

Extended Abstract

Please do not add your name or affiliation

Paper/Poster Title	Farmers' perceptions and perspectives in regard to agricultural policy making in Switzerland
---------------------------	---

Abstract prepared for presentation at the 97th Annual Conference of the Agricultural Economics Society, The University of Warwick, United Kingdom

27th – 29th March 2023

Abstract	200 words max
<p>Recent agricultural policy reforms in Switzerland claim to be the result of holistic approaches that take all actors of the food chain into account. However, especially the bulk of actors at the first (farmers) and last (consumers) stage of the food chain were mostly substituted by powerful organizations representing them. We observe a growing discomfort among both farmers and consumers. A true holistic approach includes all actors among the food chain while accounting for their respective power relation. We interviewed 75 Swiss grassland farmers about their perceptions and perspectives in regard to agricultural policy making. The statements cover a wide range of different topics, that go beyond common narratives usually brought into political discussions by representative organisations. Our findings emphasize participatory approaches, spatial and structural differentiation of measures and the empowerment of networks.</p>	
Keywords	Agricultural Policy, power relations, semi-structured interviews
JEL Code	Q18
Introduction	100 – 250 words
<p>The multifunctionality of the agricultural sector in Switzerland is defined by legislation (Flury and Huber 2008). Especially grasslands provide various important ecosystem services beyond fodder production. Agricultural policies aim to preserve and incentivize less intensive, more environmentally friendly grassland cultivation practices to improve ecosystem quality. As these measures involve compensational payments, their efficacy is crucial for efficient allocation of public money. However, the implementation of such measures not always delivers the desired result (Mack et al. 2020), as they are poorly designed in regard of farmers' willingness to comply (Brown et al. 2021).</p> <p>Traditionally, agricultural policy making has been the result of scientific knowledge, economic principles and political opinion. Recent policy reforms acknowledged the need for more holistic approaches (Möhring et al. 2020). The greening cycle of agricultural policy making in Switzerland thus involved a variety of actors (Metz et al. 2021). However, most actors at the first (farmers) and last (consumers) stages of the food chain were represented only by influential organizations. Among consumers, growing unease with agricultural policy is reflected in several popular initiatives demanding more sustainable agricultural practices (Huber and Finger 2019). Farmers perceive this as a lack of social recognition (Contzen and Häberli 2021). To</p>	

overcome this situation, a truly holistic approach is needed, that includes all actors and takes into account their respective power relations (Jacobi et al. 2021). This paper provides direct insights into farmers' perceptions and perspectives on agricultural policy making, based on 75 semi-structured interviews. Using these insights, we propose possible improvements in policy design.

Methodology

100 – 250 words

To obtain farmers' attitudes towards agricultural policy making, we interviewed 75 grassland farmers in the mountain region of Switzerland in late 2020. Interviewees were randomly recruited among the members of the Swiss Grassland Society (AGFF). We ensured an even spatial distribution of farms and chose to interview 25 conventional intensive (>1 ruminant Livestock Unit per grassland hectare (LSU/ha)), 25 conventional extensive (<1 LSU/ha) and 25 organic farms. Further, our data allows to group interviewees according to past in- or extensification strategies.

In our semi-structured interview guide, three questions addressed farmers' attitudes towards agricultural policy making: i) "what does it mean to be a farmer nowadays?", ii) "what barriers do you think there are to farmers being good land managers/farmers?", and iii) "according to your opinion, how should agricultural policies be shaped?". The interviews were transcribed and coded. In three inductive coding loops, we identified 14 topics that emerged from the answers to the three questions listed above. These topics can be grouped as stating either complaints or solutions to current issues in agricultural policy making. Among the solutions, we further distinguished three subgroups: solutions that add more details to current policies, solutions that continue and expand current policies, and solutions that reverse developments in policy making.

Results

100 – 250 words

An overview on farmers' opinions can be given by the number of statements per category. Of a total of 188 coded statements, 81 refer to complaints. Major topics were that (some) policies and regulations are too restrictive (25 statements) or too complex (17 statements). Farmers questioned the efficacy of policies and regulations (27 statements), and were concerned that direct payments may prevent innovations and transition (7 statements). 5 statements questioned area-based direct payments in contrast to animal-based direct payments.

107 of 188 statements referred to solutions. More detailed, case-specific policy measures were proposed 26 times, mostly by farmers who changed their production intensity in the past. These details included a spatial and/or structural differentiation of measures (21 statements), more responsibilities for farmers (4 statements), and improvements on the educational system of farmers (1 statement). 49 statements aimed to reverse developments in policy making, and a majority of these statements came from farmers who intensified their production in the past. A general discomfort was expressed towards frequent reforms, as farmers asked for more planning security (17 statements). Further, farmers proposed to increase protection by import restrictions (10 statements) and product price subsidies (22 statements). 22 statements proposed to continue and expand current policies, mostly coming from farmers which extensified their production in the past. The propositions included an increase of ecosystems services (17 statements), improvements in social

sustainability (10 statements), and the demand for more involvement of farmers and consumers in agricultural policy making (5 statements).

Discussion and Conclusion

100 – 250 words

Our results show that farmers' stated perceptions and perspectives cover a wide range of different topics that go beyond the narratives brought into political discussions by their representative organisations such as the farmers' lobby. The farmers show deep and conclusive system understanding, e.g. when they explain how they perceive missing efficacy of policy measures. In addition to the already revealed lack of recognition by consumers, they also perceive lack of recognition by policy makers and scholars.

Overall, farmers were constructive, as more than half of all statements included tangible strategies for policy improvements. This even culminates in the specific demand of more involvement of both farmers and consumers in agricultural policy making. Spatially and structurally more differentiated policy measures may be one of many possible solutions: By empowering local networks among farmers and consumers, the perceived recognition gap could be reduced (Anderson et al. 2019). Territory-based measures have been shown to be an effective complement to single-farm measures (González De Molina and Lopez-Garcia 2021). However, many farmers still proposed to reverse past decisions or simply complained. Such statements should not be marginalised as well.

Literature

- Anderson, C. R., J. Bruil, M. J. Chappell, C. Kiss and M. P. Pimbert (2019). "From Transition to Domains of Transformation: Getting to Sustainable and Just Food Systems through Agroecology." *Sustainability* **11**(19): 5272.
- Brown, C., E. Kovács, I. Herzon, S. Villamayor-Tomas, A. Albizua, A. Galanaki, I. Grammatikopoulou, D. McCracken, J. A. Olsson and Y. Zinngrebe (2021). "Simplistic understandings of farmer motivations could undermine the environmental potential of the common agricultural policy." *Land Use Policy* **101**: 105136. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.105136>.
- Contzen, S. and I. Häberli (2021). "Exploring dairy farmers' quality of life perceptions – A Swiss case study." *Journal of Rural Studies* **88**: 227-238. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.11.007>.
- Flury, C. and R. Huber (2008). "Evaluation of jointness in Swiss agriculture." *Multifunctionality in Agriculture Evaluating the degree of jointness, policy implications: Evaluating the degree of jointness, policy implications*: 241.
- González De Molina, M. and D. Lopez-Garcia (2021). "Principles for designing Agroecology-based Local (territorial) Agri-food Systems: a critical revision." *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* **45**(7): 1050-1082. DOI: 10.1080/21683565.2021.1913690.
- Huber, R. and R. Finger (2019). "Popular initiatives increasingly stimulate agricultural policy in Switzerland." *EuroChoices*.
- Jacobi, J., G. V. Villavicencio Valdez and K. Benabderrazik (2021). "Towards political ecologies of food." *Nature Food* **2**(11): 835-837. DOI: 10.1038/s43016-021-00404-8.

Mack, G., C. Ritzel and P. Jan (2020). "Determinants for the Implementation of Action-, Result- and Multi-Actor-Oriented Agri-Environment Schemes in Switzerland." Ecological Economics **176**: 106715. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2020.106715>.

Metz, F., E. Lieberherr, A. Schmucki and R. Huber (2021). "Policy Change Through Negotiated Agreements: The Case of Greening Swiss Agricultural Policy." Policy Studies Journal **49**(3): 731-756. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12417>.

Möhring, N., K. Ingold, P. Kudsk, F. Martin-Laurent, U. Niggli, M. Siegrist, B. Studer, A. Walter and R. Finger (2020). "Pathways for advancing pesticide policies." Nature Food **1**(9): 535-540. DOI: 10.1038/s43016-020-00141-4.