



CfF Meet & Greet: Head of the Unit of Food and Agriculture of the German Permanent Representation

On the 25th of March, 10 representatives of community-led initiatives from across Europe met with representatives of the Department for Food and Agriculture of the German Permanent Representation to the EU, to learn about their work and in particular their involvement in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) negotiation processes.

Affiliates of GEN, the Permakultur Institute, LEADER, as well as members of the ECOLISE policy circle and team participated in an online event with Dr. Jürgen Weis, head of the unit of the Department of Food and Agriculture and Anna Hübler, policy officer in the department, to exchange on the challenges and opportunities of the CAP for community-led initiatives. Right in the beginning of the meeting, some general and important questions were raised: How can ECOLISE work around the CAP? How can the CAP become a policy that works for everyone and not just for some? How can Community-led initiatives become engaged in the shaping of this policy?

The German Permanent Representation

The event started with an introduction to the organizational structure & the functions of the German Permanent Representation (PermRep). For a more detailed description see the [presentation](#). The Permanent Representation of Germany, is more or less a mirror image of the federal government of Germany at the EU level. It is headed by a permanent representative and a deputy representative, who are the spokespeople in the two Permanent Representatives Committees (COREPER 1 & 2). They are responsible for preparing the work of the Council of the EU. It has 3 departments - politics, economy and finances – which contain different ministries. Moreover, there are divisions on food and agriculture, traffic / transportation, labour and social affairs, health and education and research.

Representation of German interests towards EU institutions

The main task of the Permanent Representation is to represent German interests towards EU institutions, which they do in different kinds of negotiations and primarily in the Council.

How the German position is formed

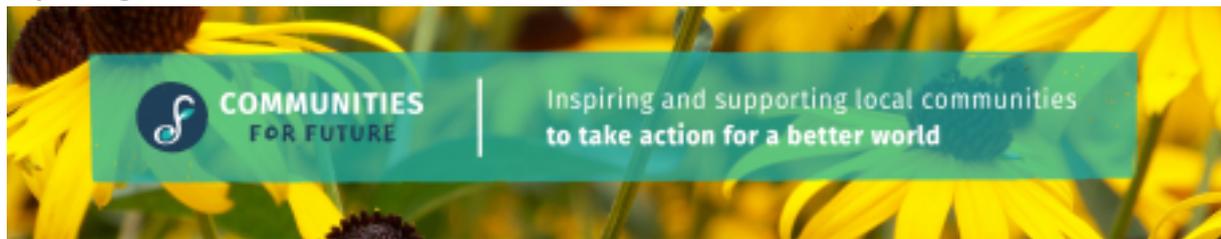
In preparation for the Council meetings, all ministries concerned in the government of Germany, as well as a representative of the federal regions, are involved in drafting the German position.

Preparation of decisions in the Council of Ministers

The Permanent Representation is also involved in the preparation of decisions in the Council

of ministers, through its practical organization.

Reporting



The German law requires that every meeting of the German Permanent Representation has to be reported on in a complete, objective and neutral way. For the German PermRep, transparency is a high value, however, there is also a necessity for non-public discussions, as the knowledge about the other negotiation parties positions would distort the outcomes of the negotiation. With regards to the CAP negotiation process, it was mentioned the lack of inclusiveness of the negotiations towards civil society stakeholders and suggested that to respond to this, NGO's should be able to participate, through informal Council meetings. The permanent representation confirmed their awareness of this public request and mentioned that the Finnish presidency in 2019 invited a civil society stakeholder, which allowed the European Environmental Bureau, to provide inputs for the negotiations. However, there are also limitations of that format, as the discussions in informal Council meetings are very broad and the speaking time of participants is just a few minutes.

Early warning function

The German Permanent Representation has an early warning function to try to inform the governments as early as possible about future projects of the Commission.

Press and public relations

Lastly, one area of work is press and public relations: The PermRep informs the Commission about press and public relations and informs journalists about what's going to happen at the Council and what the German position is going to be.

ECOLISE's perspective on food, agriculture and rural development

Subsequent to the presentation by the representative of the German PermRep, some of the main reasons why the CAP matters to community-led initiatives were explained by ECOLISE facilitator, Amelie Krug. She highlighted some of the most pressing issues of the global food system with regards to sustainability goals, referring to the findings of the three year international collaborative efforts of the "[International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development](#)". She pointed out that the solutions to the hereby described social and ecological problems lie within the work of sustainable community-led initiatives. The main methods and models that she promoted on behalf of the movement of sustainable Community-led initiatives are agroecology, permaculture, community-supported agriculture, local trade and democratic decision-making at the local level. Knowing that the CAP has a huge impact on agricultural and rural development, it is apparent that the negotiation process, determining the future CAP within the next

Multiannual framework from 2021-2027 is of high relevance to community-led initiatives.

Q&A

During the Q&A round participants exchanged and discussed ways in which the above mentioned approaches can be better promoted by the CAP and what opportunities lie within the current negotiation process. The permanent representation stressed that as they are



representing Germany's position in the negotiations and, while they can't include directly what they hear from associations, the information shared by participants will contribute to their learning. as the process is well-progressed within the current process; at this point it would not be easy to bring in positions that go beyond the existing positions of the parliament and the Council. In Addition to verbal exchange and inputs on transparency, the legal framework for agroforestry systems; EU long term rural vision and the grabbing of land and resources; the permanent representation also responded to written suggestions and demands surrounding the CAP which you can find in more detail below.

Legal framework for agroforestry systems

Here several limitations were pointed out regarding the impact of funding legislation frameworks on agroforestry. First one being that while the German internal regulation has provided the opportunity to fund agroforestry, the German regions have not implemented this mechanism. The Regions have been arguing that the expenditure for this would be too large. And farmers, who don't know about agroforestry also didn't ask for the funding of this method. This lead to a structural disadvantage of small, as well as diverse and complex farms, which exemplifies the following two aspects of EU regulation:

1. Despite favorable funding from the EU, small scale farms have difficulties accessing the funds, as they don't have the capacity to professionalize themselves in a way that they could align their practices with EU law.
2. The current agricultural policy funds have clearly defined general conditions, which are not fulfilled by more diverse and complex farms. This leads to a situation, where trees need to be subtracted from the eligible land.

Based on this analysis, it was suggested that for EU Agricultural Policy the following be put in place:

1. A funding mechanisms which reflects the diversity of farms, both with regards to size and to land use systems which are closely linked to different levels of biodiversity 2. A need within the first pillar to create significantly greater flexibility for certain paths to be taken in agriculture, which do not only reflect the limits of one particular farming culture, namely the monoculture.

Dr. Jürgen Weis shared with participants that there have been some changes to the regulations, which prevent some of the limitations of agroforestry systems and that the Commission has brought forward new suggestions in relation to agroforestry within the eco-schemes. However, the German government has not yet planned agroforestry to be included in the eco-schemes mechanism, as there seems to be too little demand for it. Dr. Jürgen Weis suggested that the 2nd pillar could be the more appropriate scheme to fund agroforestry, as it could then be offered on a regional scale, in those regions, where agroforestry is more commonly practiced.



EU's Long-Term Rural Vision

Following the forum on "Economics of Sustainability " one of the conclusions was proposed in which 70% of our agricultural areas would no longer be needed. So, the questions of which Long-Term Rural Vision is being negotiated in the CAP trilogues and whether the hereby targeted future will be one to further marginalize groups such as the Global Ecovillage Network was raised. The representation explained that, once the Commission presents their vision; the position on rural development of the German PermRep will then be formulated. With regards to the feared obsolescence of agriculture, Dr. Jürgen Weis assures that while it may be useful to implement certain technologies in the future, the agricultural ministries will still work towards protecting the viability of rural areas. Further concerns were raised with regard to the development of a long term vision for rural areas. While the Long Term Rural Vision is supposed to help rural areas to become more socially inclusive, diverse, resilient and ecologically sustainable, a concern around the actual impact of the Long Term rural vision report on policy making is raised. The CAP 2021-2027 was still quite dominated by sectoral interests and the integrated model suggested by rural developers is not visible there really. Member states still make the agenda in the EU, even though the EP has become stronger. Consultative institutions (EESC, CoR) are not listened to so much either in the big picture.

Grabbing of Land and Resources

Concerns were raised regarding the abuse of subsidy schemes. Participants explained that agricultural land, farming subsidies and resources in LEADER¹ are subject to unfair grabbing. Here the role of politicians and the processes put in place were questioned as to whether and how they could revert this and bring land use to more common uses to people who are not using the land for speculative purposes. Jürgen Weis confirmed that in Germany, the government is aware of the problem of land concentration through investors and is trying to deal with this. He explained that, when talking about the CAP reform, they are discussing certain provisions that would help the Member States to cut those connected companies

¹“LEADER^[i] is a local development method which has been used for 30 years to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas.

It is implemented by around **2 800 Local Action Groups (LAGs)**, covering 61 % of the rural population in the EU and bringing together public, private and civil-society stakeholders in a particular area (*situation as of end 2018 - EU-28*). In the rural development context, LEADER is implemented under the national and regional **Rural Development Programmes (RDPs)** of each EU Member State, co-financed from the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**, [which is part of the CAP].^[ii]

In the 2014-2020 programming period, the LEADER method has been extended under the broader term **Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)** to three additional EU Funds”.

(ENRD “CLLD / LEADER”. https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en#_edn1. Accessed 9 May 2021.)



from receiving those subsidies. For example, member States would have to integrate degressive direct payments; other instruments discussed include also redistributive payment and active farmers. The latter requires those who receive CAP funds to actually manage the land for agricultural purposes in contrast to receiving CAP funds for mere land ownership, without agricultural productivity taking place on that land.

More Demands for the CAP Reform

During the meeting; written demands/needs which the CAP reform could bring also received oral responses from the Permanent Representation. See below what they were and the responses they received.

1. Reduction and limitation of glyphosate use

Jürgen Weis gave his personal view that glyphosate use would not be prolonged for much longer.

2. Promotion of mechanical-thermal weed management in integrated cultivation in 7-year crop rotations.

For something to happen here; the Commission will need to table proposals on farm-to-fork protection rules, and implement the quantitative objective of -50 %. On the crop-rotation, with 7 crops in a row, that might not happen. The Council brought the view that a crop-diversification is enough.

3. Reversal of the preferential promotion of plowless tillage with high pesticide use

The conditionality does not ban the plowing or tilling of the land but it would say that it is an

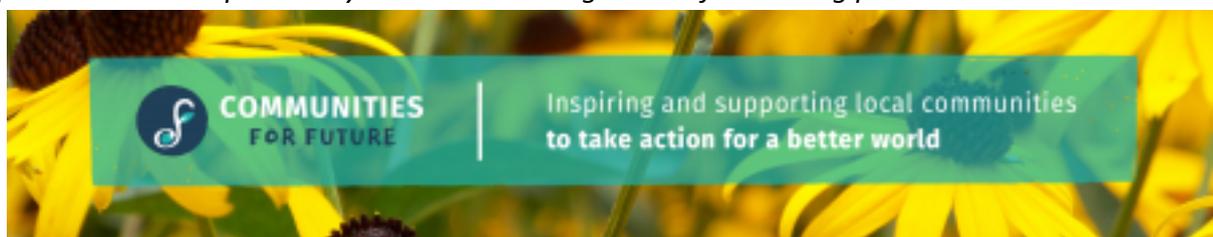
objective

4. Reformulation of the requirements for integrated cultivation with the inclusion of biological-mechanical technologies

With the farm-to-fork strategy, there is now a plan when the Commission will revise rules for the approval of plant-production-products and plant-protection as such. So there is support but MS are also aware of the limitations.

5. Legally guaranteed prices for agricultural products to achieve investment security for farmers

Guaranteed prices is something that is not in line with the German and the European Economic System. We have had that and it has led to the overproduction of agricultural products. For the past two years a directive against unfair trading practices has been



preparing authorities and creating procedures to react to certain infringements, which is measured against dumping prices.

6. Clear perforation of grain legumes to replace soybean feed imports- integration into long crop rotations.

There is no intention to ban soja-import. A ban on no scientific basis would lead to WTO cases.

Closing

After 1 hour and 45 minutes the event was brought to a close with words of appreciation for the rich discussion, the knowledge that was shared and the openness to listen to each other's arguments. Jürgen Weis was especially thanked for his comprehensive presentation and his patience in answering all the questions. With a lot of information to digest and reflect upon, the participants said goodbye to each other.