



LUND UNIVERSITY

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# How is Sustainable Agriculture Represented in the EU CAP Proposal 2020-2027?

A Discourse Analysis

by

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The need for a sustainable agricultural system that works to support the environmental, social, and economic needs of the agricultural sector and those both within and affected by it is absolutely imperative given the climate crisis and challenging economic and social health of farmers. The agricultural sector has an enormous environmental impact while also providing large economic and social value. It is also a sector that is heavily influenced by consumers and changing attitudes towards food and health. The EU Common Agricultural Policy steers the direction of the agricultural sector within the EU and its implementation influences environmental, social, and economic aspects of the EU agricultural sector. A discourse analysis methodology is used to investigate the representation of sustainable agriculture within the Common Agricultural Policy proposal 2020-2027. Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" framework is employed to identify the underlying assumptions present in the representation of sustainable agriculture and the consequent effects. Eleven underlying assumptions were identified and five effects of said assumptions discussed.

Key words: sustainable agriculture, EU policy, environmental policy, discourse analysis

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# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Research Problem

We are at a critical turning point in combating the climate crisis. Decisive action is needed if climate change is to be mitigated and consumption levels brought within planetary boundaries. A concerted effort is required from all sectors in order to meet this challenge which can either be helped or hindered by institutional decision making. As we move further into this critical decade for climate action, there is mounting consumer awareness and pressure on institutions and the sectors they support to take the necessary steps in order to meet climate goals. One sector that is certainly under pressure is the agricultural sector. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that agriculture is responsible for an average of 23% of total anthropogenic emissions (IPCC 2020). Sustainable agriculture is purported to be a potential tool that can act as a guiding concept as well as a goal for the agricultural system in order to achieve not only climate goals, but also social and economic goals, given the vast impact that the agricultural sector has in many aspects of society.

Discussed in more detail in chapter 2.1.2, sustainable agriculture refers to an agricultural system whereby the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental, are held in equal standing, and their interconnectedness acknowledged (Siebrecht 2020). That is to say, an agricultural system that is economically viable, contributing to the welfare of those working within the sector and affected by the impacts of the sector, and not exceeding planetary boundaries in terms of environmental impact. While sustainable agriculture may certainly be a legislative and consumer goal, it is not always evident that these three pillars of sustainability are guiding policy formation in an equal and complimentary manner. The enormous increases in agricultural productivity over the past decades for example, seeing vast increases in the economic viability of the agricultural sector as a whole, has brought about disastrous environmental consequences as well as social and economic consequences for small-scale farmers (Greenpeace 2019).

Given the enormous scope of the agricultural sector, it is important to shed light on the legislation and institutional processes that guide it. Institutions have the ability to influence change at varying levels throughout society through the use of different mechanisms. One such example of large scale

institutional influence is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU. This is one of the largest agricultural policies in the world and sets out the strategic direction of the EU agricultural sector as well as the mechanisms that will realise this direction for a seven year period at which point it is 'reformed'. This overarching policy document outlines agricultural policy, including budget and funding requirements, for the entire bloc. It was first established at the Treaty of Rome 1957 as a founding policy of the EU and there have been many reforms of the policy since, usually in seven year cycles. The CAP reform is proposed by the European Commission and is then negotiated by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU in a process called the trilogies, before being voted on, amended, passed into law and implemented.

The original goals of the CAP, to increase farm productive, increase the incomes of farmers, stabilise agricultural markets, and ensure reasonable prices and good food supplies for consumers, remain core aspects to this day (Pe'er et al. 2020). In 2019, the CAP budget was €58.4 bn./year which equated to 36% of the total budget of the EU (Pe'er et al. 2020) and, as such, is absolutely fundamental to the fulfilment of not only agricultural goals but social and economic EU goals in general. The CAP is structured as two pillars which focused on separate policy areas and financial mechanisms. Pillar 1 focuses on income support and market measures, with income support being granted through various different Direct Payment schemes. Pillar 2 focuses on the numerous Rural Development Programmes. The large influence of the CAP is perhaps best exemplified through the role played by its policy of direct payments in the 1970s and 1980s. The original iterations of the CAP supported farmers by guaranteeing minimum prices for their products through direct payments. This resulted in vast amounts of overproduction in the 1970s and 1980s, which were referred to as "lakes of milk and beef mountains" (Scown et al. 2020).

Integral then to promoting and supporting a truly sustainable agricultural system is a CAP that both supports and promotes the three aspects of sustainability to relatively equal degrees. A discourse analysis allows for the representation of sustainable agriculture within the most recent CAP proposal to be understood and the biases and assumptions underlying this representation, discussed. The discourses related to varying environmental factors of previous CAP iterations have been investigated in numerous discourse analysis studies employing many differing discourse analysis frameworks, forming a robust body of research relating to discourse analysis of previous CAP reforms. However, the discourses pervasive in the current CAP reform have not yet been analysed in this manner. Moreover, an analysis of sustainable agriculture specifically has not yet been undertaken.

Carol Bacchi's "What is the Problem Represented to be?" framework (explored in more detail in chapter 4.1) provides a deeper investigation of the tensions that lie within the discourses pervasive in the CAP proposal. As the concept of sustainable agriculture encompasses three different aspects, it is important to highlight if and how this may lead to tension within the discourse, and how the three aspects are represented in terms of potential biases towards certain aspects. As the most recent CAP reform will lead the EU agricultural sector during this critical decade, and it is a cornerstone aspect of the EU environmental policy, the discourses related to sustainable agriculture underlying the document and the tensions that lie therein must be highlighted and discussed.

## 1.2 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to identify and discuss the underlying assumptions and tensions in the discourse related sustainable agriculture in the EU CAP proposal for 2020-2027. This will contribute to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the pre-existing biases and assumptions that underpin this foundational agricultural policy proposal. The EU CAP is an integral legislative tool for the EU bloc and, given the enormous impact agriculture has on the environment, it is the aim of this thesis to draw attention to the intricacies of the discourse underlying the proposal.

The research questions for this thesis are therefore as follows:

RQ1: What are the presumptions and assumptions underlying the representation of sustainable agriculture in the EU CAP proposal 2020-2027?

RQ2: What effects are produced by this representation of sustainable agriculture?

## 1.3 Outline of the Thesis

Following this section, Chapter 2 will begin with a discussion of the previous research related to this thesis. This will be followed by an outline of the theoretical framework employed in this study. Chapter 3 will then provide a detailed discussion of the source material used in this thesis. Next, Chapter 4 will outline the method used, highlighting steps that will be followed as well as the delimitations related to it. Chapter 5 will provide the results of the study and an in-depth discussion of these results. Finally, Chapter 6 will address the research questions from the first chapter, it will include the practical implications of this thesis and future research opportunities that could further this study.

# 2

## Background

### 2.1 Previous Research

Research into the agricultural system and its policies within the EU is substantial and includes work from a number of fields and disciplines, resulting in a rich and varied area of study. Academic journals provide the majority of previous research sources, with journals specialised in environmental policy, such as the *Journal of Environmental Science and Policy* and the *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, featuring heavily. Research was also undertaken using environmental pressure group publications, allowing for a very up-to-date and action orientated understanding of the field. Finally, publications and statistics from national and international institutions provided more first-hand data and material.

The previous research section of this chapter will discuss the existing research relevant and related to the research questions of thesis. First, the role of discourse within institutional decision making will be explored and the concept of discourse analysis will be discussed. Next, a discussion will be had on sustainability, its meaning and how it can be understood within the context of the agricultural system. The final section will highlight the current body of research concerned with the three pillars of a sustainable agricultural system, taking the environmental, social, and economic aspects in turn.

#### *2.1.1 The Role of Discourse and Discourse Analysis*

The role of institutions in addressing the climate crisis cannot be overstated. Institutions are the most powerful actors in terms of funding and supporting particular practices. The European Union is an excellent example of a large scale-intergovernmental institution, housing within itself institutions that span all sectors across the EU. In terms of the agricultural sector specifically, the CAP is one of the largest agricultural policies in the world and has a vast impact on economic, environmental, and social aspects within the EU and globally (Pe'er et al. 2019). With this degree of influence, it is imperative to draw attention to the discourses and assumptions that are pervasive at the policy level. Drawing attention to the need for further investigation of discourses at an institutional level,



Saari et al. (2021) highlight in their study investigating veganism and institutional change that veganism and the increasing uptake in plant-based foods can be affected at a micro (consumer) level, meso (company and industrial drivers) level, and macro (institutional environment) level. They note that the public discourse and academic study on the uptake of veganism focus on the micro and meso levels, missing the vital contribution of the macro level.

Discourse analysis has been well used as a tool for investigating policy related to various sectors as discourses affect varying levels of policy making in a multitude of different ways (Leipold et al. 2019). It has been shown that discourses that are persistent or only experience very small incremental changes usually lead to policy outcomes that are dissatisfactory. These persistent discourses are often accompanied by an increased potential for more radical discursive and social change (Leipold et al. 2019). This is particularly relevant to the discussion concerning agriculture as farmers as a group are traditionally conservative and hesitant towards change while also providing a strong political influence (Gijssels & Bussels 2014). Moreover, if the discourses present in the policy formation processes and eventual documentation are out of touch or detached from the public narrative concerning the subject, the policy is less likely to be accepted by the public (Leipold et al. 2019). It is necessary to acknowledge that the agriculture sector not only affects but is affected and discussed by many different groups within society, many of whom may not share common views. That is to say, consumer decision making influences the agriculture sector as does farmer decision making, however the motivation and rationale for the decision made may well differ between and within these groups. Furthermore, it is imperative that the discourses underpinning policy are understood within the context within which the policy will be implemented. The existing institutions and frameworks (including social norms) that a policy will be implemented within will greatly affect the success of the policy (Leipold et al. 2019). Especially when concerned with EU policy, which is applied in countries with varying pre-existing institutions and frameworks, the analysis of underlying discourses within different contexts is vital in understanding how the policy may be implemented.

Due to the importance of discourse in decision making and policy, discourse analysis has been employed by numerous studies to investigate previous CAP reforms (Erjavec & Erjavec 2015). A discourse analysis allows for a deeper and more complex understanding of multidimensional research questions, resulting in a more nuanced outcome. All discourse analyses, no matter the analytical focus, are interested in the relationship between language and subject (Wetherell et al. 2001, p. 1, Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 1). Hajer and Versteeg (2005, p. 175) aptly state that studies concerning

environmental policy can be strengthened through discourse analysis as “the role of language in politics” is brought to attention and analysed. Importantly then, particularly in the case of the study of policy, discourse analysis allows for an understanding of what lies beneath the stated text. It is necessary to gain this understanding as “our ways of talking [and interacting] do not neutrally reflect our world, identities, and social relations, but rather, play an active role in creating and changing them” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 1).

When analysing discourse, many studies look to multiple varying sources to consider the discourse surrounding a particular policy, including drawing on the media and official statements and interviews, as well as the policy documentation itself (Serra & Duncan 2016). Other studies take a more narrow approach by only including in the analysis the particular policy document in question, or perhaps numerous iterations of a specific policy (Alons 2017). Furthermore, discourse analysis itself includes many different frameworks that can be employed. One such framework is Carol Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” framework which is specifically concerned with uncovering tension that lie within discourses through the investigation of underlying assumptions present in the documentation being analysed (Bacchi 2009). This framework has, for example, been used to consider the tensions within the discourse surrounding EU aquaculture policy (Ertör & Ortega-Cerdà 2017).

### *2.1.2 Understanding Sustainability Within the Agricultural Sector*

In recent years, the word sustainability has become an increasingly commonly used word amongst private citizens, the private sector, and institutions alike within the EU. However, due to this, its meaning and how it is understood vary somewhat. It is therefore important to clearly define sustainability and how it is to be understood within the context of the agricultural sector. Famously defined in the Brundtland Report of 1987, sustainable development was defined as “...development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland United Nations Commission 1987).

From this, the definition of sustainability evolved with many variations, however, these variation generally share the key aspect that sustainability must include three interconnected areas: environment, society, and economy (Gimenez et al. 2012). At the Earth Summit of 1992 in Rio Janeiro, it was emphasised that these three interconnected aspect must be treated as such (Grubb et al. 2019).

That is to say, actions taken that impact one aspect cannot be seen as separate from the other aspects. Sustainability has become synonymous with the environmental movement and it is perhaps the most well understood part of sustainability. It refers to acting in a way that respects the environmental boundaries of the world, rather than exploiting natural resources, and both protecting and replenishing natural habits. While this is a fundamental aspect of the concept, the other two aspects must not be overlooked. Society refers to the social impact of actions—the affect had on people, both directly and indirectly, as well as the social fabric of a community or area. Finally, economy refers to the financial impact. This is often thought of as only profitability but it is important to consider also the financial health of sector or certain group as well as the financial longevity of a behaviour or policy. Furthermore, it was made clear that the future impacts of actions taken in the present must be considered so as to protect the needs of further generations and the ability to meet those needs (Grubb et al. 2019). Finally, it was made clear that this Earth Summit that in order to achieve consumption patterns that remain within the environment bounds of the planet, exhaustive structural shifts within the global economy are needed (Grubb et al. 2019). While there may not be one clear definition of sustainability, Vos asserts that definitions should be adapted to serve the time and context of its and through implementation and practice of sustainability, definitions will be crafted and refined (Vos 2007).

In the same vein, sustainable agriculture does not have one definition, and is rather an umbrella term that can mean a number of different things depending on the context. This lack of singular, universal definition allows for a degree of flexibility which is currently regarded as an opportunity, particularly when concerned with the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices (Siebrecht 2020). Two main groups emerge when considering a definition of sustainable agriculture. These are “goal-prescribing” and “system-describing”. Goal-prescribing understandings of sustainable agriculture view sustainability as an ideology and, as such, an approach with which other areas can be managed (Siebrecht 2020). Therefore certain measures, techniques, or tools can be defined as sustainable and if the standards defining them are met, sustainability can be assumed. This has also been described as “mean oriented”. On the other hand, system-describing concepts interpret sustainability as “the ability to fulfil a diverse set of goals” or the ability to continue something over time (Siebrecht 2020). This understanding therefore highlights sustainability to be an objective property that attains varying goals that can either be in line with each other or conflicting. This is closely related to the “competing objectives” understanding of sustainability, whereby the main focus is on “balancing social, economic, and ecological goals” (Farrell & Hart 1998).

There is no doubt that a sustainable agricultural system within the EU has many demands to meet, such as support thriving rural areas, sustain economic health of farmers, mitigate climate change and contribute to a biodiverse environment, and meet the food needs of EU citizens. According to Siebrecht (2020), “the more goals an agricultural system can achieve, the more sustainable it will be”. This dynamic understanding of sustainable agriculture, one that is continually optimising and adapting to reach multiple goals, in line with the competing objectives interpretation of sustainable agriculture, is the understanding that will be used in this study.

### *2.1.3 The Importance of a Sustainable Agricultural System*

As mentioned previously, a sustainable agricultural system must equally support the environmental, social, and economic needs of those working in and affected by the system. As the CAP proposal will decide the direction of EU agricultural policy moving forward, it is necessary to consider the current context of factors relating to a sustainable agricultural system. From an environmental perspective, there is an urgent need for improved agricultural policy focused on climate change mitigation. As mentioned previously, the agricultural sector is a very large contributor to global emissions, which can be separated into direct and indirect emissions. Direct emissions make up roughly half of all food systems emissions and are defined as emissions related to production, such as ruminants releasing methane through the digestive process and nitrogen applied to soils in the form of chemical fertilisers (Greenpeace 2020). The majority of direct emissions are therefore methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) released through farming practices, the farmed animals themselves, and from the manure the animals create. Indirect emissions, making up the other half of food systems emissions, are related to land-use changes, such as deforestation (Alexander et al. 2015), and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from both pre- and post-production processes, such as food processing, food transportation, and food waste (Greenpeace 2020).

It is important to note that within agriculture, the farming of animals is responsible for 70% of global agriculture direct emissions, which include roughly two-thirds of the total methane emissions for agriculture (Greenpeace 2020). In 2018, total emissions from animal farming specifically, referring to the production of meat, dairy, and eggs, was responsible for 17% of total EU emissions (Greenpeace 2020). To put this in perspective, the total emissions from animal agriculture (703.69 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>eq) in 2018 were more than the total emissions for all cars and vans in the EU-28 (655.9 Mt

CO<sub>2</sub>eq) in the same year (Greenpeace 2020). In the period 2007 to 2018, total emissions from animal agriculture increased by 6% (5% increase in direct emissions and 8% increase in indirect emissions). In the same period, meat, dairy, and egg production increase by 9.5%. Increased amounts of food production must be understood in the context that 20% of food produced in the EU is wasted (Stenmarck et al. 2016).

Another major environmental impact of the current agricultural system is biodiversity loss. The agricultural sector accounts for the single largest land use, covering roughly one-third of the land surface of the world (Dudley & Alexander 2017). It is perhaps not surprising then that the largest driver of biodiversity loss is agriculture (Dudley & Alexander 2017). Biodiversity loss as a result of the agricultural sector is a result of many complex mechanisms, however the most common aspects are the transformation of natural ecosystems into farms, the intensification of production methods in traditionally managed landscapes, the release of pollutants, and the associated impacts of the agricultural value chain (such as transportation and food waste) (Dudley & Alexander 2017).

Agriculture is the largest driver of deforestation, with the practices reaching back to the 1980s and 1990s, when forests formed the primary source of new agricultural land (Gibbs et al. 2010). The replacement of traditional, often biodiversity supportive farming method with intensive, large-scale monoculture methods for crops such as soybeans and oil palm have increased drastically in the last decade resulting in devastating consequences (Dudley & Alexander 2017). Agrochemicals, such as fertilisers, are a key tool in the intensifications of the agricultural sector. Algal blooms as a result of nutrient pollution are particularly damaging to freshwater ecosystems, with there currently being over 500 'dead zones' or water severely depleted of oxygen around the world (Dudley & Alexander 2017). Increased crop resistance to chemicals such as glyphosate will likely result in increased use of the chemical, highlighting why biodiversity continues to decrease on farmland and adjacent land over time (Tanentzap et al. 2015). It is important to acknowledge that while farming has intensified, this has not been translated into health benefits for consumers. Almost 80% of total arable agricultural land is used for the production of animal feed (Thornton et al. 2011) and while 60% of the worlds total agricultural land is used for beef production, beef only accounts for under 2% of global calories consumed (Boucher et al. 2012).

Currently, just over 71% of the agricultural land in the EU, that is to say land that is used to grow crops (arable land) as well as grassland that is used for grazing and/or fodder production, is used to

feed livestock. When excluding grasslands, over 63% of all arable land is used for the production of animal feed rather than food for human consumption. More generally, beef and pork production contributed to 43% of species loss per year between 2008 and 2016 (Crenna et al. 2019). In fact, according to the EEA 60% of species and 77% of habitats assessed were found to be in unfavourable conservation conditions (EEA 2015). Furthermore, the level of nitrogen greatly exceeded the eutrophication limits adequate for the ecosystem in most of the EU (EEA 2014). As the CAP is directly responsible for altering the direction of the agricultural sector of the EU, it has enormous potential for environmental impact. Further reaching environmental policies would therefore contribute to a more sustainable agricultural system.

The second pillar of a sustainable agricultural system is that of social sustainability. The agricultural sector has an enormous impact on people that are directly involved as well as people that are not. For those that are directly involved, the sector is responsible for economic stability through a salary and social connections through their place of work and/or rural community. For those that are not directly involved, who will be referred to broadly as consumers, the agricultural sector affects the cost of food, their access to healthy food, as well as the environment around them. Roughly 10 million people work within the EU agricultural sector, accounting for 4.4% of total employment within the EU (Eurostat 2017). As of 2016, only 31.8% of agricultural labour force was below the age of 40 years old, compared to 42.2% of the total working population. Moreover, 59.2% of the agricultural labour force were between the ages of 40-64 years old and 9.0% were above the age of 64. This is compared to 55.2% of the total working population and 2.4% of the total working population respectively (Eurostat 2017). It is evident that young people are choosing to not pursue careers in the agricultural sector, resulting in many leaving rural areas completely to find employment elsewhere. This may be, in part, due to the lack of economic stability currently provided by working in agriculture. Between 2005 and 2013, 3.7 million or 26% of farms across the EU shut down (Greenpeace 2019). In the same time span, however, the total number of livestock units on very large farms increase by almost 10 million (Greenpeace 2019). According to Eurostat, this took place due to these farms “making use of more intensive farming practices” (Greenpeace 2019). The economic health and social fabric of rural areas needs to be an integral aspect of the CAP proposal in order to support a socially sustainable agricultural system.

To build on this, it is important to consider that consumers are not only effected by the agricultural sector but can also influence it. Consumers in the global north are becoming increasingly aware of

the enormous environmental impact the agricultural system has and, with this awareness, many consumers now desire an agricultural system that promotes climate change mitigation and are showing this change through their purchasing decisions. Currently, consumers are increasingly shifting to more plant-based diets across the EU resulting in both policy makers and other actors within the agricultural sector adapting to consumer demands. While animal welfare continues to be a leading motivation for consumers to adopt a more plant-based diet, ecological factors are becoming increasingly important, as are health concerns (Janssen et al. 2016). Moreover, the socio-economic make up of those shifting to more plant-based diets is predominantly young (under 35), female, and highly educated (university education) (Janssen et al. 2016). However, it is not only plant-based diets that are contributing to climate change mitigation. Increasing numbers of Europeans are incorporating more plant-based foods into their diet even if they do not subscribe to the dietary choice completely. According to the IPCC, “the potential to reduce [greenhouse gas] emissions through changes in consumption was found to be substantially higher than that of technical mitigation measures [such as improved cropland or livestock management]” (IPCC 2014, p. 840). Evidently, consumer dietary choices have a large environmental impact.

There is a substantial body of research interested in the environmental impacts of varying dietary choices and hypothetical scenarios. With food being responsible for between 20% to 30% of a private individual’s total environmental impact (Scherhauser et al. 2018), it is an important aspect to consider when address the climate crisis. This body of research encompasses a number of different approaches, such as: analysing the environmental impact of omnivore, pescatarian, vegetarian, vegan, and alternative protein diets (Hallström et al. 2015, Alexander et al. 2016, Rööös et al. 2017, Alexander et al. 2017, Rabès et al. 2020, Mann 2020), analysing the environmental impact of a national recommended diet (Ow et al. 2020, Huan-Niemi et al. 2020, Broekema et al. 2020), and including impacts on health and nutrition (such as non-communicable disease) and environmental impact (Rööös et al. 2015, Aleksandrowicz et al. 2016, Springmann et al. 2016).

An overarching review of this body of research found that vegan diets had the greatest reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as well as the biggest positive impact on health (Aleksandrowicz et al. 2016). However, the largest impact could be seen in the reduction of consuming ruminant meats (Aleksandrowicz et al. 2016). In the same vain, Springmann et al. (2016) show that an increase in the consumption of a vegan diet would result in 6–10% reduction in global mortality and 29–70%

reduction in food-related greenhouse gas emissions. According to an extensive report by Willett et al. (2019), the necessary dietary shift “requires a dramatic reduction of consumption of unhealthy foods, such as red meat, by at least 50% with variations in the change required according to region” and, simultaneously, “an overall increase in consumption of more than 100% is needed for legumes, nuts, fruit, and vegetables” (Willett et al. 2019). When considering the average diets consumed in the global north, more realistically it has been put forward that there needs to be a 56% reduction in the consumption of red meat, a 25% increase in the consumption of fruit and vegetables, and humans as a whole need to consume 15% fewer calories to meet the climate goals of the Paris Agreement and stay within the guidelines of a healthy diet (Springmann et al. 2016). This evidence highlights that the increased consumption of plant-based dietary choices supports both environmental and social sustainability factors.

Finally then, the economic pillar of sustainability. This refers to the economy of the agriculture sector overall, and its economic impact within the EU, rather than looking at the private economic health of those working within the sector (which is discussed as part of the social pillar). While not as heavily researched or discussed when concerned with sustainability, it is a vital aspect of a sustainable agricultural system. In 2020, the agricultural sector created a gross value added of €177.0 billion, contributing roughly 1.3% to the EU’s GDP in 2020 (Eurostat 2021). To put this in context, this contribution is only slightly less than the entire GDP of Greece, which is the 16th largest economy within the EU (Eurostat 2021). An important aspect of the EU agricultural sector is the enormous role played by the private sector. The private sector is purported by the EU as an important collaborator with the public sector in order to achieve numerous agricultural goals, however, it is of course guided by profitability (Knickel & Maréchal 2018). This is, at times, a difficult relationship and duality to maintain given the multitude of other objectives that are worked towards by the public sector (Knickel & Maréchal 2018).

Moreover, it is worth noting that the volume of total agricultural labour has declined sharply between 2005-2020, at an annual average rate of -2.5% (Eurostat 2021), which highlights increased rates of productivity. An awareness of this is vital as the increasingly high levels of agricultural production in the 1970s and 1980s were made possible due to a period of extreme amounts of intensification and this intensification of agricultural production lead to vast environmental damage (Matthews 2013). The agricultural sector is an important economic interest for the EU and one



which has been advocated for in the past at the expense of social and environmental factors (Matthews 2013).

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

This analysis undertaken in this thesis takes place through the lens of Polanyian theory. Economic sociologist Karl Polanyi's eponymous theoretical framework has been employed to understand policy, particularly policy pertaining to environmental factors, in numerous academic studies (Coffey 2016, Ertör & Ortega-Cerdà 2017). This framework specifically highlights the interrelatedness of social, economic, ecological, and political dimensions when considering the growing and transforming of socioeconomic activity that is based on ecological resources. As discussed previously, this is a vital aspect of the understanding of sustainable agriculture that is used in this thesis. From a Polanyian perspective, it is imperative that the agricultural sector, which is a socioeconomic activity based on ecological resources, be guided by the interconnected nature of the social, economic, ecological, and political aspects that are necessary within the sector. Two core aspects of this framework are the ideas of embeddedness and enclosures, both of which will be discussed below.

Embeddedness is an integral of the Polanyian framework, with Polanyi stating that "economic systems, as a rule, are embedded in social relations" (Polanyi 2001 [1944], p. 279). This is in reaction to the popularisation of disembodiedness, or the perception that the economic sphere is inherently separate from the political, ecological, and social spheres. According to Polanyi, economies that are disembodied from socio-ecological relations and institutions, that is to say, economies that are governed by market prices, will '[annihilate] the natural and human substance of society' (Polanyi 2001 [1944], p. 3). This allows the discourses present within the CAP proposal to be understood with the framework of an embedded economic system. The implications of the CAP proposal on the agricultural sector through market mechanisms are intrinsically related to the socio-ecological systems and institutions within the EU. The economic sphere cannot be understood as separate from any other, as has potentially been the case in the past concerning direct payments, as it leads to detrimental social and environmental affects. Therefore when discussing the representation of sustainable agriculture within the CAP, and the related discourses, the economic aspects must be understood through the lens of embeddedness.

The second fundamental aspect of the Polyanian framework is the concept of enclosures. Enclosures are the means by which public or common natural space (i.e. arable land, forests, etc) were converted to private property, resulting in the ability to accumulate capital from said space. Such enclosures were formed due to the belief that the economy was disembedded from society (Polanyi 2001 [1944]). In recent years, this theory has been expanded to include ‘new enclosures’; a set of techniques to manage and understand environmental challenges brought about by market-based instruments, such as contamination and habitat degradation (Ertör & Ortega-Cerdà 2017). Understanding enclosures and ‘new enclosures’ allows for an awareness particularly concerning climate change and biodiversity loss as a result of agricultural business interests. As agricultural activities have continued to intensify, increasing amounts of common natural space is being enclosed in order for businesses to accumulate capital. This process is leading to greater levels of environmental degradation. The concept of enclosures and new enclosures allows for a more nuanced understand of the role of financial instruments, such as those employed through the CAP, and their environmental impacts. The discourses surrounding the representation of sustainable agriculture in the CAP proposal can therefore be discussed with this Polanyian understanding of capital accumulation and the natural space.

# 3

## Data

### 3.1 Source Material

The source material of this study is the document CAP Strategic Plans (referred to as CAP proposal) published by the European Commission via the EUR-Lex website where EU legal documents are made available to the public. Published in 2018, this document is a proposal to reform the current EU CAP for the period 2021-2027. Currently, the version published in 2018 is the most up to date version available. However, the document does undergo a negotiation process and editing before approval. Generally, EU CAP reforms are in place for a seven year period. However, the end of the CAP reform for the period 2013-2020 coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic. The decision was therefore taken that for 2020 and 2021, the previous CAP reform would be extended allowing for priorities to be adjusted in terms of policy focus during the pandemic. Included in the EU CAP proposal for 2021-2027 are the strategic directions and goals of the policy, as well as information regarding implementation and funding of the strategies proposed.

### 3.2 Critical Discussion of the Source Material

The source material was chosen from a group of related documents published by various EU bodies on EUR-Lex. These documents were: *A Farm to Fork Strategy*, *A Programme for the Environment and Climate Change (LIFE)*, *The European Green Deal*, *Questions and Answers on the CAP Reform*, and the *CAP proposal*. While certainly related to the subject matter, it was not within the scope of this study to include all of these texts. The CAP proposal outlines in distinct detail the proposed agricultural policy of the EU moving forward. It goes beyond being a statement of goals or intentions, or a publication piece highlighting key policy focus points, and states what the reforms to policy will be. I therefore decided that this was not only the most relevant to the study but would provide the most detailed data.

The *Farm to Fork Strategy* is a ten year strategy plan set out by the European Commission as part of the European Green Deal. It outlines to goals of the European Union relating to a sustainable food system and the health of European citizens. While related to the topic of this study, this docu-

ment did not include aspects related to implementation—a vital point to be analysed. *A Programme for the Environmental and Climate Change (LIFE)* outlines the details of the next iteration of the LIFE Programme. This is the EU’s funding instrument for the environment and climate action and, while it does cover aspects related to agriculture, this is certainly not its focus. It is much broader than just agriculture and supports environmental and climate action in many different sectors. *The European Green Deal* is the most exhaustive document that was considered for this study, detailing the position and goals of the European Union related to climate in all sectors. Both of these documents were too broad in scope for this study. Finally, a complimentary document to the EU CAP proposal was published by the European Commission in 2020 in the form of a list of Questions and Answers. This document clarifies the European Commission’s position on a number of aspects of the EU CAP proposal. While important, it does not include much more detailed information and rather acts to clarify certain aspects in the text.

# 4

## Method

### 4.1 Method

This study follows a qualitative methodology in the form of a discourse analysis. In particular, Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) analytical framework is employed to investigate how sustainable agriculture is represented in the current EU CAP proposal. This approach aims to draw attention to the underlying assumptions and taken for granted premises in the EU CAP proposal, as well as the unheard voices that may well have been silenced or actively/accidentally not included (Bacchi 2009). Assumptions and taken for granted premises certainly result in the limitation of thoughts and actions. Through understanding these limitations, and the causes of them, a wider realm of possibility is discovered (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). The WPR analytical framework is made up of six questions (Bacchi 2009, p. xii):

- (i) what's the "problem" represented to be in policy?;
- (ii) what presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"?
- (iii) how has this representation of the "problem" come about?;
- (iv) what is left unproblematic in this problem representation and where are the silences; can the "problem" be thought about differently?;
- (v) what effects are produced by this representation of the "problem"?
- and (vi) how and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended and how could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

This thesis analyses the representation of sustainable agricultural in the EU CAP proposal using a two step method. Based on Bacchi's WPR framework, the "problem" then is sustainable agriculture. The CAP proposal is a primary document published by the European Commission and, as highlighted in the previous chapter, covers proposed agricultural policy changes within the EU. As the first step of this study, the document was codified and categorised, covering 143 pages. Upon a thorough reading of the document, *quotes* were identified in the form of both relevant sentences and paragraphs. *Codes* were formed by summarising the *quotes* into short, general sentences. The *codes* were then categorised to reflect broader semantic concepts, resulting in six *code families*. As an example, the quote: "a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increas-

ing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture” (European Commission 2018), was identified. This was coded as ‘C5 The economic health of farmers must be improved’ due to its focus on increase the income of those working within the agricultural sector and ultimately categorised within the code family ‘Rural Economy’.

Through the coding and categorising of the source material, common discourses are able to be uncovered, their intensity and frequency highlighted, and the varying ways in which the discourses are framed, analysed. For the second step in this study, the first five questions of Bacchi’s WPR framework are applied to each of the four most frequent code families, with each question being addressed in turn. The sixth question of the WPR framework is not included in this study as it does not act to address the research questions and was therefore deemed not relevant to include in this study. An examination of the internal differences in discourses within the code families, as well as differences between the code families, allows for conclusions to be drawn concerning the assumptions underlying the multiple discourses relating to sustainable agriculture in the CAP proposal and their effects.

Ertör and Ortega-Cerdà (2017) employ Carol Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” (WPR) framework to analyse the discourse surrounding EU aquaculture and fisheries policy paying particularly close attention to uncovering the tensions that lie within the discourses highlighted. They use this framework in conjunction with Polanyi’s theoretical framework (chapter 2.2) to further uncover the tensions and assumptions that exist within the discourse of this particular EU agricultural policy. This provides a solid basis for the use of this method and theoretical framework in this study. Ertör and Ortega-Cerdà (2017) use a two step process in their analysis whereby their source material is coded and categorised into quotes, codes, and code families first. Bacchi’s WPR framework is then applied to their resulting data allowing them to highlight underlying assumptions and tensions within the discourses and discuss through the lens of the Polanyian theoretical framework. Based off of this, I employ the same methodology for this study.

## 4.2 Delimitations

The focus of this study is the current EU CAP proposal. This is therefore the key document relevant for this analysis. There are a number of EU strategies, and accompanying published documents, such as the Farm to Fork Initiative, the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE)

and the European Green Deal strategy that are influential strategies and legislative focal points related to the EU CAP. However, the EU CAP is a very wide reaching and multifaceted legislative policy. It interacts with many EU wide policy strategies and it is therefore not within the scope of this study to include all related documents.

Furthermore, this study will only analyse official EU documentation. The media, think tanks, NGOs and other groups certainly provide important data to analyse concerning the EU CAP proposal. However, for the scope of this study, only the official discourse of the EU CAP proposal will be analysed.

Finally, this study will only analyse the discourse surrounding the topic of sustainable agriculture. The CAP proposal includes many aspects, such detailing how countries should apply for funding and support the bureaucratic process involved. As this type of information is not related to sustainable agriculture directly, it will not be included in the discourse analysis of this study.

# 5

## Analysis

### 5.1 Results and Discussion

The main themes concerning sustainability within the COP proposal were highlighted through the identification of 130 quotes directly related to sustainability. These 130 quotes were codified into 13 codes which, in turn, were grouped into six code families. These have been outlined in table 1 below.

The code with the highest repetition frequency was ‘C1 Call to action and support of activities aimed at mitigating climate change’. This was certainly to be expected given the focus of this study and the most common focus of sustainability being on the environment. Multiple codes had the same lowest frequency of repetitions. These codes span multiple code families and, as such, highlight the wide scope of the CAP proposal. While the main themes identified shed light on the discourses included in this document, an analysis of the tensions existing between the discourses and the assumptions underlying them, employing Bacchi’s WPR analytical framework, is required to fully examine the representation of sustainable agriculture in the CAP proposal.

Table 1: Frequency of code repetitions

Code	Repetition
<b><i>Environmental Action</i></b>	
C1 Call to action and support of activities aimed at mitigating climate change	28
C2 Support measure that improve biodiversity	22
C3 Support environmentally friendly agricultural activities	12
<b><i>Rural Economy</i></b>	
C4 Rural areas must be supported in developing a strong economic and social fabric	15
C5 The economic health of farmers must be improved	10



C6 New economic opportunities for rural areas must be promoted and supported	6
<b><i>Agricultural Productivity and Profitability</i></b>	
C7 Support innovation to increase agricultural productivity	11
C8 Improve farmer market orientation	5
<b><i>Consumer Access to Healthy and Desired Food</i></b>	
C9 Support farmers in adapting to changing consumer demands concerning dietary choices	5
C10 Improve food security through increased access to healthy, affordable food	4
C11 Promote and support healthy eating and dietary choices	4
<b><i>Policy Trade-offs</i></b>	
C12 Income and environmental goals do not always support each other	4
<b><i>International and union-wide climate and development goals</i></b>	
C13 International goals concerning climate change and development must be upheld	4

Based on the results of step one, the second step will follow the first five questions of Bacchi's WPR framework (Bacchi 2009, p. xii), outlined in chapter 4.1, to shed light on the different discourses surrounding sustainable agriculture within this document. This discussion will focus on the four most commonly identified themes, namely the code families: Environmental Action, Rural Economy, Agricultural Productivity and Profitability, and Consumer Access to Healthy and Desired Food. Each code family will be taken in turn and Bacchi's framework will be applied to the codes grouped within to investigate the different discourses surrounding sustainable agriculture.

### ***5.1.1 Environmental Action***

The code family Environmental Action is the first to be discussed and represents the environmental pillar of sustainable agriculture. This code family has the highest amount of repetition within the source material, with a total of 62 repetitions. The most frequently repeated code, 'C1 Call to action and support of activities aimed at mitigating climate change', is included in this code family, along

with ‘C2 Support measure that improve biodiversity’ and ‘C3 Support environmentally friendly agricultural activities’.

*How is sustainable agriculture represented in the policy?*

Sustainable agricultural activities are represented as providing an opportunity to mitigate climate change and, as such, sustainable agriculture is seen to be a tool with which the EU can address climate change as well as biodiversity loss (C2). This is exemplified in the quote “Agriculture and forestry cover 84% of the EU territory. The sectors both depend on and influence the environment. Therefore, a number of the proposed CAP specific objectives will trigger environmental and climate action in line with the respective EU policies supporting the transition towards a fully sustainable agricultural sector” (European Commission 2018). Environmentally friendly agricultural activities (C3) are overtly encouraged, however, they are stated with the caveat of being voluntary if they go beyond the minimum EU requirements. While purported as an important goal, it is heavily emphasised that sustainable agricultural activities that go beyond the mandatory EU agricultural regulations are completely voluntary.

*What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of sustainable agriculture?*

From this representation, it is evident that there is an underlying assumption that agriculture contributes to climate change. This representation also shows an assumption that the minimum requirements currently in place within the EU are not far reaching enough to adequately address the climate crisis. Moreover, these codes show that the agriculture sector is being taken as a whole when considering environmental impacts, rather than addressing the significant differences between varying agricultural practices. The pervasive assumption is that all forms of agriculture within the agricultural sector demonstrate the same level of environmental impact.

*How has this representation of the sustainable agriculture come about?*

It is important to acknowledge the actors that are involved in forming EU policy, when addressing how this representation came about. The agricultural sector, particularly animal agriculture, is an important financial asset within the EU.

*What is left unproblematic in this representation of sustainable agriculture and where are the silences?*

There is a glaring silence concerning animal agriculture in this representation. As stated in chapter 1.1, the differences in the environmental impact of different forms of agriculture are vast. These inherent differences are neither acknowledged nor explored. Furthermore, the positive impact that some forms of agriculture can have on the environment and in turn the positive relationship be-

tween environmentally friendly agricultural technical and agricultural performance are not included in the discourse.

*What effects are produced by this representation of sustainable agriculture?*

This discourse results in policy proposals that do not adequately address the wide discrepancies that exist in environmental impact between different forms of agriculture. Furthermore, it highlights that the current EU agricultural regulations are not far reaching enough but maintains that reaching above them to a more appropriate level of climate change mitigation is completely voluntary. This messaging does not improve the environmental standards of agricultural sector and rather encourages farmers and agricultural actors to view sustainability measures as an optional addition to their business practices. While the environmental impact is no longer being ignored, far reaching and rigorous mandatory climate change mitigation activities are evidently still belong the scope of EU policy.

### *5.1.2 Rural Economy*

The second code family, Rural Economy, and includes the third most frequently repeated code: ‘C4 rural areas must be supported in developing a strong economic and social fabric’. It also includes the codes ‘C5 The economic health of farmers must be improved’ and ‘C6 New economic opportunities for rural areas must be promoted and supported’. This code family has a total of 31 repetitions and represents one aspects of the social pillar of sustainable agriculture which is focused on those directly working within the agricultural sector.

*How is sustainable agriculture represented in the policy?*

In combination with improving the economic health of farmers (C5) and promoting new economic opportunities for rural areas (C6), sustainable agriculture is represented as an opportunity to revitalise rural areas. It is shown to provide employment opportunities, particularly for young people, and new, innovative and, most importantly, profitable, forms of farming.

*What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of sustainable agriculture?*

There is an overt assumption that rural areas are struggling not only financially but also in terms of social cohesion. It is also evidently assumed that young people are not currently interested in the agricultural sector or living in the rural environmental. Furthermore, it is assumed that sustainable agriculture will provide new job opportunities and more profitable activities which, in turn, will be attractive to young people.

*How has this representation of the sustainable agriculture come about?*

As highlighted in chapter 2.1.1, the agricultural sector is certainly less popular with young people than other employment sectors. As young people are becoming increasingly aware and active related to climate change mitigation, the perception that the agricultural sector is entrenched in old, environmental damaging ways and that it does not provide a stable income, has led to young people not choosing to enter the sector.

*What is left unproblematic in this representation of sustainable agriculture and where are the silences?*

This discourse is lacking in highlighting the discrepancies between large-scale farms and small-scale farms. There is no inclusion of the role large farms play in negatively impacting the financial health of small-scale farmers or their damaging impact on the social fabric of rural areas. Furthermore, there is no mention of what aspects of the agricultural sector are unappealing to young people. Other than alluding to its lack of profitability, there is no mention of what would need to change in order to attract young people to work in the agricultural sector.

*What effects are produced by this representation of sustainable agriculture?*

Policies aimed at supporting small-scale farmers, as a result of this discourse, do not address the systemic issues that prevent small-scale farmers from thriving. The focus remains on the outcome of an issue rather than the cause of it. To employ a Polanyian lens, this discourse is representative of an embedded system whereby the market system is seen as being intrinsically related to the socio-ecological factors present within society. While sustainable agriculture is represented in this discourse as an opportunity for small-scale farmers and rural communities, but it is not put forward as a tool for tackling the issues caused by large-scale (particularly animal) farming.

### *5.1.3 Agricultural Productivity and Profitability*

Agricultural Productivity and Profitability is the third code family to be discussed and represents the economic pillar of sustainable agriculture. This is the code family with the third highest frequency of repetitions—31—and includes the codes ‘C7 Support innovation to increase agricultural productivity’ and ‘C8 Improve farmer market orientation’.

*How is sustainable agriculture represented in the policy?*

Increased productivity due to innovation (C7) and improved market orientation (C8) for farmers are both key aspects that sustainable agriculture is represented to support. Innovation, in the form of new methods, technologies, and knowledge sharing, is put forward as a key contributor to reaching

sustainable agriculture goals as well as being triggered by the support of a more sustainable agricultural system.

*What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of sustainable agriculture?*

A clear underlying assumption here is that increased productivity will lead to increased profitability. Innovation is purported as certainly bringing about improvements in productivity which, it is assumed, will lead to improved levels of profitability. Furthermore, innovation and new technologies are seen as an answer to deep rooted challenges within a system that does not function as required to mitigate climate change.

*How has this representation of the sustainable agriculture come about?*

The focus on innovation is not unique to agricultural policy—it is an EU wide initiative. This representation is therefore a result of the CAP being an integrated and cornerstone policy of the EU, as discussed in chapter 3.2.

*What is left unproblematic in this representation of sustainable agriculture and where are the silences?*

This representation does not highlight or discuss the deeply rooted, structural challenges facing the agricultural sector and rather puts forward innovation, new ideas, technologies, and methods, as solutions to reach environmental and economic goals. Moreover, there is no discussion concerning the potential for environmental damage as a result of increased productivity within the agricultural sector.

*What effects are produced by this representation of sustainable agriculture?*

Evidently, by focusing the discourse surrounding productivity and profitability in a sustainable agricultural system on innovation and new technology, policy that may have addressed structural issues are not emphasised. Furthermore, from a Polanyian perspective this is representative of a disembedded system where the market forces are seen as separate from socio-ecological aspects. This discourse, while important, results in a shifting of focus away from core, deeply rooted challenges in the agricultural sector and highlights sustainable agriculture as something that will trigger as well as be achieved by technological advances.

### *5.1.4 Consumer Access to Healthy and Desired Food*

Finally, the code family Consumer Access to Healthy and Desired Food, will be analysed. This represents the second, consumer focused aspect of the social pillar of sustainable agriculture and is repeated 13 times. This code family includes the codes ‘C9 Support farmers in adapting to changing

consumer demands concerning dietary choices’, ‘C10 Improve food security through increased access to healthy, affordable food’, and ‘C11 Promote and support healthy eating and dietary choices’.

*How is sustainable agriculture represented in the policy?*

Farmers’ ability to adapt to changing consumer demands (C9) while improving food security (C10) and promoting healthy eating choices (C11) are focused on as key policy points in a sustainable agricultural system. A sustainable agricultural system must provide EU citizens with healthy food that is affordable food and in line with consumer desires.

*What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of sustainable agriculture?*

From the identified discourse, it is plainly assumed that farmers struggle to adapt to changing consumer habits. As consumer habits change, farmers are unable to pivot to stay profitable. It is also assumed that farmers do not produce an adequate amount of healthy food that is affordable for consumers. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that this discourse assumes that farmers do not or cannot drive change within consumer decision making, i.e. consumers choosing to eat more plant-based foods, and rather farmers can only respond to changing consumer behaviour.

*How has this representation of the sustainable agriculture come about?*

These assumptions stem from consumer habits in terms of dietary choices in particular changing significantly in the EU in recent years, as discussed in chapter 2.1.3. As an industry, the farming sector does face significant challenges when concerned with adaptability and changing their operations quickly. Consumers habits and awareness are changing at a fast rate which is proving to be particularly challenging for farmers. Moreover, the EU population is struggling with health as a result of dietary choices. Highlighted in chapter 2.1.3, the typical diet within the EU is not conducive with a healthy population and there are serious lack of equal availability of healthy food.

*What is left unproblematic in this representation of sustainable agriculture and where are the silences?*

This discourse fails to discuss how to prevent the production of unhealthy food within the EU and rather than highlighting which foods or production methods need to be moved away from, innovation is emphasised as the answer. The role of the agricultural sector in influencing dietary choices, as well as in the production and support of unhealthy dietary options, is not addressed. Also not included is the difference between crops produced for animal agricultural consumption and crops produced for human consumption. This is an important distinction for both health and environmental aspects.

*What effects are produced by this representation of sustainable agriculture?*

This removes farmers from the active role of supporting and promoting more sustainable food choices through their choices as food producers. It emphasises heavily the role played by consumers and portrays farmers in a passive light. As a result of this discourse, the role of new technologies and innovations is given significant prominence in policy formation, while it is not emphasised where these innovations are needed, who will be innovating, and who will have access to the innovations.

### *5.1.5 Tensions Between Discourses*

It is evident that the discourse surrounding sustainable agriculture is varied, with a number of underlying assumptions and impacts as a result. There are a number of tensions that exist between the numerous discourses. It has been shown that there is a powerful discourse surrounding increased agricultural productivity (C7) and improved farmer market orientation (C8). However, depending on how this is done, this is potentially in direct conflict with supporting environmentally friendly agricultural activities (C3), supporting measure that improve biodiversity (C2), call to action and support of activities aimed at mitigating climate change (C1), promoting and supporting healthy eating and dietary choices (C11), improving the economic health of farmers (C5), and supporting rural areas in developing a strong economic and social fabric (C4). The assumption that agricultural productivity should increase, without distinguishing between differing forms of agriculture, is certainly in conflict with the codes related to climate change mitigation. Increased productivity has, in the past (highlighted in chapter 2.1.1), had detrimental affects on the environment. Without specifying with forms of agriculture are to see productivity increases, there is also a risk that consumption of unhealthy dietary choices will be continued and potentially encouraged through product pricing. Furthermore, productivity increases do not necessarily translate to small-scale farmers and rural communities. As shown in chapter 1.1, in the past decade productivity increases in large-scale farms have put small-scale farms increasingly out of business.

Moreover, tension is certainly clear between the call to action and support of activities aimed at mitigating climate change (C1) and support for farmers in adapting to changing consumer demands concerning dietary choices (C9). C1 assumes that farmers and the agricultural sector are drivers in systemic change and climate change mitigation activities, however, C9 assumes that consumers are drivers of change and farmers are only able to adapt to their changing preferences. This tension leads to unclear discourse surrounding the responsibility held by different actors within the goal of

mitigating climate change. While farmers must adapt to changing consumer demands, by extension of the assumption underlying C9, it can be understood that if consumer demands did not change, then farmer behaviour would not need to.

Finally, there is also tension between support for farmers in adapting to changing consumer demands concerning dietary choices (C9) and supporting innovation to increase agricultural productivity (C7). As highlighted previously, C9 assumes that farmers are unable to adequately adapt to changes within the market. However, C7 assumes that innovation will provide new market opportunities for farmers. The tension here lies in the assumption that innovation will be taken up by farmers when it is assumed that farmers do not adjust well when needed due to outside factors. Innovation and innovative methods therefore do not seem to be something that is currently generally taken up quickly or easily within the farming community. The reliance on innovation as a tool that will allow farmers to adjust to changing market conditions and demands therefore seems out of touch with the reality of how farmers are currently perceived and the assumptions underlying other aspects of the CAP proposal.



# 6

## Conclusion

### 6.1 Research Aims

This study has conducted a discourse analysis of the current EU CAP proposal, utilising Bacchi's WPR framework to uncover the tensions that lie within the representations of sustainable agriculture and ultimately address the research questions, which are:

RQ1: What are the presumptions and assumptions underlying the representation of sustainable agriculture in the EU CAP proposal 2020-2027?

RQ2: What effects are produced by this representation of sustainable agriculture?

Beginning with RQ1 then, this study identified 11 assumptions concerning the representation of sustainable agriculture in the CAP proposal. The first assumption being that agricultural sector contributes to climate change. The second assumption highlighted is that the current agricultural policies within the EU do not go far enough in order to mitigate climate change. Next, this representation of sustainable agriculture shows an assumption that all forms of agriculture have the same environmental impact. Another assumption identified is that rural areas are experiencing serious challenges financially and socially. In the same vein, there is an assumption that young people do not currently desire to work in the agricultural sector and, in combination with this, do not desire to live in the countryside. Moreover, an underlying assumption is that sustainable agriculture will create an increasing amount of well paying employment opportunities that will, in turn, attract young people to the agricultural sector and to the countryside. Innovation is assumed to be able to increase productivity and therefore profitability of the agricultural sector. In fact, innovation and new technologies are assumed to provide solutions for deeply rooted structural challenges within the sector. A further assumption is that farmers, and actors within the agricultural sector in general, are unable to adapt to fast-changing consumer demands. In addition to this, it is assumed that farmers are not active in guiding consumer behaviour in relation to climate-smart food choices. It is also assumed that the agricultural sector of the EU does not produce enough food that is both healthy and affordable to European consumers.

To address RQ2, five effects are produced by these assumptions and ultimately this representation of sustainable agriculture. First, the vast differences in environmental impact that exist between different agricultural activities are not adequately addressed in policy proposals as a result of the aforementioned assumptions. As the environmental measures put forward in the COP proposal are completely voluntary in nature, the mandatory environmental measures in place within the EU are shown to be inadequate in mitigating climate change. This messaging highlights to actors within the agricultural sector that comprehensive and far reaching environmental policies for the agricultural sector are optional and thus not a necessary cornerstone of their business practices. Moreover, the previously discussed assumptions result in policies that do not address the distinct challenges faced by small-scale farms. The substantial differences between small-scale and large-scale farmers remain unacknowledged therefore allowing the systemic advantages of large-scale farms to prevail. A further effect is that innovation and new technologies become the focus of policy and the sustainable agriculture conversation, drawing attention away from deeply rooted, systemic issues within the agricultural sector. While innovation and new technologies are certainly an important part of climate change mitigation and the building of a sustainable agricultural sector, the focus on them acts to disguise fundamental challenges that policy needs to address. Furthermore, farmers are removed from being positioned as active contributors to healthy and sustainable dietary choices to consumers and rather framed as passive actors that are only able to react to consumer demand changes rather than acting to influence consumer habits.

It is evident that the assumptions that underlie the representation of sustainable agriculture within the CAP proposal have serious and wide-reaching effects on policy. Both the assumptions and their effects within policy are important to acknowledge as they are not at the forefront of the discussion concerning the policy in question. A deeper understanding allows for a more nuanced and complex understanding of the policy. In the case of this study, the conclusions drawn concerning the CAP proposal highlight pressing issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve a sustainable agricultural system that meets the economic, social, and environmental challenges of the EU agricultural sector.

## 6.2 Practical Implications

There are a number of practical implications for this research. The need for rigorous and multi-dimensional policy in order to achieve a sustainable agricultural system has been made overtly clear

through the identification of the underlying assumptions, tensions therein, and effects concerning sustainable agriculture. With this knowledge, it is imperative that policy makers recognise the assumptions that underlie the policy they are involved in forming in order to address said assumptions and ensure their ultimate effect is in line with the goals of the policy in question. This study has exemplified how the WPR framework can be applied to policy in order to identify and address assumptions and their effects, setting the groundwork for this method to be employed more commonly moving forward. Furthermore, the contrasting discourses highlighted provide a groundwork for not only policy makers but pressure groups and non-governmental organisations, as well as other actors within the agriculture sector, to base upcoming discussions concerning this CAP proposal on moving forward.

### 6.3 Future Research

This thesis has applied the first five questions of Bacchi's WPR framework in order to address the research questions concerning the assumptions and their effects underlying the CAP proposal. However, the final question of this framework—how and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended and how could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?—was not included due to its lack of direct relatedness to the research questions. There is therefore a natural progression of this research to examine this question. In employing this final question of the WPR framework to build upon the research in this thesis, the production of the representation of sustainable agriculture identified in this research will be explored, as well as how this representation has been circulated in policy and elsewhere, and how it has been defended. Furthermore, addressing this final WPR question would allow for an exploration of how this representation can be questioned, disrupted and replaced. This would provide a deeper investigation of how this representation of sustainable agriculture came to be, where it has been used, and what can be done to about it. Actionable steps moving forward would be produced from this future study.

Looking more broadly at future research opportunities, this thesis has exemplified how the discourse surrounding sustainable agriculture can be explored in policy documentation. Given the urgency of the climate crisis and the enormous role played by the agricultural sector, it is imperative to understand how sustainable agriculture is represented in other policy documentation as well as in other forms, such as in the media.

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