
The Non-take-up of French Farm Holders, from social rights to CAP

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Abstract

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Through their production, farmers are at the heart of the emerging and promising bioeconomy, which relies on renewable resources (European commission 2018). However, frustration is growing among French farmers, who are still awaiting European subsidies. Protests and road blockages have been taking place across rural areas and major cities. In some cases, farmers have even taken control of municipal buildings, as seen in the department of Indre, France (France Info, 2024). Paradoxically, while the agricultural population feels increasingly marginalized-expressing their frustration through demonstrations and even tragic cases of suicide-the promises of the bioeconomy have never been more celebrated as a model of success.

Since the bioeconomy impacts society as a whole, it is essential to focus more on farmers' incomes, particularly as they are undergoing changes. As their profession evolves, farmers are now required to manage biomass for both food and non-food purposes, a shift that can directly affect their revenue streams (Grouiez et al, 2023). This situation calls for a mechanism that addresses both social inequalities and economic objectives. A dual approach like

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this could be reflected in a social protection system that ensures social justice—a fundamental pillar of an ecological bioeconomy which is essential as without such mechanisms, the bioeconomy risks being “hijacked” by market-driven interests, undermining social equity and long-term ecological sustainability (Vivien and al, 2019).

One of this important agriculture social protection forms is a European political tool established as early as 1962, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). With its social and economic objectives, it has had a significant positive impact on the European Union’s exports (OECD, 2018). It has also influenced land use, as well as the income and production of most agricultural activities (OECD, 2011, CAPRI model). Meanwhile, its objectives include not only improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, but also inclusivity and solidarity towards farmers (European Commission, 2023), along with elements characteristic of social protection. Despite of its importance there has been a notable decline in the producer support estimate, a key component of the CAP that measures transfers to farmers, both direct and indirect, particularly after 2013 (OECD, 2023). Meanwhile it is not clear that this decreasing trend is due to the agriculture holder’s rejection of such tools and non-take up may exist or not. Thus, this article seeks to explore *whether farmers are not accessing important social and economic tools such as the CAP and who are the non-takers?*

Despite the challenges faced by some agricultural holders and their precarious incomes (Magnan, 2022), a non-take-up of social rights is observed among people insured through the Mutualité Sociale Agricole, the social insurance for farmers and other agricultural workers. For example, the non-take-up rate for family allowances among MSA insured was estimated between 7.5% and 8.2% in 2018 (MSA, 2021). This phenomenon also exists in the rest of the population, who is affiliated with a different social security system (the general social security regime), which includes various social insurances funds depending on the sort of risk (there exist a fund dedicated to pensions, another to healthcare, etc). The non-take-up of social rights phenomenon is mainly explained by individual reasons, such as rejection of stigma associated with poverty, and concerns that taking benefits may impact self-esteem and personal autonomy in adapting to the economy (Deville, 2015; Warin, 2014). Thus, literature gives evidence that a part of the agricultural population non takes-up to social rights, which question the existence or not of a non-take-up phenomenon to CAP.

Therefore, to better understand the income of a major contributor to the bio-economy system, the farmers, the article is organized as follows. First part will present a detailed analysis of the origin of farmers’ income, particularly through the agricultural operations they manage (Magnant, 2022; Laurent, Magnant, 2023). Part 2 focuses on the literature on non-take-up of social assistance, highlighting the reasons of non-take-up (Van Oorschot, 1996; Warin, 2014; Warin, 2016; Deville, 2015; Meinzel, 2022). Part 3 aims to present the CAP as a form of social protection and test the hypothesis of the existence of non-take-up of such important social protection tool and its relation to the agriculture holders’ revenues. The analysis will be based on data from the RICA survey (Réseau d’Information Comptable Agricole), an annual survey conducted by the French Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty under the direction of the European Union. The project will use data from the 2022 survey, which covers a sample of 7,322 agricultural holding and indicates the CAP benefits received by these holders, as well as elements allowing the determination of eligibility. Part 4 discuss these results regarding the highlights of the literature about non-take-up. Part 5 briefly concludes.

This research proposal is part of a PHD work which aims to study the non-take-up of social rights within the agricultural population. Although the policies adopted by the European Union primarily have economic objectives, particularly after 2008, the CAP remains both an economic and social policy, and more recently, an ecological one. By drawing a parallel with benefit systems directly linked to social protection, which have already been the subject of numerous in-depth studies, it is possible to consider the non-take-up of the CAP.

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