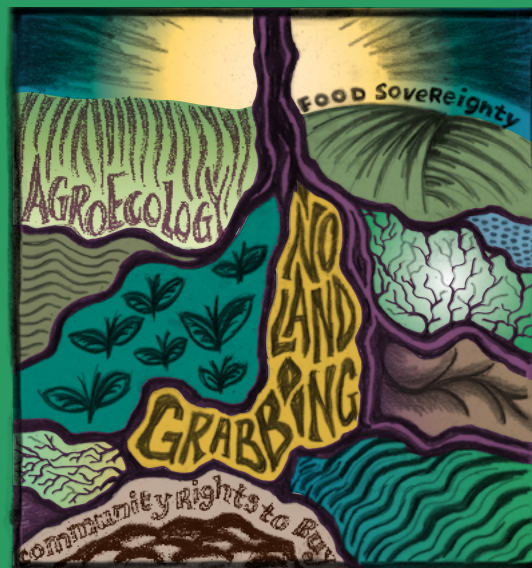


Roots of Resilience:

Land Policy for an Agroecological Transition in Europe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



As Europe enters the 2020s, issues of sustainability are primed to take centre stage with future-oriented policy frameworks such as the European Green Deal (EGD), the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy, and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform all seeking to rise to the challenges confronting Europe in terms of food production, decent work, economic prosperity and climate change.

Land politics – who controls what land, how it is used, for how long, for what purposes and to whose benefit – is a central pillar of this debate. As politicians across Europe struggle to balance the urgent need for climate action with the need to strengthen equity and popular support for new policies, the risk of societal discord looms large, fuelled by farmer protests, perceptions of ‘agri-bashing,’ and long-running tensions between conservation movements and agricultural communities. This has been made more complicated by the interweaving of questions of land and national identity and an apparently increasing disconnect between those living in rural and urban areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought these issues into starker relief. As the health crisis has given way to an economic crisis, and degrees of suffering are fractured along class, race, gender, generational and geographic lines, new attention is being given to questions of preparedness and resiliency as well as to issues of socio-economic justice and relationships of care.

This Policy Report argues that, to meet this moment, it is time to rediscover the roots of our resilience by grounding land policy in collective action and democratic forms of land politics. This is based on **an understanding of land not as a commodity but as a common resource, a living territory and a natural landscape**. It corresponds closely with a philosophy of land stewardship: a deep and abiding relationship to land that is based on care-taking and an appreciation that land is held in trust, for now and for future generations.

In practice, this implies a different set of land property relationships and more diverse models of food production than those of industrial agriculture, which homogenises landscapes and cultures. This opens up the possibility for other land access regimes to emerge beyond simply that of the land market, including forms of common and collective land use and ownership. Patterns of land ownership and distribution track closely with patterns of land use. Thus this approach to land politics also helps to sustain more ecologically regenerative models of food production such as organic agriculture and peasant agroecology as practised by many of Europe’s small farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and indigenous peoples.

Therefore, this **Policy Report looks to support increased access to land for agroecology throughout Europe**. This support is now more critical than ever in light of a number of alarming trends including increasing land concentration and land speculation, instances of land grabbing, the

precipitous decline in the number of farmers and smallholdings, a generational challenge in terms of farm succession, massive biodiversity loss, a crisis in soil fertility, and the devastating impacts of intensive livestock breeding and industrial agriculture, to mention but a few.

We offer up a number of **policy recommendations** geared towards policymakers at all levels in order to counter these trends and take seriously the goal of increasing access to land for agroecology in Europe:

1. At local and municipal level :

At the local and municipal level, we see change as driven, in the first instance, by farmers themselves, in particular by a new generation of farmers who are interested in regenerative farming practices and agroecology. It is their skills, investment strategies and ingenuity that are put to use in the service of a more human-scale and community-connected agriculture. This can be seen in the proliferation of new farming enterprises and business models that are emerging throughout Europe including co-operative farms, county farms, joint ventures, incubator sites and model farms, among others. Local authorities can take a number of measures to encourage this new generation of farmers and sustainable agriculture including by:

- Instituting **legal control mechanisms** that seek to foster greater democratic land control at the local level such as the SAFER system in France and the 'community right to buy' provision in Scotland.
- Initiating processes of **participatory land mapping**, such as in the Basque Country, to increase transparency of the land tenure system and better inform plans for land zoning and allocation.
- Setting up **public land banks**, such as in Asturias, Spain to buy up land and make it available at an affordable price. This can include criteria for sustainable land use

and priority access for particular farmers and farming systems on the basis of job creation, labour protection, environmental management, opportunities for young or women farmers etc.

- Supporting **community land trusts** that seek to take land out of the market and make it available for sustainable agricultural use on a long-term basis.
- Engaging in **inclusive spatial planning processes** in order to manage competing land use claims, safeguard agricultural land from conversion, foster better rural-urban linkages and allow for a more equitable delivery of services and infrastructure.
- Providing **access to (start-up) capital, grants, training and support services** to smallholders, agroecological farmers and new entrants. This can be facilitated through a variety of land and rural development partnerships, including through support for agricultural co-operatives, such as in the case of Karditsa, Greece.
- Working with **local food policy councils** in order to increase market channels for small, organic and agroecological farmers. These can include designated spaces for farmers' markets in town squares, public procurement and distribution systems, and a variety of supports for market gardening, Community Supported Agriculture, food education etc. that can be articulated in local food strategies.

2. At national level :

At the national level, land policy can frame legislative action to support access to land for agroecology. This includes most importantly, the development of a national land policy, but also includes rural affairs, sustainable development, fiscal policy, environmental management to name but a few points of intersection. More specifically, states can:

- Enact **(re)distributive land reform**. The experience of the 2016 Scottish Land Reform Act shows that land reform in the European context is not off the table, especially when high degrees of land inequality and other structural barriers to land access are observed.
- Beyond land reform, there are a number of measures states can take to encourage the emergence of **healthy and equitable agrarian structures**. For example in France, the law on the 'control of agrarian structures' brings much needed oversight to land transfers.
- Increase **protections for tenants**. Given increasing land prices throughout much of Europe, many farmers access land through tenancy arrangements. Measures to increase the rights and protections enjoyed by tenants, such as through rent controls, pre-emption rights, and the granting of long-term leases to provide tenure security can all help tenant farmers gain and maintain access to land.
- Use **tax and fiscal policy** to support active farming and generational renewal. This can be done by granting tax relief to landowners who enter into long-term lease agreements with young farmers, as for example in Wallonia, Belgium. To prevent land speculation, land value taxes can be considered as in the case of Scotland. These can discourage land hoarding, absentee landownership, or land being left vacant or idle.
- To prevent land concentration, **anti-monopoly and financial disclosure regulations** can come into force in order to curtail aggressive land accumulation strategies by corporate entities and investors. Regulations should be adapted to the modern realities of global finance in which control over land is increasingly being exercised through the transfer of shares in agricultural companies.
- To prevent land grabbing, a number of **anti-corruption and anti-fraud measures** should

be promulgated. This should include close scrutiny of large-scale land deals along with improved transparency and democratic oversight of the distribution of CAP aid in order to stop unjust profiting from control over land.

3. At European level :



This Policy Report also outlines the number of ways in which EU policy frameworks impact land in member states. To strengthen access to land for agroecology across the EU, we call on MEPs and the European Commission to:

- Support the development of a new framework for European land governance to bring greater coherence and direction to land policy at European level, as called for in the 2016 EP INI report *on the state of play of farmland concentration in the EU: how to facilitate the access to land for farmers*. This could take the form of an **EU Land Directive** which would elevate best practices that exist at member state level, draw from regional expertise to be found e.g. in the European Economic and Social Committee, and be informed by international standards such as the FAO Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants. Such a Land Directive would mark a reset from an approach that treats land as a commodity governed by the principle of the free movement of capital towards one grounded in human rights and the multi-functional nature of land.
- Advocate for the creation of a **European Land Observatory** to gather robust, harmonised and legitimate land tenure data, including information on land use, and sale and rental prices. This would respond to the need for greater transparency of EU land market dynamics and could function as an early warning system to flag alarming trends. It can also be used to monitor progress towards the implementation of states' Organic Agriculture Plans.

- Create a **high-level task force or permanent civil dialogue initiative** between DG AGRI, DG FISMA and representatives of peasant organisations, CSOs, and affected communities to provide an independent and comprehensive assessment on the impact of land related policies and to inform future policy-making.
- **Embed a model of land stewardship, food sovereignty, and agroecological farming within the European Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategy**, understanding that this is an important pillar of any serious strategy for combatting climate change and building resilient food systems. The lack of a specific focus on land within the F2F Strategy is a missed opportunity to tackle issues related to agricultural sustainability in a holistic manner, including moving away from support for Free Trade Agreements and the general export orientation of European agriculture as well as critically examining the role that technological innovation plays in the food system.
- Drive forward the commitment to sustainability encapsulated by the EGD and F2F Strategy within the current proposals for the new **Common Agricultural Policy**. This could be done for example by orientating the newly introduced **eco-schemes** towards direct support for sustainable farming practices and closely scrutinising the **National Strategic Plans** of states according to a set of clear criteria that prioritise support for small and medium farmers, peasant agroecology, women farmers, and aspiring farmers/new entrants. More specifically, these National Strategic Plans should push for a new orientation of the CAP. This means, *inter alia*, a capping of annual direct payments at €60,000 per beneficiary, making redistributive payments compulsory, and using and expanding the young farmer scheme. Ultimately, the CAP must redirect basic payments based on a farm's size in hectares to payments conditional on the delivery of positive environmental and social outcomes, including the number of farmers employed.
- Commit to promoting **gender equity and balance** (in age composition, social status, educational levels, employment and other economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making) in rural areas **in the design and implementation of rural development strategies, programmes and projects**.

While the exact nature, scope and timing of public policy interventions in European land politics will always be subject to debate, this report charts a path forward for meeting the actions, skills, and investments of Europe's small-scale and agroecological farmers from below with supportive policies from above – whether at local, municipal, national or regional level. It is now time to act.

This policy report is published by the Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia platform for Food Sovereignty, the European food sovereignty movement, to set out the vision and strategy of the partnership for securing access to land for peasant, small-scale and agroecological farming systems in Europe.

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