



The trouble with soy

How intensified production in EU hurts Eastern European peasant farmers?

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Eco Ruralis

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Eco Ruralis in a rural Romania

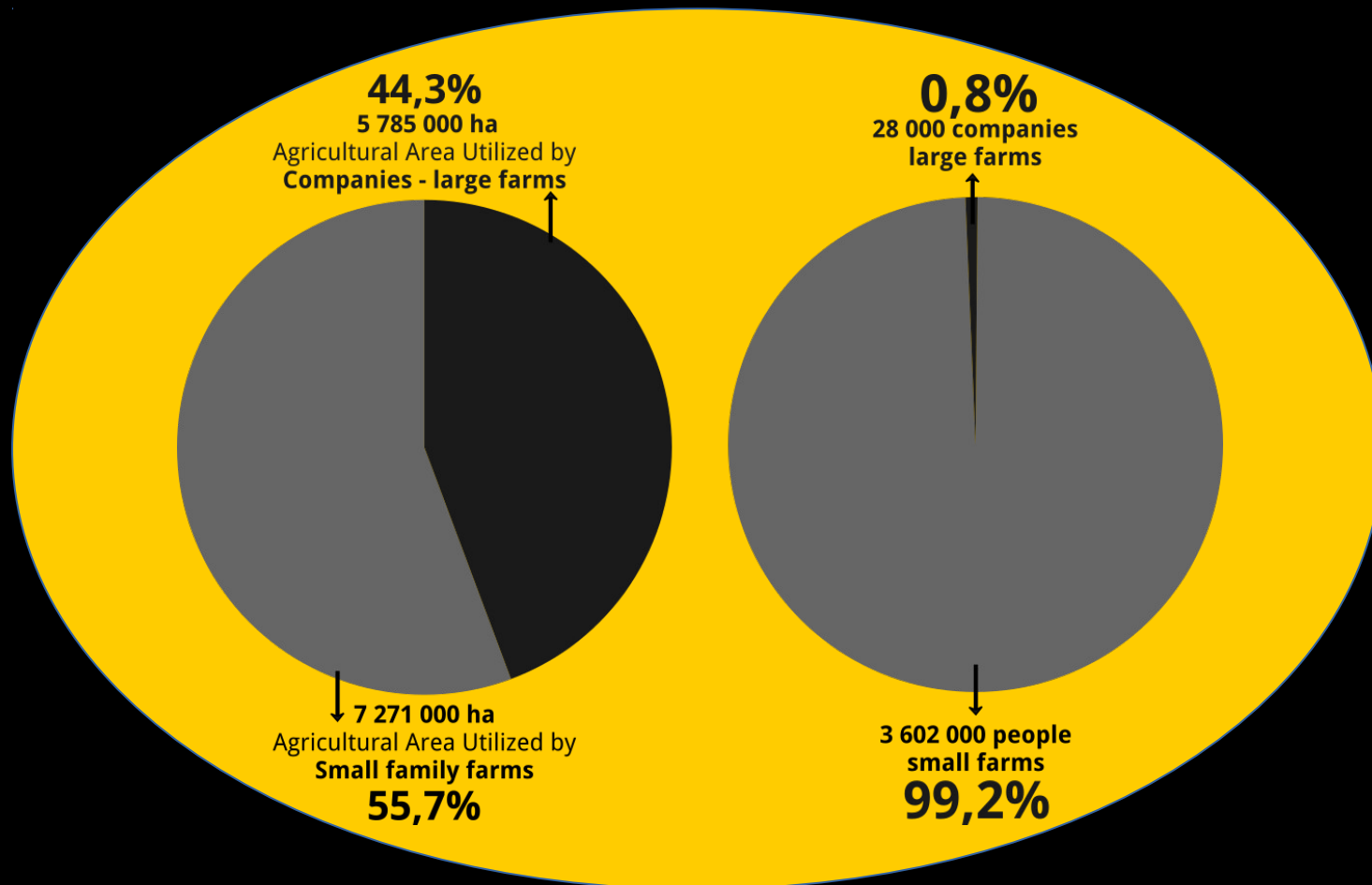
- 10000 members, small peasant and agroecological farmers from every region of Romania.
- Member of the European Coordination “**La Via Campesina**”, part of a global movement of more than 200 million small farmers.

Our Mission: Uniting small family and peasant farmers practicing agroecology, preserving our farming practices and way of life and establishing food sovereignty and a just and inclusive food system.

- **87%** of the country has a rural character.
- More than 50 % of the populations lives in rural areas.
- With **14 million hectares of agricultural surface**, Romania is the 5th largest agricultural country from the EU.
- Every hour, 3 family farms disappear due to land concentration, land grabbing and unjust farming practices and policies.



Division of agricultural lands in Romania



The trouble with soy in EEU : GM past, export interface

- Romania was one of the largest soy producing country of Europe : in 2006 – 137.275,5 ha of GM soy was cultivated. The Government and the agribusiness sector wants it back. Producing conventional soy is seen as a stepping stone.
- The European Soy Declaration increased the momentum for the support of EU soy production, but there is no effort to challenge the damaging agro-industrial food system that dominates it.
- There is a danger that unequal supply chain dynamics will emerge. The European Soya Declaration and Donau Soja Association point to Central and Eastern Europe as the region with the greatest potential for expansion, whilst the biggest markets lie in western European livestock powerhouses such as the Netherlands and Germany.
- In a region with already big problems around land concentration and land grabbing agribusiness corporations and financial speculators are viewing the CEE region with interest in the context of protein crops, deepening the pressure and threats on peasant producers in the region.

The trouble with soy : agroindustrial model, EEU the new Latin America ?

- These investments are primarily export-oriented, creating little local benefits. Production is aimed at supplying big non-GM food markets in Western Europe such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland.
- Agribusiness corporations or their subsidiaries implement an agro-industrial model in search of quick profits. High mechanisation means little local employment opportunities: at one site in Romania, 800 hectares of soybean is worked by just 2 employees plus 2 engineers.
- Encouraging the spread of this type of model threatens to further marginalise small-scale peasant producers and family farms. CEE still harbours significant peasant populations, yet they are finding their livelihoods increasingly unviable in an economic and policy context that favours corporate controlled food systems.
- Soya is NOT a peasant crop, while other protein crops are more preferred : legumes such as peas, broad beans, lupins, alfalfa, clover – but which are largely excluded or marginally supported by the EU protein plan proposal.



Solutions



**Agroecology and the concept of food sovereignty
should shape EU policy on protein independence.**

- **Employment is higher in small-scale agroecological enterprises and small farms are actually more productive** than large industrial-scale producers. In 21 EU countries, the Standard Gross Margin (SGM) per hectare is greater than that for large farms (more than twice as large in 9 countries).
- **Peasant agroecology** explicitly aims to protect the environment in a sustainable manner. Agroecological principles focus on minimising external inputs, nurturing on-farm biodiversity and investing in the longevity of local ecosystems.
- **Food sovereignty** explicitly aims to challenge the corporate dominance of food systems. The increasing concentration of land and food supply-chain markets in corporate hands is unhealthy for people and planet, and EU policy needs to reflect this.

The opportunity

The fact that the EU's protein deficit (and its impact on communities and ecosystems in Latin America) is on the table as a hot political topic is progress. However, a policy framework based on current agro-industrial production systems, and one that fails to challenge the concentration of corporate control over our food system, is not a real solution and threatens peasant producers across the continent.

EU decision-makers must grasp this political moment, and take the opportunity to lead the way towards more sustainable European food systems. They can do this by placing small-scale agroecological producers at the centre of EU food and farming policy, such as the CAP and future protein plan. This is not only viable, but is necessary for the wellbeing and vitality of Europe's current and future generations.

Policy Proposals



- place the support of small-scale agroecological producers at the centre of the new CAP and protein strategy ;
- focus protein strategies around encouraging diverse intercropping of local varieties for short-supply chains ;
- encourage the use of pasture for agroecological livestock production
- end direct-payments based on size of holding to avoid incentivising industrial-scale production and land concentration ;
- apply the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure on Land, Fisheries and Forests within EU Member States ;
- create an EU land observatory in order to increase transparency of land transactions and discourage protein-market speculation ;
- stricter regulation of markets across our food system to ensure that domination by a handful of firms is abolished and prevented ;
- look beyond food security and adopt a food sovereignty approach to food systems, which challenges concentration in food systems markets ;

Thank you



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