

Does Europe want to industrialise agriculture?

The current EU Green Deal is gearing up to combat climate change. We approved the Deal in 2020 to make the European Union climate-neutral in 2050, and we are fully committed to this objective. To this end, along with the Green Deal, a set of policy initiatives like the revision of the Directive on Industrial Emissions (IED) is in the making. This revision seeks to attain the EU's zero pollution ambition by abating the large industries like power plants, refineries, waste treatment and incineration, production of metals, cement, glass, chemicals, etc. And now, the EU Commission wants to handle cows like an industry as well.

How? With the brilliant idea of submitting them to the same closed-loop production process that captures most emissions of factories and plants through mitigating techniques, by means of which water and air do not leave the plant until they are purified. And here we have our problem: most cows live outside, in prairies, and not locked up in a box all year long. The ammonia and methane they emit cannot be captured, unless you oblige farmers to put their animals in a closed environment deprived of daylight.

We say no! We say no, because we have seen how poorly it has worked for the pig meat and poultry sectors.

According to the European Commission, the Directive for Industrial Emissions has been keeping emissions in the pig meat and poultry sectors in check since 2010, and has good results to show for it as well ... Has it resulted in less concentration, more diversification, and more animal welfare for pigs and poultry? Not in the slightest.

With the sole and narrow objective of mitigating emissions, the Industrial Emissions Directive applied to livestock might call for big industry solutions: animals in closed stables and devices to purify the air from these stables. The cost of this installation on an existing stable is around 50.000 euros. That is if you do not need to build a new stable and install mitigating techniques to rear cows that are now seasonally reared outdoors. The cost can rise up to 1 million euros. It goes without saying that only larger commercial holdings can make it. And for what sustainability gain? Not to mention animal welfare...

Besides, the European farming model was always built on diversifying risks. Farming was simply a matter of not putting all eggs in one basket. But with the current proposal, the EU Commission pushes for more and more concentration and standardization. With a simple account sum, one adds up all the animals, and it makes no difference to them whether they are cows or chickens. Once a farmer reaches a certain threshold, he has to invest in emission-reducing techniques for all species. So a farmer who keeps a number of cows, pigs and chickens has to invest three times more than someone who only keeps pigs.

We, Members of the European Parliament, have clearly been stating for months that all our arguments stated above can only lead to one reasonable course of action: we need to keep the status quo, which means excluding cows from the scope of the directive, and not force further measures on pigs and poultry already partially covered by the current legislation. Treating agriculture like an industry is a clear mistake and will not solve anything. It will, on the contrary, further industrialise the agricultural sector to the detriment of the farmer, who will face higher costs and have less ways to diversify his or her revenues. Animals, for their part, risk a life without daylight and the freedom to roam the prairies. Derogations for extensive

farming are on the table, but they will do little to change the signal sent to farmers (about the nature of their activity?).

In the end, with rather uncertain effects on emissions, this policy risks bringing about fewer farms and less sustainable farming. Not to mention more emissions abroad as well, since the Commission is not willing to go forward on reciprocity principle applying similar rules to the animal products that we currently import, and would probably import even more if the directive were to be implemented.

So, shall we address emissions from agriculture and especially livestock ? Yes. Should we do it via this directive? We say no. We believe the sustainability of farms should be dealt with in comprehensive and dedicated texts tailor-made for agriculture. Certainly not this way, not by considering agriculture as industry. Animals deserve better than to be treated like waste or cement.

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