

Climate sensitive agriculture - securing sustainable food and resource management



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Prof. Dr. Stephan von Cramon-Taubadel

How can a balance be struck between sufficient production and climate-friendly agriculture? We discussed the new phase of food security that we face today in the wake of heating geopolitical crises with Prof. Dr. Stephan von Cramon-Taubadel, Director at Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development at the University of Göttingen.

For decades the number of hunger worldwide had been decreasing, but since around 2017 there has been an upward trend, and the recent increase in food prices has been exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine. Prof. Stephan von Cramon-Taubadel explains that this is a result of a combination of reasons that built up - including the recovery from corona which started to increase demand for food, combined with logistics problems - transport is more expensive and there is shortage of shipping transport. The Black Sea is a very important region in terms of global supplies and exports, and even the threat of a conflict there is enough to make markets nervous. Now that our worst fears are realized there, significant amounts of food supply that people were expecting from Ukraine is now suddenly put to a halt. This is triggering countries to build up their stocks, which drives the prices up even higher and leads to a real food crisis.

The crisis also changes environmental plans that were to be implemented - for example there were plans this year at the EU level to set aside 4% of agricultural land as fallow to boost biodiversity. However, the European Commission will most likely now allow member states to farm that fallow to supplement for production.

In thinking about sustainable production, it is important to assess the tradeoffs. In the long run of course, there is no doubt that sustainable production is the only way to feed the world - yet in the short run, there may be times when certain tradeoffs need to be made to increase production. In the Farm to Fork Strategy, the EU proposes to expand organically farmed areas from 10% to 25% by 2030. This also means that the yields are going to be lower, some say more than by one-third. If the demand for food stays the same, then the food that is not produced needs to be produced elsewhere, which merely shifts the environmental problem to another part of the planet. There needs to be clarification between local and global environmental good because while measures like increasing protected land or organic farms may improve local biodiversity, it does not necessarily help change the greenhouse gas balance.

Hence the demand for food is key and there is great importance on how policymakers are going to nudge the consumers in the right direction. While Prof. von Cramon does not call for abandonment of all meat consumption, he does point out how the meat and livestock product consumption is forcing a lot of demand on the global agricultural system. Around 60% of grains are fed to livestock. Yet this nudge for consumption alteration requires a sensitive approach and should avoid telling others what to eat and what not to, especially in the midst of an inflation.

There have been great expectations for the Common Agricultural Policies (CAP) reforms, but it will take some time to assess their effect. The reform gives member states more

individual leeway; the EU is not going to date the member states' actions, but instead each country submits a proposal and now the EU is in the process of reviewing them. They are to be implemented in January 2023, around two years behind schedule. Policies like Farm to Fork Strategy are still in the process of being passed and implemented. Although the agricultural discussions may have been drawn away with the current war, it may be time to reflect once again on how we envision to feed ourselves and with what.

*Please note that these are off-the-record, background insights provided by Prof. Dr. von Cramon-Taubadel. If you do want to clarify or quote, please contact Prof. von Cramon directly.



Relevant websites:

<https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/18906.html>

https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/sustainability_en

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/climate>

https://www.bmel.de/EN/Home/home_node.html

<https://www.farm-europe.eu/>

<https://www.farm-europe.eu/blog-en/conference-of-the-future-of-europe-a-forward-looking-vision-from-eu-citizens-for-sustainable-food-systems/>

https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/cap-glance_en
