

SEEDS OF DISCORD: THE OMINOUS FUTURE OF EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR UNDER F2F EU DIRECTIVE AND THE NATURE RESTORATION LAW

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ABSTRACT

In January 2024, a substantial gathering of tractors from diverse European regions converged upon Brussels, staging fervent demonstrations outside the premises of the European Commission and the European Parliament. These protests, persisting to date, are spearheaded by agricultural workers predominantly from medium and small enterprises, urging the European institutions to reconsider the regulations outlined in the Farm to Fork (F2F) directive and the Nature Restoration Law. These regulations are integral components of the European Green Deal, designed to aid the European Union in accomplishing its main objectives: maintaining Earth's temperature within a 1.5°C threshold, achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, curtailing pesticide usage by 50% by 2030, restoring ecosystems, promoting sustainable food production, and fostering innovation in the industry. Despite these ambitious goals, farmers contend that these rules are unsustainable, as they fail to consider the unique characteristics



of various territories and production entities, thereby imposing bureaucratic constraints. Some stakeholders suggest that the regulations might not genuinely prioritize environmental protection; rather, they could be perceived as potentially favoring large multinational corporations. Notably, individual European governments disclaim any responsibility in this domain, as the entire purview falls under the jurisdiction of the Commission and the European Parliament. This research employs a qualitative approach, involving a comprehensive policy analysis of the F2F EU Directive and the Nature Restoration Law, a critical evaluation of political discourse from EU official documents, media scrutiny of contemporary European newspaper articles, and video interviews with protesting farmers. Through this multi-faceted analysis, the study endeavors to ascertain whether these regulations genuinely align with the EU's environmental protection objectives or if they are rooted in ideological political choices that could jeopardize the livelihoods of European farmers. The findings underscore that the decisions of European institutions not only threaten the existence of medium and small-scale farmers but also compromise the production of natural and authentic goods traditionally linked to these agricultural practices. Consequently, the European agricultural sector faces the looming threat of extinction within a few years, potentially replaced by industries specializing in synthetic foods manufactured in laboratories.

Keywords: EU Commission, EU Parliament, EU farmers, Farm to Fork, Nature Restoration Law

INTRODUCTION

Since January 2024, a wave of protests has swept across Europe, with farmers from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) converging on Brussels, the headquarters of the European Commission. Dubbed the “tractors' protest”, this movement targets the European Green Deal's directives, which farmers perceive as imposing a significant burden on their livelihoods. The protests originate from major European agricultural countries, including Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Poland, Romania, Portugal, and Greece. In these nations, agriculture represents a substantial contributor to gross domestic product (GDP). Disgruntled farmers have descended upon Brussels intending to pressure the EU Commission to reconsider the

stringent regulations outlined in the European Green Deal (EGD) directives governing the agricultural sector (Parbuoni, 2024).



Figure 1. In February 2024, the city of Brussels, in Belgium, where is located the headquarters of the EU Commission, was invaded by EU farmers' tractors

Source: <https://www.lifegate.it/agricoltori-bruxelles-protesta>

The grievances of EU farmers encompass a multifaceted set of demands. Foremost among these is a reduction in diesel fuel prices, which have significantly impacted their operational costs. Farmers also seek a comprehensive reform of bureaucratic regulations. They argue that the current system indiscriminately applies to all agricultural entities, irrespective of size or business volume. This one-size-fits-all approach, they contend, unfairly burdens smaller farms. Another key demand concerns the use of pesticides. Farmers advocate for the maintenance of their access to essential tools for crop protection, while acknowledging the need for sustainable practices. A critical point of contention is the perceived equivalence drawn between livestock farming and carbon industries. Farmers vehemently refute the notion that they pollute to the same degree as factories, and they seek a differentiation in regulations that reflects this disparity. Furthermore, EU farmers call for stricter regulations on food imports from non-EU countries. They argue that lax regulations in nations like Ukraine, Mexico, China, Vietnam, India, and the USA create unfair competition, as these producers are not subject to the same stringent environmental and production standards as their European counterparts. Additionally, farmers seek financial compensation for setting aside a percentage of their land (e.g., 20%) from cultivation, as proposed by certain environmental policies. Finally, a pervasive concern is the fear of eviction

from their land and the potential loss of their livestock. This anxiety stems from directives like the Farm to Fork (F2F) and the Nature Restoration Law (Isola, 2024). Farmers plead for a working environment free from such anxieties and one that fosters agricultural sustainability.

A complex political dynamic has emerged surrounding the farmers' protests. While EU member states have expressed support for their agricultural sectors, a tension has developed between them and the central EU institutions. National governments have engaged directly with farmers, holding meetings and listening to their grievances. In contrast, the leadership of the European Commission has yet to initiate formal negotiations with the protesters. Despite the limitations on their authority in agricultural matters (a largely EU competence), national governments have implemented various measures to alleviate the farmers' plight. These include reductions in income taxes for agricultural workers, lowered VAT on agricultural diesel fuel, streamlined bank loan processes, and debt moratoria (Barbati, 2024; Meslet, 2024; Sönnichsen, 2024; Sahuquillo, 2024). Additionally, they have pledged to lobby the EU Commission for revisions to the contested agricultural directives. The situation in Brussels has become increasingly tense, with protests occasionally turning violent and prompting police intervention using water cannons and riot control measures. As a result of safety concerns, the EU Commission offices have been temporarily closed, hindering direct communication between farmers and key EU officials, such as President Ursula von der Leyen and Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski (Giuliani, 2024).

As of March 25th, 2024, European Union (EU) farmers have obtained a concession from the European governing body. The EU Commission has agreed to retract the directive concerning the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (SUR) from the Farm to Fork (F2F) initiative. This measure was designed with the objective of achieving a 50% reduction in pesticide usage by the year 2030 (Parmeggiani, 2024). EU farmers have consistently contended that pesticides represent an indispensable means for safeguarding crops and upholding agricultural productivity. They highlight that no other nation beyond the EU has enforced limitations or prohibitions on pesticides. The EU Commission previously advocated for the mandatory use of environmentally friendly bio-pesticides. However, farmers maintain that the cost of these alternatives is twenty-five times higher than conventional

pesticides, posing a significant financial burden. While the withdrawal of the SUR regulation represents a partial victory for the farmers, they remain dissatisfied. They await the Commission's response on their other demands and express concerns about potential profit decline, reduced competitiveness with foreign producers, and even business failure. Consequently, the protests are expected to continue (Angaroni, 2024). Protracted for over two months now, the farmers' protests have inflicted damage not only on the economy, with significant agricultural production suspended across EU countries, but also on the daily lives of ordinary citizens. Local food products from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are failing to reach supermarkets, and the overwhelming presence of tractors on European roads has caused major traffic disruptions. Despite these inconveniences, a strong majority of the European population stands in solidarity with the farmers' cause. They perceive the farmers as battling a supranational institution, the EU Commission, which is seen as unwilling to address the needs and concerns of agricultural sector workers (Giansanti, 2024).



Figure 2. A survey conducted in February 2024 among two million EU citizens, aged between 18 and 55, reveals that 64% support European farmers' protests against the EU Commission

Source: <https://tg.la7.it/sondaggi/trattori-pensano-gli-italiani-protesta-sondaggio-swg-per-tg-la7-09-02-2024-205688>

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this research is to critically examine the future of the agricultural sector within EU member states in the context of the Farm to

Fork (F2F) directive and the Nature Restoration Law, which are central components of the European Green Deal (EGD). The study seeks to determine whether these regulations will lead to a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector that supports environmental protection and mitigates global warming, as asserted by the EU Commission, or whether they pose a threat to the livelihoods of European farmers, particularly those from medium and small-scale enterprises, due to ideological political motives. To achieve this aim, the study has set the following specific objectives:

1. To analyze the key provisions of the F2F directive and the Nature Restoration Law, exploring their intended and potential impacts on the future of agricultural practices within the European Union.
2. To evaluate the political discourse surrounding the EGD, particularly the narratives and objectives promoted by the EU Commission, and to determine how these align with or diverge from the anticipated future of the agricultural sector.
3. To scrutinize contemporary media representations and public reactions, particularly from farmers and other stakeholders, to understand the broader societal and economic implications for the future of agriculture in EU member states.
4. To explore the potential long-term impacts of the EGD's agricultural regulations on the viability of medium and small-scale farming in Europe, with a focus on how these regulations might shape the future landscape of the agricultural sector.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach, emphasizing the in-depth analysis of textual data to understand the impact of the European Green Deal (EGD) on the agricultural sector. The decision to use this approach is rooted in the need to thoroughly explore and interpret the complex socio-political dimensions of the EGD, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis allows for a nuanced understanding of the underlying intentions, implications, and stakeholder responses associated with the EGD's policies.

The study focuses on the following key elements:

1. **Policy Analysis:** A thorough examination of the F2F EU Directive and the Nature Restoration Law, both integral components of the EGD's agricultural strategy, is conducted. This analysis delves into the specific provisions of these directives and their potential implications for agricultural practices within the EU. The relevance of policy analysis lies in its ability to critically assess the legal and regulatory framework, revealing how these policies might influence the agricultural sector at both the macro and micro levels.
2. **Political Discourse Analysis:** The stated objectives of the EU Commission regarding the EGD and its impact on the agricultural sector are critically evaluated. This analysis involves examining EU official documents, speeches, and policy statements to uncover the ideological underpinnings and political motivations that drive these regulations. By focusing on political discourse, the study seeks to reveal the broader narrative constructed by EU institutions and how it aligns or conflicts with the practical realities faced by farmers.
3. **Media Scrutiny:** Contemporary European newspaper articles and video interviews with protesting farmers, obtained from various online platforms, are scrutinized. This allows for the exploration of the perspectives and concerns of stakeholders directly affected by the EGD's agricultural policies. Media scrutiny is justified as it provides insights into public sentiment and the real-world implications of policy decisions, highlighting the contrast between official rhetoric and grassroots responses.

The in-depth textual analysis employed in this study is particularly relevant to the topic as it facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the EGD's impact, beyond mere statistical data. By examining the policies, political discourse, and media portrayals, this methodology offers a holistic view of how the EGD's agricultural directives influence the European farming landscape, particularly for medium and small-scale farmers. This approach ensures that the study captures the complex interplay between policy, ideology, and practice, which is essential for assessing the true implications of the EGD.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before delving into prior research on the Farm to Fork (F2F) directive and the Nature Restoration Law, both of which significantly impact the EU agricultural sector, it is crucial to examine the underlying philosophy of the EGD. Launched in 2019, it represents an ambitious and strategic plan to combat climate change and global warming. It encompasses a comprehensive framework of laws and directives, each targeting a specific business sector. A core tenet of the EGD prioritizes “environmental justice” over “social justice”. Proponents of this approach argue that achieving environmental sustainability is paramount, even if it necessitates policies with potential social costs for workers and vulnerable populations. Critics, however, contend that the EGD’s “dirigiste” approach, characterized by top-down regulations without sufficient consideration of social consequences, unfairly burdens these groups (Ocone, 2024).

Fabio Dragoni, in his book *Per non morire al verde* (Let us not die because of the EU green policies) published in December 2023, criticizes the EU Commission’s approach to the green transition. He argues that the Commission prioritizes environmental regulations without adequately considering their social and economic consequences. Dragoni acknowledges the EU’s reliance on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, which support the anthropogenic (human-caused) origin of global warming. However, he contends that the EU has neglected alternative scientific perspectives. He cites the World Climate Declaration, published in June 2022 by a group of scientists, as an example of a dissenting viewpoint. This declaration questions the extent of human influence on climate change and argues that the IPCC’s projections have been overly dramatic (Tigue, 2022). It further criticizes the economic costs associated with carbon dioxide mitigation policies. Dragoni highlights the controversy surrounding the World Climate Declaration, particularly the use of terms like “deniers” to discredit these scientists. He further raises concerns about the financial feasibility of the EGD. Dragoni points out that while the plan initially secured substantial funding (over €1 trillion) for the green transition, the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 led to a reallocation of resources towards military support for Ukraine. Despite this shift in priorities, Dragoni argues that the EU has not revisited the EGD regulations, leaving the economic burden solely on citizens.

The F2F directive, a key component of the European Green Deal, has been the subject of scrutiny by The Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), a non-profit organization dedicated to researching and raising awareness about corporate lobbying's influence on EU policymaking (CEO, 2020). From a stated perspective, the F2F directive aims to achieve a multifaceted set of objectives: ensuring sustainable food production practices, bolstering food security for all EU citizens, promoting the consumption of environmentally sustainable food products, and significantly increasing the area of organic farmland to 25% by 2030. However, the CEO's research raises concerns about the directive's potential to disproportionately benefit large multinational corporations at the expense of smaller and medium-sized agricultural enterprises. With the anticipated reduction in overall agricultural land use, the viability of smaller farms with limited landholdings and diversification options remains unclear. Furthermore, the CEO expresses apprehension regarding the potential rise of lab-grown meat products as a consequence of reduced natural food production. While the F2F directive emphasizes food safety, the CEO raises concerns about the potential health risks associated with these novel laboratory-created products.

Several medical studies have indicated that insect-derived products, such as cricket flour, locust biscuits, larvae pasta, and yellow mealworm powder, can trigger allergic reactions, ranging from hives to potentially life-threatening anaphylactic shock (Di Gioacchino, 2023). In 2023, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) jointly published a study titled "Food Safety Aspects of Cell-Based Food". This research identified a series of potential hazards associated with the four distinct phases of synthetic food production. Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding the possibility of tumor formation in some individuals due to the manipulation of animal cells within bioreactors (Bonfranceschi, 2023). Given these emerging safety considerations, a critical question arises: how did the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) grant approval to lab-grown meat products? This prompts further inquiry into the potential influence of international lobbying groups that advocate for the expansion of this technology.

On March 8, 2024, the Aspen Institute published a paper titled "Election Year: Transatlantic Public Opinion and Ukraine". The authors, drawing on internal European Commission documents and data from

independent think tanks, analyze the financial contributions of the European Union (EU) to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Their findings reveal a significant shift in European spending priorities. According to data from the Ukraine Support Tracker and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, since February 2022, European contributions to support weaponry for Ukraine have surpassed those of the United States, exceeding €2.2 trillion. Additionally, the EU announced a new €50 billion multi-year support package for Ukraine between 2023 and 2027. As a result, the EU's total financial commitments to Ukraine are now nearly double those of the US. When factoring in contributions from non-EU Western European nations (UK, Norway, Switzerland), the disparity widens further. The Aspen Institute's study also highlights a potential disconnect between public opinion and political decisions. Surveys conducted across the EU indicate that a majority of citizens disapprove of the substantial financial commitments made by Brussels. This disapproval stems from the perception that these funds were originally earmarked for financing numerous EGD projects, including initiatives focused on transportation, housing, food security, and the circular economy's green transition. It is important to recall that when the EGD was approved in 2019, the EU Commission introduced a comprehensive sustainable finance strategy and investment plan, allocating over €1 trillion, alongside additional significant investments planned through the EU budget and the European Central Bank. However, following a political decision made in February 2022, these funds were redirected to address the Ukraine conflict. Consequently, the EU's green transition initiatives remain largely unfunded, placing the financial burden for realizing the EGD on ordinary citizens.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed analysis of both the F2F Directive and the Nature Restoration Law, which encompass regulations pertinent to the agricultural sector. Each will be examined separately, aiming to enhance comprehension. The F2F Directive, a key component of the EGD's agricultural sector strategy, outlines thirteen key objectives:



Figure 3. It showcases the Main Objectives of the Farm to Fork Directive, as Depicted by the EU Commission

Source: <https://northsearegion.eu/reframe/news/examples-to-support-eu-farm-to-fork-strategy/>

- 1.Ensure Food Accessibility: Promote food security for all Europeans, potentially incorporating novel or lab-grown foods.
- 2.Establish Environmentally Friendly Agriculture: Foster an agricultural sector that respects the environment, preserves biodiversity, and mitigates climate change by reducing reliance on chemical pesticides and transitioning to renewable energy sources.
- 3.Reduce Chemical Pesticide Use: Attain a significant reduction in chemical pesticide use by 2030, prioritizing biopesticides or alternative environmentally sustainable methods to safeguard crops.
- 4.Shift to Renewable Energy Sources: Promote a complete transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources within the agricultural sector by 2033.
- 5.Cut Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Farm Animals: Drastically decrease greenhouse gas emissions generated by farm animals by 2035.
- 6.Promote Biogas Production: Equip farmers with anaerobic digesters to convert agricultural waste and residues into biogas.
- 7.Reduce Meat Production and Consumption: Advocate for a potential 40% reduction in animal meat production and consumption by 2030.
- 8.Implement Standardized Labeling and Packaging: Establish a single labeling and packaging system across the EU, providing detailed information on product ingredients and production processes.
- 9.Monitor Farm Resource Consumption: Monitor all farms, regardless of size, to track their electricity, water, and fuel usage.

10. Digitize Farm Data and Management: Embrace digital tools and data collection practices to enhance farm management efficiency and precision.
11. Combat Antimicrobial Resistance: Reduce the sale of antimicrobial substances for farm animals and aquaculture by 50% by 2028.
12. Expand Organic Farming: Increase organic farming practices by allocating 25% of total agricultural land to organic production.
13. Introduce Digital Food Passports: Implement a digital passport system to monitor and trace individual food products.

The introduction of these measures reflects the EU's commitment to a sustainable and environmentally responsible agricultural sector (Melani, 2022). These regulations, ostensibly aimed at enhancing agricultural practices and combatting climate change, impose significant financial burdens and necessitate substantial investments that individual farmers are ill-equipped to bear without adequate public funding. For instance, the Plastic and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR), integrated into the F2F strategy, prohibits the production and use of disposable plastic packaging, including items employed for fresh produce such as salad bags, orange nets, cherry tomato baskets, and containers for goods weighing less than 1.5 kg. Similarly, for the hospitality industry, the regulation mandates the discontinuation of disposable packages smaller than 50ml for liquids, such as shampoo, soap, creams, or shower gel, and non-liquid products weighing less than 100 grams. The Plastic Packaging Waste Reduction (PPWR) legislation is poised to exert a multifaceted impact on various sectors of production, encompassing establishments such as restaurants, hotels, fast-food chains, supermarkets, agricultural enterprises, beverage distributors, thereby exacerbating food wastage and generating additional solid waste. This development starkly contradicts the purported commitment of the European Commission to combat global hunger, as articulated in its official discourse (Talignani, 2023). Implementation of the PPWR is anticipated to compel European enterprises to undertake significant expenditures in acquiring new machinery to reconfigure their operational processes. Distinguished economists have forecasted the imminent closure of numerous small and medium-sized enterprises, while larger corporations are expected to transfer the burden of heightened costs to end consumers, precipitating inevitable inflationary repercussions (Capezzzone, 2023).

The newly proposed packaging standards delineate an expedited timeline, targeting a reduction of these items by 10% by 2030, 15% by 2035, and 20% by 2040. Of particular concern to the agri-food industry is the potential adverse effect these regulations may exert on packaging practices, potentially jeopardizing existing food safety and quality standards. This, in turn, could result in elevated waste levels due to the heightened perishability of unpackaged food items (Leardi, 2024). Despite the provision of public funds outlined in the 2019 approval of the Green Deal, these resources are no longer available due to the European Commission's decision to allocate significant military aid to Ukraine. Since 2019, the geopolitical landscape has undergone significant shifts, marked by the European Union's (EU) militaristic endeavors, depleting its financial reserves, alongside a double-digit inflation rate. However, despite these challenges, the European Commission persists in upholding its unchanged green agenda, effectively transferring the substantial financial burden onto the European populace (Patalano, 2023).

The grandiose proclamations made by President Ursula Von Der Leyen in 2019, coinciding with the issuance of the F2F directive, wherein she articulated that green policies would aid farmers in enhancing their environmental and climate performance through an innovative model, have since diminished in significance and allure. European farmers, akin to other societal groups, have felt forsaken and deceived, prompting protests in Brussels. It is neither feasible nor justifiable for the burdens of ecological transition to be solely shouldered by ordinary citizens (Di Bartolo, 2024). Recently, the EU Parliament endorsed a revision of the F2F initiative, introducing updates to the Industrial Emission (IED) directive. Under this amended legislation, both intensive and small-scale livestock farming operations, specifically those concerning pigs, sheep, and cattle, are classified akin to industrial activities and are deemed contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Representatives of EU farmers' unions argue that such classification, particularly for small and medium-sized livestock farms, is unjust and misrepresentative. They point to scientific findings indicating that all EU animal farms collectively contribute only 5% of total CO₂ emissions, significantly lower than the global average of 14.5%. Additionally, over the past three decades, CO₂ emissions from livestock farming have decreased by 19% (Ceccarini, 2023).

Agriculture, while recognized as a source of climate-altering gases, primarily emits methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and, to a lesser extent, carbon dioxide (CO₂). Livestock farmers refute the allegation of being environmental polluters, contending that methane (CH₄) emissions from farm animals differ fundamentally from industrial emissions. They argue that methane released by livestock is rapidly reabsorbed by vegetation, undergoing decomposition into water (H₂O) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) within approximately ten years. The CO₂ is subsequently assimilated by plants, which serve as feed for the livestock. This key distinction contrasts with emissions from industrial sources, which persist in the atmosphere for up to 1000 years. Agricultural workers reference measurements of Global Warming Potential (GWP) to bolster their assertions, emphasizing the relatively short duration of methane's atmospheric presence (Ballarini, 2023).

Under the F2F directive, livestock farming is mandated for reduction due to its association with pollution stemming from animal husbandry practices. However, agricultural associations in Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands - countries with substantial livestock sectors - have voiced opposition to these measures. Italy alone anticipates the need to eliminate approximately 200,000 cows within the next three years to mitigate methane emissions. In the Netherlands, a reduction of cow, pig, and chicken breeding by nearly one-third is deemed necessary. Critics of the F2F directive express concerns regarding its potential to induce desertification in the livestock sector, a vital and foundational industry in Europe. They perceive this initiative as ideologically driven and fear its repercussions, including substantial job losses and a marked decline in meat production. Furthermore, opponents argue that these measures could confer competitive advantages to non-EU counterparts, unbound by similar regulatory constraints. The apprehension is that stringent measures outlined in the F2F directive may disadvantage European livestock farmers, prompting a shift in production to regions with less stringent regulations. This prospect poses significant economic challenges and jeopardizes the livelihoods of those engaged in the livestock industry. The implementation of stringent environmental regulations within a finite timeframe may disrupt the EU agricultural sector and compromise its competitive position in the global market (Baccini, 2024).

The Nature Restoration Law

The enactment of the Nature Restoration Law signifies a significant development, despite persistent protests, demonstrating the European Parliament's commitment to green ideology, albeit at the expense of the agricultural sector. On 27 February 2024, the law garnered approval with 329 votes in favor, 275 against, and 24 abstentions.



Figure 4. It depicts the EU Parliament's manifesto of the Nature Restoration Law

Source: <https://www.progressivamagazine.com/p/the-nature-restoration-law-was-approved>

These legislative provisions are geared towards interventions perceived to impinge upon farmers' production. They aim to rejuvenate degraded ecosystems across all member states, aligning with the EU's climate and biodiversity objectives. Among its specific mandates, the law stipulates the planting of an additional three billion trees, restoration of at least 25,000 km of rivers to free-flowing conditions, reversal of pollinator decline, preservation of all urban green spaces, and abandonment of field cultivation by farmers if these regulations are not adhered to.

Farmers are tasked with restoring grassland butterfly populations, allocating space for non-productive buffer zones conducive to biodiversity, maintaining soil quality, and fostering increased bird populations. Additionally, states are mandated to restore at least 30% of drained peatlands by 2030 and 50% by 2050. To meet these targets, EU countries must enhance at least 30% of habitats covered by the new law - from forests, prairies, and

grasslands to wetlands, rivers, lakes, and coral beds - from substandard to good condition by 2030. This percentage is slated to escalate to 60% by 2040 and 90% by 2050. Once rehabilitated, member states must ensure the continual preservation of these areas, with a commitment to prevent further deterioration. To facilitate compliance, they are obligated to submit national restoration plans, subject to regular updates (Perelli, 2024).

While scientists engaged in terrestrial ecosystem restoration have expressed a largely positive assessment of this legal text, underscoring its timeliness and urgency, they exhibit some reservation regarding its development due to financial considerations. They contend that a significant augmentation in the budget allocated for implementing the legal commitment is imperative, both from the States and the EU Commission, whose current priority is to increase military spending of each member state by 3% (Chiellino, 2024).

Representatives of EU farmers' unions assert that the Nature Restoration Law fails to reconcile environmental protection with the preservation of production levels. The legislative provision, burdened by numerous intricate bureaucratic requirements, is poised to diminish agricultural production, pitting nature against the farmer, who is, in essence, the true custodian of this environmental heritage. A decline in food production will inevitably lead to a rise in agricultural product prices, consequently exacerbating inflation, as noted by the President of the European Central Bank (ECB). Given the current historical context, farmers should aim to bolster, rather than curtail, production to stabilize inflation (Bonini, 2024).

The farmers appealed to the EU Parliament to incorporate the principle of mutual reciprocity into the law, ensuring that the regulations applied to European companies are also extended to foreign entities. For instance, this principle should be enforced in free trade agreements with Canada, where the EU imports wheat treated with glyphosate, a substance banned in Europe. Similarly, in the fruit and vegetable sector, the EU favors products imported from Turkey, where certain agrochemicals prohibited in the EU are freely utilized. In 2023, agri-food imports into EU countries reached a record high of €1900 billion, exacerbating concerns about unfair competition from abroad (Zaccardi, 2024). Consequently, the EU appears to be urging farmers to reduce their production. However, agricultural policies should instead

incentivize increased production. Otherwise, Europeans' food requirements will rely heavily on foreign products with lower quality standards and less stringent bureaucratic requirements (Meo, 2024).

Many parliamentarians who opposed this legislation emphasize how the EU Parliament's actions are perceived as obstructing the peaceful livelihoods of farmers. During an economically and politically uncertain period, characterized by turbulence, supporting them should be imperative due to their critical role in ensuring food security and contributing to the economic and social well-being of the EU society. Unfortunately, European agriculture is facing significant challenges: between 2010 and 2020, there was a loss of 3 million agricultural holdings, amounting to 800 per day. Furthermore, there is a concerning lack of generational turnover, with the average age of a European farmer now standing at 57 years old. Regrettably, farmers lack the influential lobbying power seen in industries such as vaccine or firearms production, as the majority of agricultural enterprises in Europe are family-owned businesses. Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union based in Luxembourg and responsible for collecting and processing macroeconomic data, indicates that among the 9.1 million agricultural holdings in the EU in 2022, approximately two-thirds (63.8%) encompass less than 5 hectares, while only a small 6% possess more than 50 thousand hectares. Consequently, only this small percentage of large-scale farmers will be able to navigate the stringent EU green regulations, while smaller entities may be forced to sell or dismantle their operations (Barbieri, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The ambitious initiative known as the European Green Deal (EGD), endorsed by EU institutions in 2019 and continuously revised throughout President Von Der Leyen's five-year term, has faced significant criticism for its perceived oversight of the socio-economic ramifications on particular sectors within EU industries and the broader workforce. Within the scope of this study, the scrutiny of the F2F Directive and the Nature Restoration Law reveals adverse effects on the agricultural sector and its labor force.

The reports from the United States Department of Agriculture in 2021 and Wageningen University in 2022 underscore the potentially dire

consequences of the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy on the European Union (EU). Entitled “Economic and Food Security Impacts of Agricultural Input Reduction Under the European Union Green Deal’s Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies” (Beckman et al., 2021) and “Impact Assessment of EU Green Deal Targets for Sustainable Crop Production” (Bremmer et al., 2022) respectively, these studies assert that, in the pursuit of environmental sustainability, Europe risks plunging its entire economy into a state of social and economic instability. They indicate that agricultural and food production, along with exports and trade, are set to decline. Consequently, the EU stands to lose GDP and competitiveness, detrimental to the well-being of its population. This scenario forecasts heightened food insecurity, escalating prices, and social tensions, leading to diminished consumer prosperity and overall societal well-being.

Another critique directed at the European institutions pertains to their adoption of the EGD with what is perceived as a flawed and high-handed methodology. The implementation of stringent regulations aimed at safeguarding the environment across various key sectors (such as automotive, construction, agriculture, and fishing) occurred without prior consultation with individual member states, companies, or trade unions directly impacted by this ecological transition.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study primarily examines the Farm to Fork (F2F) Directive and the Nature Restoration Law as pivotal elements of the European Green Deal (EGD) that impact EU farmers and the future viability of their enterprises. However, several limitations are inherent in this research. One of them is the focus on these two regulatory measures without considering the broader context of how different industries are treated under the EGD. Notably, other business sectors, such as transportation, have not faced the same stringent regulations imposed on agriculture. Many EU member states have pointed out the disparate treatment between industries, particularly in the transportation sector. For instance, the naval, aviation, and road transport industries appear to be less affected by stringent CO₂ reduction rules compared to agriculture. The Weight and Dimensions Directive, which facilitates the expansion of large trucks, might contribute to increased CO₂

emissions, raising questions about the consistency and fairness of regulatory approaches across sectors. Additionally, there is a notable contradiction in the political decisions made by the European Commission and subsequently ratified by the Parliament. While the EGD mandates a halt to the production and sale of petrol vehicles, it simultaneously promotes the use of oversized trucks. This apparent inconsistency highlights a potential area for further investigation. Future research should explore these discrepancies and contradictions more thoroughly to provide a comprehensive understanding of the EGD's impact across different sectors and to propose more uniform and equitable regulatory measures.

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All authors contributed equally to this research. Each author was involved in every aspect of the study, including the conceptualization, data analysis, and interpretation of results. The collaborative efforts of all authors ensured a comprehensive and balanced approach to the research, with no single author bearing greater responsibility than the others.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research. No financial or personal relationships with other individuals or organizations have influenced the research process or the results presented in this study.

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