

R4 A Harvest of Change: A Resolution to Reap Fairness in Agricultural Lobbying

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Motion text

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Introduction

Based on last year's resolution on agroecological transition ([here](#)), we aim to identify key accelerators to foster dearly necessary transitions in the European agricultural sector. It has long been proven that these transitions are necessary. However, most unfortunately, political actors are failing to react appropriately. Due to this, alternative solutions that challenge the status quo are still considered niche innovations, while the incumbent regime of socio-ecologically harmful practices remains the undefeated norm. As established in FYEG Resolution 2022 'Towards an agroecological Europe by 2030', the current agricultural system does not only cause tremendous environmental harm, inter alia via soil pollution and erosion, depleted and polluted waters and desertification, but also ultimately the degradation of whole landscapes. This is not only a major issue for the people whose livelihood depends on the fertility of the land, but also the loss of precious resources that future generations will have to rely on. Thus, FYEG calls for fundamental reforms in agricultural policies and the re-prioritisation of policy goals.

A vast body of research suggests one or several socio-technical transitions in the agricultural sector to be imperative in order to achieve desired social and sustainability goals (references [here](#)). Socio-technical transitions are a completely normal, constantly ongoing process that simply ensures sectors to renew themselves, fitting to changing times; the agricultural transition, however, seems to experience a lock-in effect (references [here](#)).

Lock-in effect

26 Taking a closer look at an example that demonstrates this lock-in effect. In May
27 2020, Euro Commissioner Frans Timmermans presented the 'Farm to Fork Strategies'
28 as an important component of the European Green Deal. In the name of aiming for
29 a more healthy, fair, sustainable and environmentally appropriate food system,
30 the European Commission set up goals to ensure the recovery and perseverance of
31 biodiversity, such as a reduction of 50% of pesticides used within Europe by the
32 year of 2030 (reference [here](#)). Pesticides manufacturers, most of which are
33 multinationals with sales volumes of over 2 billion Euros each (reference [here](#)),
34 responded to these proposed measures by stating this goal was not realistically
35 attainable to them, and pleading for more research (reference [here](#)). Sabotage,
36 says Nina Holland, a researcher of the agriculture lobby. She explains how
37 agriculture lobby groups try to convince the public of their good will regarding
38 the goals proposed by the Green European Deal, whilst simultaneously doing
39 everything in their power to try and delay the measurements that have to be
40 taken in order to accomplish these goals. Lobby groups sow doubt by stating a
41 lack of scientific proof, as well as sowing fear by claiming that Farm to Fork
42 poses a risk to food security (reference [here](#)).

43 The lock-in effect becomes visible when looking at the ways these lobby
44 strategies have forestalled the social-technological transition, both in the
45 past and now. When in 1962 scientist Rachel Carson warned of the damaging
46 effects of pesticides, the industry responded with threats of a shortage in food
47 supply - quite interestingly, similarly to recent examples (reference [here](#)). In
48 2009, the EU implemented a framework directive on Sustainable Use of Pesticides
49 (SUD), however, member states and other institutions have not managed to
50 successfully implement the SUD directive (reference [here](#))

51 To ensure better implementation of SUD, it is being revised and adjusted, so
52 that, in this revised framework directive, the Farm to Fork reduction target is
53 incorporated (reference [here](#)). However, mostly on the level of member states,
54 the Farm to Fork reduction target faces a lot of backlash, to say the least.
55 Agricultural lobby promotes a narrative where it is said we 'have to look at
56 science first'. A slogan that is reinforced by paid research and skewed media
57 coverage that focuses on the pretended negative economic consequences of the
58 Farm to Fork Strategies (reference [here](#)). Conservative and populist parties
59 point to these lobby-funded articles and studies and declare bad timing; in the
60 recent past with regards to Covid-19, today in regards to the war in Ukraine
61 (references used [here](#)). In sum; for decades, the same arguments have been
62 preventing the agriculture sector from moving forward.

63 **Policy feedback**

64 This lock-in effect is amplified by policy feedback. Reinforcing policy
65 feedbacks are created when, e.g., policy favours a specific interest group,
66 which will then work towards expanding that policy or policy creates

67 interlinkages between agencies and political leaders (reference [here](#)). Hence, so
68 called, stable states are created in which incumbent (i.e. dominant, occupant)
69 regimes can make use of reinforcing feedbacks by generating more political
70 support for their incumbent position; which makes change even more challenging.

71 This is what we see in agricultural policy making. The agriculture sector makes
72 up for almost 40% of the EU budget; between 2014 and 2020, the EU invested over
73 400 billion dollars in the industry (reference used [here](#)). It is then not
74 surprising that the sectors' lobby is huge compared to the lobby of other
75 stakeholders. It has been reported that in 2020 and 2021, the prime actors in
76 the agriculture business spent over 50 million euros on lobby activities,
77 although these reported numbers usually turn out to be much higher in reality
78 (reference [here](#)). Environmental and civil society organisations are unable to
79 compete with those kinds of numbers. But this also counts for small-scale
80 farmers, who definitely do not always feel rightfully represented by big lobby
81 organisations. Many independent farmers express a positive attitude towards the
82 price increases that would arise from incorporating the environmental cost of
83 agriculture and focussing on fair trade practices. (reference [here](#)). On top of
84 this, it is known that 80% of the EU agricultural funding ends up at only 20% of
85 the biggest farms within the European Union (reference [here](#)). A research by
86 Lighthouse Reports, Dw, Follow the Money, Mediapart and Domani, paints the
87 following picture:

88 "What emerges is a portrait of wealthy industrial pressure groups – from
89 petrochemical companies and multinational meat-packing giants to pharmaceutical
90 businesses – that have a stubborn hold over EU policy as well as critical
91 differences with the family farmers whose welfare they say they aim to defend."
92 - reference [here](#)

93 Deliberate acceleration of sustainable alternatives by policymakers or powerful
94 actors is required in order to enable diffusion and movement within the system
95 (reference [here](#)). In order to increase the likelihood of bringing about change
96 in such a set up, it is found that two developments should intersect. Namely,
97 (1) bottom-up development and mobilisation for alternative solutions that
98 challenge the stable state, needs to be paired up with the (2) weakening of
99 factors that are reinforcing the stable state (reference [here](#) and [here](#)).

100 While bottom up action has been building up for decades (reference [here](#)), the
101 stable state seems to be so locked-in, that deliberate weakening of the
102 incumbent regime is required in order to enable fair conditions for necessary
103 change to be possible.

104 **Conclusion**

105 The EU is setting out ambitious sustainability goals, such as described in the

106 European Green Deal, in which the 'Farm to fork' strategy is integrated
107 (reference [here](#)). One of the goals of this policy is the reduction of the use of
108 pesticides by 50% in 2030 (reference used [here](#)). However, due to the lock-in
109 effect, the anticipated changes are slowed down. Agricultural lobbyists sow
110 doubt about the effects of the transition, based on lobby-funded research.
111 Wherever possible, these lobbyists try to stall the reforms. The same arguments
112 (for example that the topic hasn't been researched enough) have been used for
113 decades.

114 Then there is also the policy feedback-system. Reinforcing policy feedback
115 happens when policy makers prefer a particular interest group. Environmental and
116 civil organisations are not able to compete with these kinds of sums. This
117 strengthens the policy feedback of the dominant agricultural stakeholders.

118 These kinds of imbalanced proportions are unacceptable. But how can we change
119 these systems? While public action and technologies are being mobilised and
120 developed, the first factor needs to be tackled by politics and policies. The
121 aim of our propositions is to deconstruct the imbalanced lobbyism power in the
122 agricultural sector. Therefore, we, the Federation of Young European Greens,
123 call upon the European Union and its Member States to:

- 124 • End privileged access to the fossil industry. In some formats lobbyists
125 have repeatedly been granted privileged access to politics, which other
126 actors did not enjoy in the same form. Advisory bodies and
127 institutionalised exchange rounds in the context of the energy transition
128 and the regulation of the agricultural industry must not be one-sided,
129 either in terms of personnel or topics. Interest groups such as
130 environmental and consumer protection associations, must be adequately
131 represented and must not be given a fig leaf function.

- 132 • Ensure balanced and broad participation by establishing balanced contacts
133 and integration of interests. Stakeholders with concerns in the areas of
134 climate, environmental and consumer protection, social affairs and human
135 rights are often not listened to by political decision-makers on energy
136 policy issues to the same extent as the large energy companies and their
137 associations. Relevant actors who do not have the necessary financial
138 resources and privileged access, but who nevertheless contribute important
139 social concerns and expertise, must therefore be proactively involved by
140 policymakers. Innovative formats such as citizens' councils or regional
141 transformation councils could be good starting points for broad
142 participation and have already proven their worth in many places.

- 143 • Research the establishment of a budgetary limit for the agriculture lobby

144 in order to regulate their spending on lobby activities. The financial
145 means of the agriculture lobby are wildly out of proportion compared to
146 other stakeholders as named above, so that equal representation of
147 interests is seriously disturbed. A budgetary limit on lobby activities
148 could possibly create a more balanced playing field, so that other
149 stakeholders can have an equal say and their interests are taken into
150 account.

151 • Tighten existing rules on lateral moves from politics to business and, in
152 particular, to lobby jobs. Time and again, politicians turn the knowledge
153 they have acquired in a democratic office or mandate into money by
154 switching to lobby jobs. This promotes existing power imbalances, since
155 only a few actors can afford highly paid former top politicians. In
156 addition, there is a danger that politicians will look for lucrative
157 lobbying jobs while they are still in office and base their political
158 decisions on them. That is why clear rules are needed for blocking periods
159 and waiting periods. The existing waiting period is too short, and it is
160 still possible to change sides very soon after leaving politics. The
161 waiting period for government members must be significantly extended and
162 changes in lobbying activities must be ruled out. There also needs to be
163 more effective monitoring options. Plans for the European Parliament to
164 prohibit Members of Parliament from taking up paid lobbying activities
165 after leaving Parliament for a limited period of time are positive. In
166 addition, former Members of Parliament should lose their access
167 privileges, which have been valid for life until now, and they should be
168 allowed to work as lobbyists after the expiry of the time limit.