

A resilience-oriented CAP needs to address robustness, adaptability and transformability of agriculture

Resilience of the agricultural sector is an important aim of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Most often, resilience is focused on stimulating robustness, with policy and market instruments aimed at maintaining the stability of the farm business. However, a group of European scientists argues that this is too narrow a way of looking at resilience. They state that while robustness contributes to agricultural development, the current higher risk environment also requires other types of capacity in food and agribusiness: namely adaptability and transformability.

European farmers will increasingly have to deal with uncertainties such as more volatile producer prices and extreme weather events. Additionally, stresses and opportunities due to demographic change as well as changing societal concerns and consumer preferences, to name a few, play a role. To accommodate the multitude of resulting challenges, an EU-wide group of scientists, working together in the project SURE-Farm, indicates the need for policy and agribusiness to look beyond traditional strategies. Important contributions to resilience may come from bottom-up learning processes, farmers' experimentation, and radical changes in the way goods and services are produced, financed and marketed, following a new logic or employing a new business model.

Resilience is more than robustness of farms and farm incomes

Such an understanding of resilience goes way beyond the assumption that policies addressing resilience of EU agriculture should mainly focus on the robustness of farms and farm incomes. The SURE-Farm group argues that from a public policy perspective not the farms but the functions of farms and farming should be at the centre stage, such as the provision of agricultural products, generation of incomes in rural areas as well as environmental stewardship.

Thus, the SURE-Farm group stresses that resilience in agriculture can only be reached if multiple processes are considered simultaneously, including EU policy making, risk management, farm demographical change, institutional change, and evolving modes of agricultural production.

Agricultural challenges differ within the EU

Challenges and processes differ across agricultural areas in the European Union. For instance, some regions are more vulnerable to climatic or disease risks, while others face a change in stakeholders' attitudes towards agriculture. This will have implications for the pathways towards developing the three capacities of resilience across Europe: robustness, adaptability and

transformability. SURE-Farm therefore assesses determinants and contributions to resilience in multiple regions and farming systems.

In each region, SURE-Farm will identify local challenges and functions of agriculture, study the resilience of farmers and policies, and assess context-specific pathways to enhance resilience of farming systems. Some systems may flourish with strategies of robustness. Others may be better able to maintain their essential functions if they adapt or transform. SURE-Farm involves multiple interactions with farmers and stakeholders -- as knowledge to enhance resilience is for the most part not available in statistics and data bases.

The SURE-Farm project

The Dutch case study covers intensive arable farming in the Veenkoloniën and Oldambt regions, which face considerable challenges related to fluctuating incomes, climate change, demographic change, and plant health.

SURE-Farm is a research and innovation project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme and involves 16 universities and research institutes from 11 European countries, coordinated by the Wageningen University & Research. Its full title is "Towards SUsustainable and RESilient EU FARMing systems".

Note for Editors

1 – The press release is accompanied by a [video](#).

2 – For further information about the SURE-Farm project, visit the website: <http://surefarmproject.eu/>