supplementary products from non-local sources.
- Learning language, concepts and words by experiencing them in practice.
- Cooking and philosophising on themes such as hunger, obesity, impermanence, sustainability and fair trade.
- Reduce stress by learning focus, patience and precision.
- Boosting children's personal creativity by playing with shape, colour and flavour.

Interview conducted by Erica Meijers, who is editor-in-chief of the Dutch Green Journal de Helling and is a member of the editorial board of the Green European Journal.

From the Common Agricultural Policy to Sustainable Food Systems



Louise Knops

On March 13th the European Parliament (EP), now co-legislator on agricultural and budgetary issues, adopted its position on redesigning the CAP.

A period of intense negotiations opens-up between the Council of the EU and the EP. But the complete shift of the CAP towards an ecological transformation of agriculture is now very unlikely to take place. This will not prevent the Greens and other progressive actors to continue to prepare this transition. If the CAP can't change, can we?

Today, somewhat paradoxically, after being des-invested and discarded for centuries, agriculture is starting to be re-associated with progress; it is being looked upon as one of the key sectors that will contribute to a new economic, social and ecological paradigm.

During centuries, the symbol of a society's progress and evolution was its industrial character and its move away from agriculture. Yet, in the aftermath of World War 2, Europeans realised the strategic importance of maintaining a strong agriculture sector; to feed its own people, but also to reach a certain level of self-sufficiency *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world. As a result, the emerging European Community massively invested in communalising all agricultural models across the continent and supported them through strong intervention mechanisms (fixed prices, quotas, export subsidies, import tariffs, etc.).

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the first real symbol of European integration, was born. Today, somewhat paradoxically, after being des-invested and discarded for centuries, agriculture is starting to be re-associated with progress; it is being looked upon as one of the key sectors that will contribute to a new economic, social and ecological paradigm. Farming is being re-introduced in cities, arable land is becoming an increasingly scarce – and therefore valuable – resource, and the agricultural sector sits at the crossroads of the industrial, social and territorial revolution of our century. In times when citizens are asked to re-connect with their natural environment, farmers are in a strategic position to work with nature, rather than against it.

However, despite the overall sense of urgency in the face of current challenges, there is still a long way to go before the actors of the agricultural sector take full possession of the new role society has assigned to them. Unfortunately, and to the Greens' great disappointment, the on-going CAP reform is not going to facilitate this process, rather the opposite. The recently adopted position of the European Parliament confirms the conservative and resistant-to-change character of the CAP

A highly unequal, inefficient, unsustainable policy: a difficult child

Since its last reform in 2003, the CAP has been under increasing criticism and scrutiny from the European taxpayer. The inequalities of payments between old Member States (average 2010 payment of €7 486¹) and new Member States (average 2010 payment of € 1 552²), but also within the farmers' communities revealed the highly unfair character of what is supposed to be a farmers' support policy. The economic evidence also pointed to the fundamentally inefficient system of support in place, which increases the value of land, rather than significantly contributing to the farmers' income.³ Food scares highlighted the inability of the CAP to track down fraud and enforce efficient food traceability, and the environmental degradation directly linked to the CAP (loss of biodiversity, soil, air & water pollution, etc) confirmed its largely unsustainable character.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/funding/directaid/distribution_en.htm. See also, AGRAFACTS No15-12, 22.02.2012.

2 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/funding/directaid/distribution_en.htm. See also, AGRAFACTS No15-12, 22.02.2012.

3 As payments are calculated per hectare or land, and based on the level of production during a year of reference, they have been increasingly capitalised into land values, instead of going towards farmers' incomes.

Despite their most dreadful mistakes in designing the CAP, and despite the latter's resistance to change, Europeans don't seem ready to let it go.

Finally, the competition bias towards larger actors of the supply chain, at the expense of smaller producers, the obsession of being competitive on world markets rather than optimising the European potential (e.g. through quality labels, promotion policy, etc.), and many other fundamental flaws in the CAP structure and implementation, have all significantly darkened the image of this public policy in the eyes of European citizens. Yet, many stakeholders and decision-makers – from opposite sides of the political spectrum – fight to death to keep the CAP alive.

Resistance to change: why the CAP won't grow up

As the first child of European integration, there is a very strange – and sometimes not very rational – relationship between the CAP and its conceivers. Despite their most dreadful mistakes in designing the CAP, and despite the latter's resistance to change, Europeans don't seem ready to let it go. Perhaps, because you just don't give up on food. The Greens still hope that this huge amount of money (currently 40% of the EU budget, and €373,179 million for the period 2014-2020⁴) could be re-directed towards sustainable farming, that these funds could serve the transition that our agricultural systems crave for; that they could finally support the farmers who really need it. Who? The small farmers who haven't blindly followed the industrial path but who keep our rural areas alive; the farmers who produce more than food;

the farmers whose products are not currently sold at their real production costs; the farmers who can't compete with Chinese powder milk but who we still need in our countryside; farmers who want to change but are trapped in the vicious circle of economies of scale; young farmers, urban farmers, and many more.

The Greens still fight for this policy to be maintained, but in a fundamentally different way; from a production policy to an all-compassing food policy, re-connecting producers and consumers. On the other side of the spectrum, the conservative political forces also want to keep the CAP alive, with, they hope, as little change as possible. They fight for keeping a system in place, which has largely benefitted landowners and strong agricultural corporations, at the expense of the environment, our rural areas and our health.

In broad terms, the content of the CAP reform package embodies an archaic and productivist vision of agriculture, inherited from the post-World-War II period, but which is far from responding to the challenges of the 21st Century. Nevertheless, beyond the disappointment, and because of the far-reaching implications of agriculture for the entire society, there is hope that farmers and citizens will operate their own change.

4 Figure based on the Council conclusions of 8.02.2013 on the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020). These figures are still subject to change, as the European Parliament has not yet adopted its position.

The Greens in Belgium have been a leading figure in broadening the scope of action on food, re-connecting agriculture with the rest of economy and trying to erect sustainability as the rule along the food supply chain.



Campaigners for CAP reform pictured with Greens/ EFA MEP Bas Eickhout. Though the need for reform is obvious, many conservative and agribusiness lobbyists are working to maintain the status quo

If the CAP can't change, can we?

Re-shifting the financial resources allocated to the CAP (over €373.179 million for the period 2014-2020⁵) towards the transformation of our food systems would of course make a significant contribution to the ecological transition of our economies. The fact that this shift is now very unlikely to take place⁶ does not mean that we, citizens, politicians, activists, farmers, consumers, can't be key actors of the transition. On the contrary. There are many citizen-led actions, grassroots initiatives, and loopholes in the legislation that allow us to move a little closer to sustainable food systems.

The Greens in Belgium have been a leading figure in broadening the scope of action on food, re-connecting agriculture with the rest of economy and trying to erect sustainability as the rule along the food supply chain. Ecolo has significantly contributed to the ongoing conceptual thinking around "sustainable food systems", of which the *Conseil Fédéral du Développement Durable* (CFDD, Belgium), provides a useful definition:

We define a sustainable food system as one that realises its purpose of guaranteeing a right to food and respects food sovereignty, that makes sufficient and healthy food available for all at an affordable price, that reflects all production costs and internalises external environmental and social costs and benefits in end prices, that uses resources at their rate of recovery and that respects different aspects of the food-culture. All actors of the food chain and governments should contribute to achieve this sustainable food system.

From this broad definition, Ecolo has derived a few key ecological principles, which guides its concrete political actions in the Brussels and Wallonia Regions.

Changing the world from your plate

One of the biggest flaws of the mainstream conception of food systems is its biased focused on one side of the supply chain: production. This approach has led to a situation where agriculture

⁵ Figure based on the Council conclusions of 8.02.2013 on the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020).

These figures are still subject to change, as the European Parliament has not yet adopted its position.

⁶ The negotiations which will take place over the next months (until July 2013) between the European Parliament and the Council will unlikely reverse the trend that has been initiated after the publication of the European Commission's proposals in October 2011: a gradual watering down of the measures which would bring about significant change to the agricultural sector. The Member States in particular are likely to continue the weakening of an already unconvincing proposal.

If food has historically been such an important civilizational factor, there are good reasons to hope that the agro-food sector may be at the heart of the fundamental transition we are calling for.

has increasingly been considered like any other “industrial” sector, producing commodities at the cheapest possible price. By obfuscating agriculture’s specificities, we have managed to turn our most vital sector into an industrial machine capable of poisoning us and destroying the natural resources on which it depends. The Greens strongly oppose this vision and believe in agriculture’s exceptionalism. They believe that this sector should not be treated like any other. If food has historically been such an important civilizational factor, there are good reasons to hope that the agro-food sector may be at the heart of the fundamental transition we are calling for.

Consumers are co-producers

A second dysfunction of the currently dominant agricultural model is the increasing disconnection and fast-widening gap between producers and consumers. Demographic changes and urbanisation, together with the industrialisation of our agro-food sector, have led to a situation where most consumers have very little knowledge about the food they consume, where it comes from, how it was processed or transformed, when it should be eaten, how it should be prepared, etc. The long and complex food supply chains have obvious environmental consequences (linked to the transportation of food, etc.), but also have less obvious economic, social and cultural consequences. Under the pressure of the largest actors of the supply chain (processors and retailers), and of ever-lower prices, primary producers are forced to take increasing risks, at the expense of long-lasting traditions, our health and the environment. For this reason, the Greens have put

re-connection at the heart of their political strategy towards sustainable food systems, by promoting short supply chains, direct producer-consumer relationship and urban agriculture.

Farmers contributing to the relocalisation of agriculture should ultimately be rewarded by food prices, which should reflect all positive and negative externalities linked to its production. Until we get there and until an effective re-localisation of agriculture has taken place, the Greens focus on strengthening the producers’ position against retailers and processors, so they can have a greater say in the food price-making.

You are what you eat

Along with the industrialisation of agriculture, consumers have been the victims of an increase of pesticide and fertiliser use, a loss of nutrients (e.g. in mass production of non-seasonal foodstuffs), and an increase of salt, sugar and fat contents in the ultimate products of today’s food systems: ready-made meals and fast food. Today, nobody would question the negative impacts of these nutritional evolutions; it is estimated that more people in the world die from diet-related diseases (obesity, cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes) than of hunger. However, there are some different cultural interpretations of what is “healthy” food. Despite these differences, increasing evidence points to the nutritional advantages of eating less meat, consuming seasonal and fresh food, etc. This supports our environmental arguments on the relocalisation of agriculture, as fresh food would most likely have to originate from local rural areas, instead of being imported. Sustainable food is therefore inevitably healthy food.

The love of good food, and the full appreciation of what a meal actually represents is a key step in moving towards sustainability.

Sustainable food is quality, enjoyable food

The Greens don't have the political monopoly on healthy food. What they do have is a particularly innovative way of linking quality, sustainability and pleasure. Eating is a socially-important, culturally-significant and festive moment, which should be full of pleasure and enjoyment. The love of good food, and the full appreciation of what a meal actually represents is a key step in moving towards sustainability. By re-discovering the taste and the culture associated with food, consumers have a higher incentive to pay more attention to the food they consume, and how it should be prepared. In a multi-cultural environmental, this is also of crucial importance, as the "health" argument is not always strong enough to significantly improve deep-rooted eating habits. Overall quality food should therefore be defined as tasty, healthy, environmentally-friendly, socially-acceptable and culturally-respectful.

Food is only sustainable when it is accessible to all

All this talk could easily be interpreted as an elitist discussion, reserved to a few privileged who can afford to think about quality, while others struggle to find enough food, of whatever kind. But quality food doesn't need to be a privilege. In fact, the idea that quality & healthy food is more expensive is probably one of the most difficult myths to dispel. The overall cost – in economic but also in environmental and social terms – of industrially-produced food is far greater than the costs linked to seasonal, locally and organically-produced food. Unfortunately, for many consumers the reality is that industrially-

produced food are still cheaper when displayed in the supermarket. Sustainable eating is indeed costly, but mostly in terms of knowledge and awareness. It's about knowing exactly what to buy, how to be in touch directly with producers, where to find fresh produce. A better understanding of how food gets along from farm to fork, and a better knowledge about alternative supply possibilities (other than supermarkets) are key for households to move towards more sustainable consumption patterns.

Sustainable eating as an act of solidarity

As explained above, consumers are co-producers in the sense that they are co-responsible for the way food is produced here, but also abroad. The act of consuming therefore has fundamental implications for a country's food security and food sovereignty. We have never produced as much food, used as much land for farming, and yet counted as few farmers as today. In the space of 30 years (from 1980-2010), Belgium has lost 63% of its farms, 45% of its farmers, while the average farmland size has more than doubled.⁷ In this context, no food can be called sustainable, however high the environmental and health standards are, if its production, distribution and consumption destroys the social fabric of rural areas. There will be no sustainable food systems without the participation of its main actors: the farmers themselves. ■

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⁷ Direction Générale Statistique et Information économique, Les Chiffres Clés de L'Agriculture : L'Agriculture en Belgique en Chiffres, 2012, <http://www.statbel.fgov.be>

Brussels and Wallonia: Green pioneer projects in sustainable food systems



Louise Knops

Ideological innovation and perseverance can give birth to concrete actions contributing to the Green transformation of agriculture and food systems, despite a difficult political and institutional environment. This is currently experienced by the Belgian Greens of Ecolo in the regional governments of Wallonia and Brussels.

Although there may be some controversy on the actual job creation potential of urban agriculture, the proliferation of isolated urban initiatives and the fast-growing interest towards this activity, reveal that it will certainly play a key role in the transition of our food system.

As a major European capital, Brussels may not be the first place one would think of when discussing sustainable food systems. However, it is full of crucial actors of the transition: consumers. In the face of an increasing discrepancy between the supply of sustainable food products and demand (e.g. demand for organic products has increase by 20% between 2009-2010¹), the Regional Ministers of Brussels decided to integrate the development of sustainable food systems as a strategic political priority for the years 2009-2014.

The Green Minister of the Environment, Evelyne Huytebroeck, has seized this opportunity to initiate a strong dynamic around sustainable food, by mainly focusing on demand factors. Her strategy is structured around four main axes:

- define and develop a vision for a sustainable food system in Brussels;
- encourage the integration of sustainability criteria in canteens and other infrastructures where collective food consumption takes place (including the food service industry, i.e. restaurants, etc.);
- support a change in households' consumption patterns towards sustainable eating;
- raise awareness of the broader public on the importance and positive impacts of sustainable food.

Concretely, this has been translated into a few successful actions. Firstly, the so-called "sustainable canteen" project, launched in 2009, aims at supporting and providing a framework for canteens wishing to initiate a transition towards sustainability.

To date, the project covers 65 canteens and the ultimate goal would be to convert all public canteens to sustainability. Secondly, the Minister has given great attention to the integration of sustainability criteria in public procurements related to the agro-food sector, as a means to trigger the transition towards a sustainable food system in Brussels. Thirdly, a particular focus was put on restaurants and on how to encourage the use of sustainable food products from the kitchen to our table. In this context, the Environment Ministry was a strong supporter of the "Goûter Bruxelles" event which was the culmination of projects and initiatives combining sustainability and pleasure in food (by promoting the Slow Food Movement). Actions here covered mainly information and awareness raising campaigns.

Jobs through urban agriculture

Finally, most recently, particular attention has been put on urban agriculture, as the perfect illustration of direct producer-consumer relationships. According to a study commissioned by the research institute Greenloop, this sector would have the potential to create up to 6,000 jobs. 3,633 jobs could be created in the ecological cultivation of fruit and vegetables in Brussels, 2,379 through roof-top farming, 900 in the distribution of those urban-grown products, 395 in the food service industry (restaurants directly linked to urban farming), 190 in waste management, 100 in information and awareness-raising, and finally another 20 in advice and consulting. Although there may be some controversy on the actual job creation potential of urban agriculture, the proliferation of isolated urban initiatives and the fast-growing interest

¹ Greenloop, Université Saint Louis, Système d'Alimentation Durable : Potentiel d'Emplois en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, Juin 2012, p.27.
<http://www.evolution.be/index2.php?group=3&subgroup=18&type=karaat&lang=2>

towards this activity, reveal that it will certainly play a key role in the transition of our food system.



Green Ministers in the Brussels Regional Government Evelyne Huytebroeck and Christos Doulkeridis, who are leading the charges towards making Brussels a sustainable food capital

The Green housing Minister, Christos Doulkeridis, in charge of several training institutes for the agro-food sectors (as part of the CERIA²) and in particular of the Horticulture Institute, has been the leader behind the creation of the first food-service training centre, specifically geared towards sustainable practices. He aims at encouraging all actors of the supply chain to move towards sustainability, with a specific focus on

young people, students and the professional actors of the food service industry which alone accounts for three million meals per day in Belgium.³ This has led to conducting several awareness-raising campaigns on the CERIA campus (e.g. vegetable patches and bee-hives on campus, the production of a sustainable beer in Brussels “Les Brasseries de la Senne” and a local fruit & vegetables shop on campus.

A Walloon short supply chain centre

More than half of Belgium’s food production is concentrated in Wallonia, with 722,652 ha of farmland compared to 613,860 ha in Flanders.⁴ Wallonia’s agricultural picture is quite mixed: some traditional – yet fast-disappearing - models of production remain (e.g. in the livestock sector), but industrial agriculture has been increasing at the expense of small farms in the region’s rural areas. Organic farming has progressed over the last 30 years, mainly in the livestock sector: from 37 organic farms in 1987, to 884 in 2010.⁵ Because of the more rural character of Wallonia, one could easily expect that this region would only focus on making the “production” side of the food system more sustainable. The reality is a bit different, especially under the impulse of our Green Minister Jean-Marc Nollet, responsible (amongst others) for Sustainable Development and Energy.

2 The Brussels education and research centre on the food sectors.

3 Figures received from the cabinet of Minister Doulkeridis.

4 Direction Générale Statistique et Information économique, Les Chiffres Clés de L’Agriculture : L’Agriculture en Belgique en Chiffres, 2012, <http://www.statbel.fgov.be>

5 Direction Générale Statistique et Information économique, Les Chiffres Clés de L’Agriculture : L’Agriculture en Belgique en Chiffres, 2012, <http://www.statbel.fgov.be>



The Wallonia region is the source of a majority of Belgium's agricultural produce. With the efforts of Walloon Minister for Sustainable Development Jean-Marc Nollet (pictured), it is becoming a leader in organic and sustainable farming

Following the same observation as for Brussels, i.e. an increasing discrepancy between the demand for sustainable food and its supply, Minister Nollet has recently launched the creation of a "Short Supply Chain Centre". One of the biggest problems today in the organisation of alternative supply chains is the lack of coordination between the individual actions taking place at different locations and times, resulting in a mismatch between demand and supply. To overcome this problem, the first Short Supply Chain Centre of Wallonia aims at pursuing the following missions:

- being a contact and reference point for all actors already involved in short supply chains, or those willing to be involved;
- creating and disseminating a catalogue reviewing all actors and actions of short supply chains in Wallonia;
- linking and reinforcing the different short supply chain actors;
- monitoring the new initiatives emerging in Wallonia but also worldwide;
- promoting the emergence of innovative supply chain projects;
- creating a documentation centre, easily accessible to all interested groups;
- establishing an innovative typology of short supply chains;
- defining criteria to facilitate the application of the concept to other sectors;
- formulating recommendations for supporting short supply chains in Wallonia;
- reinforcing the link with the Region of Brussels to meet the so-far unmet demand in sustainable locally-produced food.

This specific action derives from a long-tradition of forward-looking and attempts to make Wallonia a pioneer region in the establishment of a sustainable food system. In the 1990s, one of Ecolo's leading figures in the field of agriculture – and today's President of the Wallonia Parliament – made a significant contribution to the conceptual thinking

For the first time in Belgium (and possibly Europe), sustainable food producers and distributors had a competitive advantage compared to the others in complying with criteria defined in a call for tender.

on sustainable food chains, and to its concrete application on the ground. At the time working as civil-servant for the province of Chevetogne, Patrick Dupriez was in charge of a recreational centre, which welcomed school groups several times a year. Back then, the idea that school canteens are a strategic place – from a pedagogy but also quantitative perspective – to raise awareness on sustainable, healthy food, was not widespread at all. Convinced that he could significantly improve the quality of meals served in this facility and contribute to the transition, Patrick Dupriez introduced food sustainability criteria in the centre's calls for tender towards the food-service industry. The criteria were defined in such a way that only some local producers would be able to win the call and put organic and quality labels in a more favourable position.⁶ For the first time in Belgium (and possibly Europe), sustainable food producers and distributors had a competitive advantage compared to the others in complying with criteria defined in a call for tender. This episode had some deep implications for the region itself and also reinforced Ecolo's commitment to the transition towards sustainable food systems. ■

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6 The call for tender can be accessible here: http://www.etopia.be/IMG/pdf/cahier_des_charge_repas_collectivite_chevetogne_2000-2.pdf



Alexander Bonde

EU agricultural policy at the crossroads: the vision of a Green regional minister for rural affairs

The German Greens won the premiership of the German land (region) of Baden-Württemberg in 2011, giving them a unique opportunity to implement green policies across a range of areas. For food and agriculture, this meant an ambitious strategy based on high ecological quality standards, versus the industrialisation of our natural resources.

On the opposing side stands a well-organised lobby, consisting of large agricultural producers, the chemicals industry and seed companies, pushing for a continuation of “business as usual” in agricultural policy regardless of the consequences for natural resources or for employment.

Agricultural policy in Europe is facing immense challenges. On the one hand there is rising consumer demand for high quality food produced increasingly in line with strict ecological, social and animal welfare standards; at the same time, the past ten years have seen an unprecedented switch to industrialised modes of production in both arable and livestock farming in many parts of Europe. The consequences include rising numbers of farmers abandoning their farms, a dramatic reduction in biodiversity in the countryside and a never-ending series of scandals associated with the food industry.

Quality not quantity

The current debate around the reform of European agricultural policy vividly illustrates this conflict. Large groups within society have been working for many years to move our farming system towards sustainable management of the resources of our unique landscapes in harmony with the environment, the climate and animal welfare. Under the banner “Quality not quantity” (*“Klasse statt Masse”*), they voice their support for developing a competitive food production sector focused on value creation through high-quality products with both national and international appeal. This requires a reduction in the use of pesticides and synthetic fertilisers that are potentially harmful to the soil, to water and to biodiversity. It entails rejecting the use of genetically modified plants because of the high risks posed to human beings and the environment. The reform of European agricultural policy should involve linking public payments – that is, payments made from our taxes – to the delivery of social goods. For the

countryside is comprised not just of fields and woods: it is also crucially important in economic and social terms. The rural population contributes significantly to the preservation of unique landscapes. They not only produce high-quality foodstuffs and renewable raw materials, they also create valuable capital for nature conservation and tourism. These immensely important services are not properly compensated through the market, and it therefore falls to society to acknowledge and reward those who provide them. This approach is behind not only the “greening” of agricultural payments proposed by the European Commission, but also most of the subsidies under the so-called second pillar of European agricultural policy.

On the opposing side stands a well-organised lobby, consisting of large agricultural producers, the chemicals industry and seed companies, pushing for a continuation of “business as usual” in agricultural policy regardless of the consequences for natural resources or for employment. Their strategic focus for the European agricultural sector is consistently oriented towards exports and global markets, and they are prepared to accept the costs in terms of erosion of the social and natural foundations of farming both here in Europe and in those newly industrialised and developing countries whose markets they want to capture. Their aim is an increasingly intensive production system involving industrialised models of arable and livestock farming and high pesticide and fertiliser use. They strenuously resist the linking of European public finances to the provision of wider social goods. This means, however, that they are jeopardising the productive basis of more than two-thirds of our farms.

One of my first decisions was to re-activate the support system for farms switching over from conventional to organic production in order to ensure that such a change would continue to make economic sense for farmers.

A Green magic triangle

The demand for organic and regional produce (which has been continuously rising for some years now in the German food retail sector), consistently rising consumer pressure for humane animal husbandry, the growth of tourism in rural areas with rich landscapes - all point towards a different path. What might be called the “magic triangle” of agricultural production models, nature conservation and tourism all working in harmony demonstrates the opportunities, sadly underexploited to date, offered by our native rural economy. For the great wealth-creating potential of the countryside can only be mobilised if the economic, social and ecological interests of the various rural sectors are no longer developed independently of one another but rather brought into alignment so that they create new synergies. The flight to maize monocultures for energy or animal fodder production, or livestock factories with tens of thousands of hens or pigs, both restrict profits in the rural economy to a small number of businesses, destroy the natural capital of landscapes that have developed over centuries and render whole regions unattractive to their own populations as well as to tourists.

A farming policy that takes full account of its responsibilities, by way of contrast, needs to strengthen the economic basis of the many businesses still in family ownership. It needs to use incentives to enable them to gain a steady income through high-quality, locally-sold organic produce while preserving the natural resource base of the region.

Baden-Württemberg promotes switching to organic farming

This is what we are doing in Baden-Württemberg. The Red-Green coalition governing the region [*Land*] promotes both organic farming and GMO-free production of food and animal fodder, and it supports the conservation of nature and the environment. One of my first decisions was to re-activate the support system for farms switching over from conventional to organic production in order to ensure that such a change would continue to make economic sense for farmers. For it is especially in the changeover period that organic farms need help. In addition, we provide support for education, research and marketing in the organic farming sector through our Organic Action Plan [*Bio-Aktionsplan*].

Baden-Württemberg joined the European Network of GMO-free Regions on 10 October 2012. This sends out a clear political signal against the introduction of genetic engineering in agriculture and in favour of safe food and animal fodder. We have also extended the quality label “Baden-Württemberg” so that products bearing this mark will soon have to be GMO-free in terms of both cultivation and feeding. The publicly-owned research institutes in the region now source only GMO-free fodder, and new tenants of publicly-owned land have to pledge that they will practise only GMO-free cultivation. This helps to increase the sales of produce from our region, as ever-growing numbers of consumers want to buy locally-produced foodstuffs. They are thereby supporting a vibrant diversity of tastes, and helping at the same time to determine how the farming industry can contribute to the environment and animal welfare.

We have also set out a new path for tourism. For example, we are currently developing a sustainability check for the sector, supporting an upgrading of the energy performance of the hospitality industry stock, and promoting environmentally friendly, nature-based holiday options through the “Green South” project. ■

Alexander Bode is Minister for Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection in the German Federal State of Baden-Württemberg



Birgit Weiss

Organic farming and agricultural movements in Spain

Against the backdrop of Spain's desperate economic situation, the organic industry is one source of positive news. However despite its potential, significant barriers to its development remain.

Since its beginnings,
Spanish organic
production has always
been export-oriented,
mainly due to strong
consumer demand
from Central European
countries.

In 2011 Spain was the number one EU Member State concerning the number of hectares dedicated to organic farming.¹ It increased by 11.76% that year and now includes 1,845,039 hectares. Almost all Spanish regions show increases in the area dedicated to this type of farming. The number of organic farmers reached the figure of 32,837, an increase of 18.23% over the previous year. Cereals, with 178,061 hectares, represent the biggest part in terms of cultivated area within the Spanish territory. Since its beginnings, Spanish organic production has always been export-oriented, mainly due to strong consumer demand from Central European countries. It is estimated that 80% of the production is destined for export, mainly for EU countries (89.2%), especially Germany, France and the UK.²

Spanish tastes for organic

The average national consumption of organic products is estimated at 35.4 kilos per year³ which indicates that every Spaniard consumes 35.4 kilos of organic products and spends about €29 euros on that demand. Organic foods now represent 1.9% of the total expenditure on food made by Spanish households (which is an increase in comparison to the 1.7% of the previous year).

At the same time, during the past year, spending on organic products has increased by 6.3%, with an increase of 8.4% in organic vegetables (these figures are particularly important in the context of a decrease of food expenditure of 1.6% for the same period).⁴

The products most in demand are mainly eggs, olive oil, vegetables and fruits. Interestingly enough (in comparison to other EU countries), in Spain we can therefore observe that organic or ecological products are mainly seen as vegetarian food, since organic meat or animal products are rarely or not available in most organic shops (they are mostly distributed via Internet from farms in the northern parts of the country), and due to its scarce distribution they are quite expensive.

Organising organic

The profiles of organic farmers are quite diverse within the country's territory. From the huge extensions of agriculture (vegetables, fruits, olives) in Andalucia, to small farmers in the Valencian region, cereal production in the inner parts of Spain, and animal husbandry (dairy farming in the North, sheep and goat husbandry in the interior and less inhabited parts of the country).

1 Ministerio de Agricultura, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente (18/09/2012):

<http://www.magrama.gob.es/es/prensa/noticias/la-superficie-inscrita-destinada-a-la-agricultura-ecol%C3%B3gica-en-espa%C3%B1a-aumenta-un-11,76-por-ciento-y-alcanza-la-cifra-de-1.845.039-hect%C3%A1reas/tcm7-220503-16> (6/3/13).

2 <http://www.biomanantial.com/exportacion-productos-ecologicos-a-200-es.html>

3 http://www.mercasa.es/noticias/post/fuerte_aumento_del_consumo_de_alimentos_ecologicos

4 Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, y Medio Rural y Marino (01/04/2009 to 31/03/2010)

http://www.mercasa.es/files/multimedios/Alimentos_ecologicos.pdf (6/3/13).

In general, the current organic certification system favours the big productions, and demands the same (or more) paperwork of small family farms.

Therefore, also the distribution of organic products depends on the structural conditions of the region: In regions with monocultures, the distribution is easier to organise (and is mostly dedicated to exportation) than in the regions with intensive farming distributed throughout the area and where the region is at a distance from major markets. Local farmers' markets exist but very often it is quite difficult for organic farmers first to enter and second to compete with conventional farming. Lately, there are local initiatives popping up all over the territory organising markets that only or mainly offer ecological products. Supermarkets of foreign origin offer organic products, but in most Spanish supermarket chains you will not find any goods which are organically produced.

The delicate economic situation in Spain seems not to be jeopardising the sector as a whole until now but makes it harder to invest in a sustainable project; although at the same time it seems to be a possible way out of high unemployment rates (especially of young people) due to the economic crisis in Spain. The problem is that many of those small organic projects lack initial funding or are started without any entrepreneurial perspective, so that there is quite some fluctuation to be observed.

Overcoming barriers to expansion



Could the further expansion of Spain's organic sector be a solution to that country's economic problems ?

Another obstacle is the Spanish system of Organic Certification which differs from one region to the other. While for example there are a big variety of organic products offered in Catalonia, in the neighbouring region of Valencia, with a similar climate and landscape, many farmers experience bureaucratic problems or disincentives to regularise their organic production. In general, the current organic certification system favours the big productions, and demands the same (or more) paperwork of small family farms.

Partly (but not only) due to this situation, some of the farmers' and consumer movements are looking for new ways of ensuring the quality of their production and products. One solution is to buy directly from the producer, yet it is not always a sustainable one, or does not bring enough customers to the farmer, or means quite some effort in marketing which is not always possible for a small farmer lacking good infrastructure. So another solution which

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recently is discussed at meetings of ecological movements within the organic sector is some form of Participatory Certification: “the process of generating credibility presupposes the joint participation of all segments interested in ensuring the quality of the final product and the production process”.

Another obstacle for (organic) agriculture and farming in Spain is the policy of the Spanish authorities in favour of GMOs. Whereas across Europe an increasing number of countries are limiting or prohibiting genetically modified production, the Spanish authorities are welcoming experimental and/or commercial projects including genetically modified crops which in other EU countries would not be allowed. Yet slowly but steadily, municipalities and regions all over Spain begin to understand the threat to their local agriculture – still a very important sector in rural Spain – and declare themselves GMO-free zones.⁵

Bottom-up initiatives

Finally, I'd like to present four examples of movements in the Spanish organic sector which represent current developments and resistances:

1) An increasing number of *networks of seed exchange* to contribute to the conservation of agro-biodiversity, organised within the national “Red de Semillas” network;

2) *Agroecological movements* developed on a local or regional level, e.g. the Agroecology Network of Castellón (XAC). In general, it is a network for any kind of information related to agriculture and ecology, and it organises trainings and workshops, and other events such as seed exchanges and organic markets;

3) Recently the *Food Sovereignty* movement, related to the *Vía Campesina* small farmers movement is gaining attention throughout Spain;

4) *Food or Consumer cooperatives* appear within those movements, or in the context of the 15M movement, on the one hand, in order to self-organise the distribution of organic food, and on the other hand, to create a shorter distance between the producers and the consumers; both also contributing to more competitive prices of organic goods, especially important in times of economic crisis. ■

Birgit Weiss is an Austrian living in Spain. Her background is in Political Science and Intercultural Relations, yet in Spain she started her own company in the Organic Food sector. Last year Birgit and her partner transformed their business into a Food Cooperative. She is also active in the Green Movement, mainly in civic networks.

⁵ <http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/gmo-free-regions/spain.html> (6/3/13).



Kostas Loukeris

Poverty, food and citizens' responses in Greece

If “you are what you eat” than what happens when you don’t eat? In Greece, the economic crisis is forcing a rethink of people’s relationship with food, and the consequences are positive.

The “new poor” in Greece are multiplying day by day. One should not be overcome with a feeling of hopelessness as initiatives to counterbalance this situation are also expanding.

The first time I travelled to Western Europe in the 1980s, I was surprised by – among other things – the fact that fruits and vegetables looked so beautiful and at the same time they were tasteless. Their shape was geometrically perfect and their colour as if painters had been engaged in their making. After some years in the then European Community, Greek vegetables improved in shape and colour but lost their taste. Gone were the days one could smell a funny shaped cucumber from meters away. Today most cucumbers are as if they are industrial products. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are “seasonless” thanks to green houses, with less taste and of course at a much higher price.

A food culture being lost

After almost 30 years of Greece's participation in the European Union, Greece is no longer an agricultural country. Greece depends on food imports. One can find in Greece lemons from Argentina, onions from Egypt and oranges from Morocco. At the same time one can observe everywhere in Athens and other cities lemon trees full of unpicked lemons. While the infamous Mediterranean diet “conquered” the world it was abandoned by Greeks. Just to get an idea, Greek children were until very recently second in the world in child obesity while US children won the “gold medal”.

The on-going crisis though seems to have altered the food landscape and eating habits in the country. With an unemployment rate of more than 30% and more than 400,000 children living in poverty, issues related to food have taken a place of acute

importance in everyday life. The “new poor” in Greece are multiplying day by day. One should not be overcome with a feeling of hopelessness as initiatives to counterbalance this situation are also expanding. Family and community ties are re-established and strengthened while a sense of solidarity is gaining momentum.

The response from the community

Non-for-profit organisations aimed at providing food to the needy are mushrooming. Boroume, meaning “we can”, has brought together more than 200 companies that supply food, 25 hotels and 650 volunteers. Food that would be thrown out, either because it is not fresh enough for particular customers or because of the proximity of their expiration date, is supplied to people with immediate need. Boroume today helps today up to 6,000 people in Athens with approximately 5,000 portions of food on a weekly basis. “Boroume” collaborates with municipalities, schools and a number of foundations that help the needy.

A well-known TV and radio station has brought together most of Greece's supermarkets and the wide network of the Greek Orthodox Church in having customers donate food, medicines and even toys. As customers approach the exit of their supermarket, they are asked to donate part of what they just purchased. So far approximately 1,700,000 kilos of food have been donated through this initiative. The Athens Archdiocese which involves about 3,000 volunteers supplies over 10,000 portions of food on

This message serves as a response to the preachers of neo-liberalism who thought that the “free market” will do its job. Well, they should have known better.

a daily basis to the needy, regardless of faith or national background.

The so-called “Social groceries” are opening one after the other, operated by Municipalities, Churches, NGOs, political organisations and various activists' groups. Single parent families, the unemployed, the elderly, pensioners who saw their pensions disappear are among the beneficiaries of such initiatives.

Bring Greeks closer to the land

The “potato movement”, meant to reconnect farmers and consumers while at the same time doing away with middlemen, has opened up space for all kinds of networks to supply foods. Greeks realised that the internet offers them a huge and unused space to “do business” in an alternative way. To give you a couple of examples, I have been buying my lentils, beans and chickpeas through such a network built by friends. Yesterday, I bought 10 kilos of organic oranges at a really low price that I expect to arrive in Athens on Monday. More and more people through word of mouth become part of similar attempts to find things cheaper while at the same time giving a political message. This message serves as a response to the preachers of neo-liberalism who thought that the “free market” will do its job. Well, they should have known better. Part of the ruling elite in Greece involves those with vested interest in keeping food cartels alive. There has been no government in Greece with the political will to fight against this form of theft and it comes as no surprise that the Troika has not voiced a single comment against this practice.



Will local Greek markets emerge as winners from the economic crisis?

In a similar fashion, urban farming is becoming fashionable nowadays in Athens. Abandoned pieces of land in the greater area of the capital are being used by neighbours and friends who plant and care for their seasonal vegetables. Traditional Greek seeds are usually offered for free by relevant initiatives while at the same time elders' “farming knowledge” is becoming popular once again. More and more people are aware of local seeds, organic agriculture and the need to do away with pesticides and chemical overdose.

Supporting the local economy

Last but not least, there is a clear tendency towards the “renationalisation” of food preferences. Greek flags proudly appear on the packages of many “made in Greece” products. Buying Greek translates for many compatriots as “keeping jobs alive” and “helping the Greek economy”. This process of ‘renationalisation’

comes together with feelings of indifference if not animosity towards products from abroad and especially from "our donors". Gone are the days of the outward-looking and rather cosmopolitan attitude of Greek customers in their food preferences. The vast majority responds to the orchestrated singling out by behaving as a... "singled out". The emphasis in the traditional "Greek salad" is on the Greek part of it!

Poverty stricken Greece is on the one hand rejecting the cure while it is reacting to austerity. We all now know that nothing will look like yesterday in Greece and that does not only apply to the PIGS' zone. The days of plenitude and consumerism have given way to calls for the "daily bread". There is a story from antiquity that talks about a man who was drowning. While he was sinking he was calling goddess Athena for her divine help. A passer-by saw him, stopped and responded to his calls by saying "while asking for Athena's help, move your hands". In today's Greece, we now know that we have to move our hands and swim. And slowly but steadily we are doing it. ■

Kostas Loukeris is President of the Greek Green Institute



Thomas Lines

Why farmers still struggle when food prices rise

One of the major drivers of change in the agricultural sector has been fluctuations in the price of different commodities. For developing countries, such changes have had a disastrous impact and urgent steps need to be taken to return their agricultural sectors to a sustainable footing.

The last six years have produced severe shocks to global food prices and supplies. This was felt especially hard by the poorest countries and the most vulnerable people.

In the debate about those shocks, it is generally assumed that food prices have reached their highest ever levels and are unlikely to fall back far. However, that runs counter to the volatile history of the commodities trade, and of basic food prices in particular.

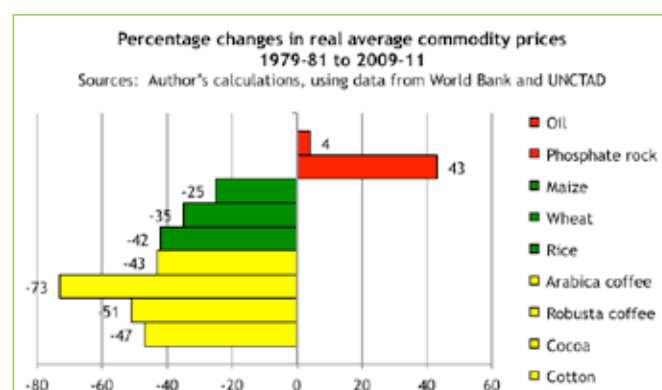
A closer look at food prices

Close examination of the recent price changes reveals a rather different story – but one that may be even more far-reaching. So what has happened to the prices of the world's food and agricultural products? And what do those changes imply?

These questions are examined in a new paper from the British think-tank, Green House, called "Primary Commodity Prices and Global Food Security: Why farmers still struggle when food prices rise".

It investigates the movements of 24 global commodity prices since the last time there was a big commodity price boom, in the late 1970s, to see what can be learnt about the economy of food and agriculture. To take increases in other prices into account, the price changes were set against the average prices of manufactured goods, using the World Bank's Index of the Unit Value of Manufactured Goods.

Fig. 1 shows the results of this study for nine important agriculture-related commodities. They include two minerals (oil and phosphates), the world's three most important cereal crops (rice, maize and wheat) and four tropical export crops, which are vital to the foreign trade of many poor countries.



An uneven change

It turns out that over this period, the real prices of the three cereals did *not* rise sharply but moved roughly in line with manufactures. The price of rice – the world's most important foodstuff – actually fell significantly in relation to manufactured goods. There are hardly any signs here of a "Peak Food" phenomenon, equivalent to Peak Oil: these market prices do not provide evidence of any substantial long-term shortage of basic foods.

On the other hand, the prices of oil and phosphates (as well as other fertilisers) did rise much more than the cereal prices. And these are the leading inputs in modern agriculture. The changes seen in their prices lend clear support to the Peak Oil theory –

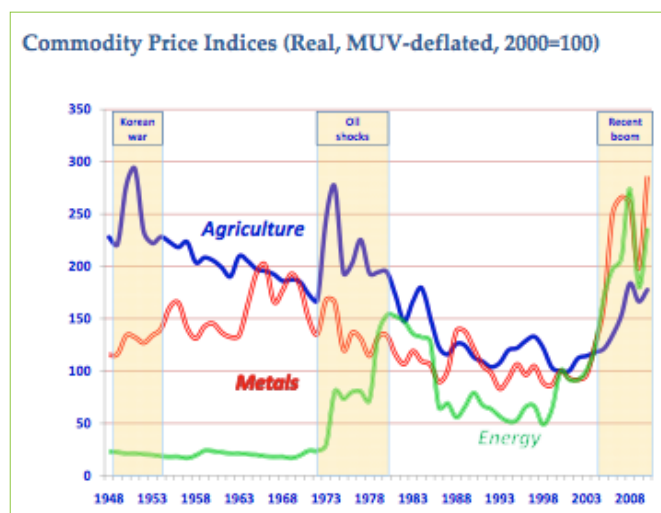
With the sudden increase in cereal prices in 2007-08, the aid agencies' advice to rely on world markets for food security, while earning revenue from commodity exports, equally suddenly failed.

and also what might be called "peak" fertilisers and other minerals.

A background factor, which is not often mentioned, is the depressing effect on world grain prices caused during the 1980s and 1990s by the gradual reduction of U.S. and European Union cereal stocks. This was due to changes in agricultural policy. The long process of sales ended shortly before the price spike of 2007-08. The corresponding pressure on developing countries to liberalise their agricultural policies and open their markets to imports was associated with the offloading of these stocks.

A steady post-war decline

Fig. 2 shows the differences in price trends of agricultural, metal and energy products over a much longer period, going right back to the 1940s and also "deflated" by the same World Bank index. It indicates that real agricultural prices have been declining over the six decades since then, but those of energy products (such as oil and coal) rose considerably.



In developing countries the recent food and commodity price shocks were transmitted from the world economy. The poorest and least developed countries depend on commodity markets almost by definition, because they produce few other goods that they can export. Many of their exports are of agricultural products such as cotton and coffee. And many of these crops, such as coffee, cocoa and cotton, fell in price when compared to manufactured goods – and most of all the robusta variety of coffee, which is produced in many small, poor African countries.

The impact on developing countries

These developments are especially dispiriting for the numerous countries where food imports grew, under pressure from the cheap U.S. and European cereal exports. With the sudden increase in cereal prices in 2007-08, the aid agencies' advice to rely on world markets for food security, while earning revenue from commodity exports, equally suddenly failed.

That greatly increased those countries' commercial vulnerability. Their balances of payments would have been in better shape if they had grown enough cereals instead of importing them, and produced and exported less cocoa, sugar, coffee and similar crops.

Taken together, this evidence has serious implications for the future of agriculture. It suggests not so much a crisis of agriculture or food supplies in general as one of intensive, mineral- and chemical-dependent agriculture in particular. Farmers and farm workers are unable to profit from higher crop prices because of the faster-growing costs of inputs, which can also be a big drain on a country's balance of payments.

The food price shocks, and the failure of farmers and rural workers to benefit much from higher prices, are elements of a wider agricultural crisis.

The generational consequences of this crisis

This has created a crisis of agricultural incomes, and consequently an ageing farming population and a worldwide problem of finding a new generation of farmers. Agriculture has become so poorly paid that young people in countries at all levels of development are going into other lines of work rather than following their parents on to family farms. Farming populations are growing older and there is a danger that, eventually, not enough food will be grown because there are not enough farming people left to grow it.

I know of no systematic research on this, but the anecdotal evidence is overwhelming: in country after country – Kenya, Nigeria, China, France, the U.K., to name but a few – one hears of an ageing agricultural population and the refusal of young people to stay on farms. I have even heard of it in relation to South Korea, where agricultural subsidies are some of the highest in the world.

The need for a new approach

This surely demonstrates that it is time for a completely new approach to agriculture and food security. The food price shocks, and the failure of farmers and rural workers to benefit much from higher prices, are elements of a wider agricultural crisis. Dependence on unstable global markets, the growing uniformity of the world's main foods, and vulnerability to shocks appearing from those markets, are all features of this problem.

If we continue further down this path, we only risk a further increase in the external vulnerability of

many countries. They need to be protected from world price shocks in order to reduce the risk of these events recurring, and to decrease their severity if and when they do occur.

In this light, the Green House paper offers this general guidance on future priorities:

- reduce the reliance of agriculture on oil, agro-chemicals and mineral fertilisers;
- review the balance between domestic food production and crops for export;
- reduce the reliance for food supplies on rice, maize and wheat – the major globally traded cereals.

It suggests the following series of policies in support of these goals:

- in food and agriculture, give precedence to trade with neighbouring countries and to domestic trade;
- permit greater use of tariffs and other border controls in agricultural trade;
- provide incentives to encourage the production and consumption of traditional crops and especially those which are *little* traded internationally – of which, in most countries, there are very many;
- reduce reliance on mineral and chemical fertilisers and crop-protection agents, by promoting green manures, agro-forestry and other ecologically sustainable techniques;
- use both modern and traditional methods of these sorts to build up natural resilience and sustainability.

A shock-proof system

A concerted attempt to encourage farmers to build on their own knowledge, and to promote traditional foodstuffs and ecological ways of farming, would help to overcome these problems. It would reduce vulnerability to imported market shocks, while the foreign exchange costs of agriculture would be reduced through the lesser use of imported inputs.

Farmers and agricultural workers would benefit more fully from higher crop prices because fewer inputs would have to be bought. Their production costs would be lower, and they would have more money to spend and could invest more.

Until recently, all these questions were overlooked by most agricultural research. They are still ignored in the mainstream debate on agriculture and food security.

But the inadequacies of the world's dominant farming system have been laid bare since the 2008 crisis. We need to find ways to insulate vulnerable countries from world market shocks and build on already known methods – a greater variety of staple crops, traditional farming techniques, agro-ecology – to create a food system which is *economically*, as well as ecologically, more resilient and sustainable. ■

Thomas Lines has followed the commodity markets for more than 30 years, as a financial journalist, a university lecturer and a consultant. His book, Making Poverty: A History, is published by Zed Books

Never closer Union? The British test



Edouard Gaudot

Britain's turbulent relationship with the EU continues, and the sources of these troubles are deep and historic. However the solution is not to simply bid the UK farewell, as that would harm everyone. But can we meet the demands of Cameron and Co without wrecking the Union?

Today, as the tools of law are being used to create Europe's unity, the UK's idiosyncratic historical resistance to any kind of European order stands once again as an impediment to the continent's political integration.

In a context of an economic crisis and with public finances under stress, the on-going round of negotiations over the next EU Budget and the European legislation for the regulation of the financial industry have taken the British debate on Europe to a new level. Europe has too few friends in British politics. The process of EU integration even prompted the founding of a political party claiming to fight for the country's independence: UKIP was founded in 1993 as a right-wing offspring of the diverse "Anti-Federalist League" – a political platform set up in 1991 with the aim of fielding candidates opposed to the Maastricht Treaty.

Even during the leadership of Tony Blair, the Labour Party has always carefully measured its unenthusiastic support for the European idea and integration, while the Tories are the ones who made Britain European. It took a Conservative Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, to start the rapprochement with the European Economic Community, out of strategic interests in the wake of the Suez debacle. It took another Conservative Parliament and Government led by Edward Heath to negotiate British entry into the EU in 1973. 20 years later, the Treaty that provoked UKIP's nationalist reaction was negotiated and signed by a Conservative Prime Minister, John Major, heir of Conservative icon Margaret Thatcher. As a result, the Tories are considered the enemy by UKIP. Today, their pressure on David Cameron and his party is stronger than ever.

Ironically, in spite of all that, the Conservatives have never felt much warmth for the European project and always tried to deny its dimension beyond the Single Market.

Un-European Spirit?

Truly, the UK's situation in Europe always had something peculiar to it. Is it the geography, stupid? Well indeed, but why should "being an island" degrade into "insularity" – in other words, narrow-mindedness in the name of world-openness? At the heart of Britain's attitude one may find some delusion of invincibility. Since 1066 when William the Conqueror, the duke of Normandy (and thus French mind you), was victorious at the battle of Hastings, England has repelled every invasion launched by successive continental superpowers – be it the Spanish Habsburgs, Napoleon's Empire or the Nazis, to name a few. Every attempt at unifying Europe by the tools of arms has failed; sometimes bogged down in the Russian steppes yet each time sunk by the Royal Navy.

Today, as the tools of law are being used to create Europe's unity, the UK's idiosyncratic historical resistance to any kind of European order stands once again as an impediment to the continent's political integration.

Britons have something of an erratic relationship with Europe. Sometimes, like in the 1940's, they feel so much part of it and are capable of envisaging a political union with their French archrival, presuming that they will cordially snarl at it. When the Treaty of Rome is signed in 1957 they opted out, only to finally jump on the European bandwagon at the first enlargement.

Britain's horizon is the ocean. "Rule Britannia" is an 18th century patriotic song associated with the Royal

Yet, as the possibility of Britain falling off the European ship turns from mere speculation or federalist wild dream to actual prospect, one should ponder the loss.

Navy and a colonial agenda hardly in disguise. In Orwell's *1984*, the UK is in union with the US and the Commonwealth under the same totalitarian regime, distinct from continental Eurasia. Indeed, the British transatlantic alignment often stands in the way of Europe's construction.

The general perception, and not only in France, is that London is only an American Trojan horse – a perception duly reinforced by Tony Blair's servile support for Bush's Second Gulf War, or when Obama recently declared the "special relationship" subordinate to the UK's membership of the EU.

But this is a shortsighted vision of history. Washington had from the start of the European project other very faithful allies within the European Community, and the British are by many accounts much more European than American. At least in their political culture. Contrary to Americans and in spite of Thatcher's reign, national solidarity, government regulation of public affairs, health, education and redistribution public policies, multilateralism and the rule of international law rather than military action, etc., still rank high on British social and political values. Every comparative study¹ of European and American values show how deep the rift goes and where it actually is: in the Atlantic, not the Channel. The welfare state was designed by the UK's Beveridge report much more than by Roosevelt's New Deal. Undoubtedly, Britons are Europeans.

Yet, as the possibility of Britain falling off the European ship turns from mere speculation or federalist wild dream to actual prospect, one should ponder the loss. Truly, the European vessel would gain a lot more maneuverability: banking regulation, Financial Transaction Tax, diplomatic and military integration (with smaller capacity though), institutional reinforcement, etc. Were the British hurdle eventually lifted, there are legions of fields in which the EU could boldly advance. But for all its subtlety, the loss would be real. Parliamentarism, *Magna Carta*, *Habeas Corpus*, Bill of Rights, secret ballot, welfare state... the British contribution to European political values is beyond measure. In addition, its international weight and prestige brings a lot more clout to the EU as a global player.

From a federalist point of view, a British exit from the Union would be excellent news. From a European, cosmopolitan politically liberal point of view, it's a depressing prospect.

For a European federalist, it's a quandary.

"My way or the highway"

Evidently, the UK's democratic tradition is real, ancient and its respect for the rule of law, pluralism and fundamental rights mirrors the EU's. But instead of acknowledging the legacy, Britain smugly considers its own tradition as so superior that it refuses to accept that the EU could offer a better

¹ Those from pewglobal.org/ are consistent, but one could also refer to europeanvaluesstudy.eu/



David Cameron delivering his long-awaited speech on the UK's relationship with the EU

way to enforce these values. This is the reason for yet another opt-out sought by the UK, in the field of Justice and Home Affairs this time. After this there might be not much left to opt-out of, except from the Union itself.

Last January, this prospect was laid down in a much-awaited speech by David Cameron.² But in spite of the drama around it, his address was traditional to the point of dullness. David Cameron merely repeated in his own words what many (with the notable nuance of Tony Blair³) said before him: the nation-state and the single market are the alpha and omega of Britain's relationship to Europe.

The long introduction, with some failed attempts at Churchillian accents, on British history and geography and the shared history of European nations is only the usual way to hint at British greatness and its uniqueness.

Typical of the current mood, the obsession with global competition may not be specific to the UK, but instead of justifying a drive towards more integration, it is used here as a reason for a looser structure. In his time, Gordon Brown was even more blunt in describing an EU that was too big to be efficient at defining and implementing policies, while too small to be relevant on the global stage.⁴

But there's more of course to the EU than the Single Market. And Britain cannot hide from it anymore. While a Brussels-based observer may find Europe's political integration process too slow, in the eyes of a British Prime Minister the pace continues to accelerate. *"The problems in the eurozone are driving fundamental change in Europe".*⁵

Hence the one big novelty in this speech: the announcement of an "in-out" referendum on Britain's membership of the EU before the end of 2017, conditional on the Conservatives winning the next election due in 2015. In politics, pandering to your base is always an easy play and the reactions from Tory backbenchers cheering him on must have been comforting to Cameron. But it actually shows

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2013/jan/23/david-cameron-eu-speech-referendum>

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21030153>

⁴ http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/2/A/global_europe_131005.pdf

⁵ In Cameron's 23/01/13 speech – all quotes in italic following are from this speech.

All in all, yielding to an increasing trend towards nationalist populism in the ranks of British Conservatives, driven by a UKIP rising influence, is first and foremost a sign of weak leadership.

how worried Cameron is about losing ground, both on the European and the domestic fronts. All in all, yielding to an increasing trend towards nationalist populism in the ranks of British Conservatives, driven by a UKIP rising influence, is first and foremost a sign of weak leadership.

Unraveling the European order? In fact, the referendum will be held on a new European package, not on the current state of the Union. In the meantime, Cameron hopes to secure a better deal for the UK along the lines defined in his speech – what he calls his *“vision for a new European Union fit for the 21st century”*.

“Competitiveness, Flexibility, Repatriation, Accountability, Fairness”, the 5 principles for a better deal laid out by David Cameron in his EU speech all point to one single idea: nation-states and their institutions are the one and only legitimate level of action. Constraining its Member States’ movements, the EU is just an overly bureaucratic inefficient structure that is trying to impose harmonisation, i.e. “one-size-fits-all solutions” to very diverse countries and situations, without any democratic legitimacy. No mention at any point of the European Parliament: national parliaments are the only source of democratic accountability. *“It is national parliaments, which are, and will remain, the true source of real democratic legitimacy and accountability in the EU.”* It is traditional misplaced British disdain for what is presently the only body of democratic accountability that reaches beyond the borders of nation states.

“Flexibility” is code for “Europe à la carte” and a plea to generalise the practice of national opt-outs. *“Countries are different. They make different choices”* (about the working time directive, for instance). [...] *The EU must be able to act with the speed and flexibility of a network, not the cumbersome rigidity of a bloc.*” Evidently, this would be the enshrinement of intergovernmentalism and the end of any kind of “community method”.

“You change or I go!” Echoing some marital dispute: there is a strong chance that a deal between Britain and its partners is impossible.

But what’s to change? Most of the EU regulations that British Eurosceptics don’t like pertain to the single market and environmental policies where the UK never considered opting out.

This classic piece of British Euro-bashing should give reasons for the Europeans to worry. The announcement of 2017 for the referendum is an ominous sign for the next few years in the European debate. As coined by Cameron himself, *“over the coming weeks, months and years I will not rest until this debate is won”*. London’s partners should therefore be prepared to face an ever more difficult (if possible) UK in every negotiation ahead, with the clear aim to roll back European integration towards a loose free-trade area.

Britain's attitude is a nervous reaction to the end of almost two decades of ambivalence. It shows that some serious work has indeed started in the process towards a federal Europe.

Roughly every 5 years, Europe enters a period of re-writing its fundamental texts. This cycle is about to begin again. And it will decide the design and kind of federation for Europe, as well as its geography. Because the choices faced by European nation-states will more than ever be a simple alternative between integration and disintegration, passing the British test will be crucial.

Whatever the outcome, the Union we've known will no longer be. The work to define what "federation" means is the next challenge for every political family in Europe – including those who made a Federal Europe core to their political engagement. ■

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Cameron's EU gamble and the consequences for Scotland



Patrick Harvie

Cameron's proposal for an in/out referendum on EU membership is likely to cause uncertainty and confusion for years to come, but what impact will it have on Scotland's independence referendum? Scottish Greens co-convenor Patrick Harvie discusses the consequences.

The introduction of a new debate, about the UK's relationship with Europe, may worsen this paralysis, or it may provide a new stimulus to the independence campaign.

The closer Scotland gets to the referendum on its independence from the rest of the UK, the harder it is becoming for any political issue to be addressed in its own right. Everything is seen through a constitutional lens.

Each issue comes to be perceived by supporters of the UK as an insurmountable obstacle to independence, providing yet another reason to vote No. All too often campaigners for a Yes vote on the other hand will see issues either as signs of the inherent failings of Westminster and reasons to advocate independence, or as potentially divisive problems which must therefore be left hanging, incapable of resolution, until after the vote.

It's an illusion of course. If we were capable of approaching the decision on independence in a calm and rational manner, with all sides willing to accept the choice the people will make, we would be quite able to continue to debate the rest of the political agenda at the same time. Goodness knows we need to. This is a time of extraordinary challenge in the economy, in social justice, and in the growing environmental crisis. Wherever one places the blame for the failure of the deregulated, free market, buccaneer capitalist economic system which has been dominant in recent decades, it falls to our generation to cut a new path. In doing so the arguments we win or lose will have an impact for generations. Political paralysis isn't helpful at any time, but it's the very last thing we need right now.

The introduction of a new debate, about the UK's relationship with Europe, may worsen this

paralysis, or it may provide a new stimulus to the independence campaign.

OK, calling it a new debate is a little misleading. The issue of Europe has been a dividing line in British politics for many years, particularly on the right. But it has acquired far greater momentum over recent months. It has also acquired a new relevance to Scotland, where anti-EU voices have failed to gain ground. UKIP and Eurosceptic tendencies within other parties have been far less evident here than in parts of England, and there has been no sign that this is likely to change.

Independence for who?

The European debate which has been taking place in Scotland – seen like all other issues through that constitutional lens – has been focused on the process an independent Scotland would have to go through to become a full member of the EU, and what the likely terms of membership would be. Almost no-one seriously suggests that if Scotland votes for independence, we would not or should not be a full member of Europe. In a way this is a surprising gap in the political landscape, since independence within Europe could easily be portrayed as merely swapping one economic and political union for another, rather than a more “purist” version of Scottish independence. But the reality is that there is little interest in filling this political space, and even UKIP have never made any serious attempt to do so.

So David Cameron's new zeal for a renegotiation of the terms of UK membership, and a referendum to follow, is having a very different impact north and

Staying in the UK now represents the only credible threat to the ability of Scots to secure ourselves continued membership of the one union we all agree we want to keep.

south of the border. In England it is providing him with a defence against encroachment from UKIP. In Scotland, it is levelling the playing field on our existing European debate. If the Yes to independence campaign is accused of risking a long period of uncertainty about our relationship with Europe, it can now answer that the very same uncertainty will be the consequence of a No vote. Staying in the UK now represents the only credible threat to the ability of Scots to secure ourselves continued membership of the one union we all agree we want to keep.



What future in Europe would an independent Scotland have?

More than this, it leaves the No campaign with a deeper problem. Just as Scotland is currently suffering paralysis because of the independence referendum, David Cameron's referendum on Europe is likely to cause the same effect throughout the 2015-20 session of the Westminster Parliament. If the

Labour Party ends up offering a similar commitment (as seems entirely possible) then we can be under no illusion that a No to independence vote will be followed by the offer of further devolution.

That prospect, derided as the "jam tomorrow" argument by many on the Yes side, including myself, has been held out as the clinching argument to persuade undecided voters to stick with the UK. If sceptics are persuaded that such an offer can't be trusted, many will take another look at the case for independence.

So the prospect of a Westminster Parliament in the grip of the very same paralysis that Scotland currently endures might just be the shot in the arm that the Yes campaign needs. If Scottish voters who see the need for some degree of greater self government reach the view that the independence referendum is this generation's only realistic hope, it could change everything.

In his effort to sideline the United Kingdom Independence Party, David Cameron has raised the stakes on the Scottish independence vote, and may just have helped to end the United Kingdom itself. ■

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