

10 FACTS

about Peasant Agriculture in Europe



1. How many peasants are in Europe?

In Europe, a total of 12,248,000 farms cover 174 million ha of agricultural land and 25 million people are involved in agricultural work [1].

Small farmers are the majority. Only 2.7% of the total farms are large ones of more than 100 ha. 11,885,000 (97%) farms have less than 100 ha [2]. 75% of farms are less than 10 ha and 69% are less than 5 ha [3].

Land is controlled by large farms. Large farms (2.7%) of more than 100 ha, account for 50% of the total agricultural land in Europe. This means that 336,000 account for 91 million ha. The remaining 50% of agricultural land is shared among 97% of European farmers (almost 12 million farms).

2. Small farms feed the people of Europe

With only 30 to 50% of the total arable land, small farmers feed the people of Europe. Small farms are significantly more productive per unit of land. Eurostat data show that large farms (as defined by Eurostat) only produce 11% of total agricultural output. [4] “

In 21 countries the smaller farms have a higher Standard Gross Margin (difference between total output and cost of inputs) per ha than the larger farms. In nine of those countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom) the SGM/ha of the smaller farms is more than twice the SGM/ha of the larger farms” [5].

3. Small farms create employment

In the EU27, larger farms only generate 5 % of total agricultural employment [6]. This shows that the farmer and the farmer’s family are especially decisive for employment generation. An entrepreneurial farm (large-scale, high capitalization and based on expansion) needs 1.9 labor units to produce 1 million kg of milk. In the ‘peasant agriculture economy’ the same amount of milk needs 3.3 labor units to be produced. 74 % more than the entrepreneurial farm-style [7] but this exemplifies the efficiency of job creation through smaller capital investment.

4. Peasants’ agroecological farming uses far less resources

Small farms are proportionally less resource intensive using far fewer fossil fuels for both production and distribution. Producing 1 kg of beef requires 8800 Kcalories on a small-farm and more than 10,000 on an industrial farm. “Grass-fed beef systems consume 50 per cent less fossil energy than conventional grain-fed beef systems” [8].



5. Public policies benefit large industrial farms and favor export-led agriculture

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the main public policy in Europe. The CAP 2014-2020 is € 400 billion and accounts for around 40% of the total EU budget [9].

The agricultural sector, which employs 22 million farmers and 44 million people provides the food to more than 500 million Europeans, is the second largest industrial employment sector in the EU [10]. But the current model is clearly imbalanced in the distribution of the aid. The main beneficiaries of the CAP are large landowners and big agribusinesses, not peasant farmers. About 80% of farm aid goes to about 20% of EU farmers - those with the largest holdings.

In 2011, the top 1.5% farms captured 1/3 of CAP subsidies. In 2011, Western Europe with 44% of the farms received 80% of CAP subsidies. Eastern Europe with 56% of European farms received only 20% [11].



Image credit: HOTL infographic: see note 11

6. Who are the losers of public support?

There has been a shift in the CAP subsidy over time, from subsidies on product to subsidies on production, which have direct and far-reaching implications in terms of land and land concentration.

In 2000, the subsidies on products accounted for EUR 26.6 billion, compared to only EUR 4.7 recorded in 2011. In contrast, subsidies on production jumped from EUR 2 billion to EUR 50.9 billion during the same period [12] This shift directly correlates with dramatic land concentration trends in the EU during the same period of time (1/3 farms were lost).

The heavy subsidies of industrial agricultural exports have damaged peasants in Europe and abroad for half a century. This has also created a big threat to food security [13].

7. Peasants are disappearing and land is concentrating in the hands of a few.

In the period 2000-2012, 4.8 million full-time jobs in the EU agriculture disappeared [14]. Europe has lost 1/3 of small farms from 2003 (12 million farms) to 2013 (8 million farms). Meanwhile, land in the hands of large farms is increasing [15].

As the picture shows, land is also increasingly used for non-farming practices like urbanization, extractive industries such as mining, oil and gas, renewable energy investments, transport, tourism, shopping malls and so on.



Image credit: HOTL infographic: see note 11

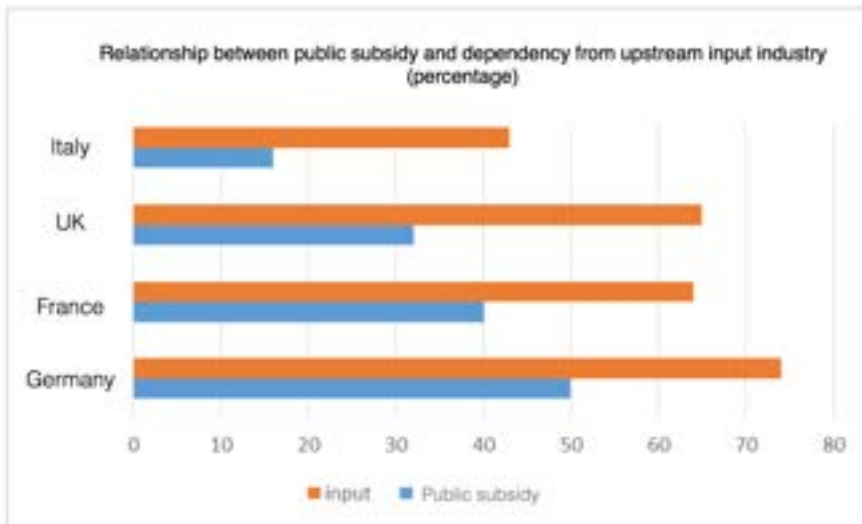
8. Farmers' income collapses while input industries and the retailer sector get richer with public money

Agricultural margins are usurped by agricultural inputs industries and retailer industries. Taking a long enough period, from 2000 to 2016 we see that prices paid to farmers for their products seemingly increased in the majority of European countries. But in the same period, prices of agricultural inputs (fertilizers, seeds, energy and feed) grew more than double when compared to the price paid to small farmers for their products [16]

Farmers are squeezed between input industries and the retailer sector, their income is decreasing and one third of small farms have disappeared in the last decade because unable to survive. In 2016 only agricultural income decreased by 0.4% in Europe.

The more industrialized and capital intensive a farm is, the more it is dependent from industrial inputs. Of 100 kg of grain produced by a German company, 75 are used to pay the input industries. The value that remains is not able to guarantee income or economic viability; therefore public intervention is needed (EU and state). Public intervention subsidizes up to 50% of the farm income [17].

Industrial agriculture survives through land rent, EU and state subsidies. The lack of autonomy in relation to production costs makes industrial agriculture extremely fragile, and its profitability is actually the result of public intervention (direct or indirect). In fact, this public intervention is largely transferred to support upstream industrial companies and, as a result of the reduced prices payed to production, the agri-food industry and retail sector downstream.



Eurostat, as referenced in Onorati, 2017 see note 13

“One farmer in two will have to leave the land, five million unproductive hectares will have to be abandoned [...] but, above all, under the plan, the myriad of tiny farms will disappear, to be replaced by multi-family businesses on a larger scale which are suitable for different types of production.”

Sicco Mansholt, 1969 [21]

9. Waged workers, migrants, women and youth are among the most negatively affected by adverse agricultural policies.

“Women in particular own less than 22% of farm holdings, meaning that [in Spain] they enjoy even less equality than women in Lesotho or Malawi [...] In addition, women are responsible for 98% of all care work, as part of the invisible domestic and family workforce, making it more difficult for them to obtain a job and gain economic independence” [18].

Rural waged workers represent an important part of the agricultural sector and must also be considered as food producers. Every year, the European Union’s agricultural sector employs almost half a million seasonal workers from countries outside the EU. For example, the proportion of migrants in the agricultural workforce in Spain is now 80%, most coming from Eastern and Central Europe as well as North Africa and Latin America. In Germany, 90% of seasonal workers are migrants, mostly from Poland and Romania. “Women migrant workers are particularly vulnerable. They face discrimination as women and as migrants” [19].

In the Italian agricultural sector, around 430,000 workers each year are being employed through illegal intermediaries (caporali), at least a quarter of which suffer severe exploitation. The vast majority of them are migrant workers from Africa, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, India and Pakistan [20].



Image credit: Confédération Paysanne

10. Against these trends, peasants and their allies are struggling throughout Europe.

In 1969, Sicco Mansholt European Commissioner of Agriculture and pioneer of the CAP was launching the plan to “modernize” European agriculture, and predicted that small farms will soon disappear.

In 2017, the peasants of Europe are united across class, gender, race and across borders. These new convergences of people involve a fusion of agrarian, labour and environmental issues and politics, and are giving rise to new forms of struggles and solidarity across Europe and across the world.

NOTES:

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