

Extended abstract

*Common Agricultural Policy and
Depopulation in the Territories of
Inland Spain (Castilla y León)*



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DOI: 10.4422/ager.2021.16

ager

Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural
Journal of Depopulation and Rural Development Studies

Highlights:

1. The agrarian model contributes directly to the depopulation suffered by rural territories.
2. The orientation of the Community Agricultural Policy (CAP) is responsible for this model.
3. The change in the agricultural model is essential in the fight against depopulation.
4. CAP promotes the concentration of resources in non-rural areas.

Abstract: At a time when rural depopulation is part of the political agenda and the concerns of Spanish society, and the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the subject of debate, it is appropriate to assess the relationship between the agricultural model and rural devitalization. The aim of this article is to critically review the CAP by analysing the aid channelled from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) to agricultural territories suffering from depopulation problems, as is the case of Castilla y León. In order to achieve the objective, the statistical exploitation and cartographic elaboration of the data on beneficiaries of EAGF funds is used. The results show that the CAP has consolidated different categories of beneficiaries who perform agricultural activities in an unequal manner, which has a direct impact on the demographic problems of rural areas. The paper concludes by providing some ideas for a future policy that, in contrast to the exclusively productivist model, favours alternatives where agriculture goes beyond its productive function and takes advantage of its potential to contribute to rural revitalization.

Keywords: Common Agricultural Policy, direct payments, rural depopulation, agri-food systems.

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1. Introduction and background

The initial hypothesis of this article is that depopulation, which affects a substantial part of inland Spain, is not only a demographic problem, but also a more evident symptom of the social and territorial recomposition of rural areas. It falls in line with the new discourses and tasks that the society with a marked urban component performs and demands. Rural areas are becoming multifunctional, but by no means less agricultural, and the agricultural model must be reoriented to face demographic decline. For this reason, it is now when rural depopulation forms part of the political agenda and European society's concerns, and the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is being debated. In this sense, this article is justified by the need to assess the relation between agricultural policy and rural decline.

2. Objectives, method and study area

The overall objective of this article is a critical review of the main EU policy, the CAP, and focuses on the analysis of compensation payments in several rural scenarios of one of the Spanish regions of inland Spain that is most affected by apathy and demographic regression, that is, Castilla y León. This is a very large region where the rural areas, including from the areas with high decline to those more dynamic ones, are linked with agricultural activity. Its economy, the way it is organised, its landscapes, its cultural representations and its heritage values are associated with this activity to a great extent. From a methodological point of view, the demographic dynamics of rural areas of Castilla y León parallels the development of the principles of a CAP that has determined the course that the sector has followed in recent decades. This is why the statistics and cartographic representation of data on the beneficiaries of the aid awarded by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) within the 2014-2020 Community Financial Framework are used in an attempt to evidence the value of community payments in agricultural economy and to ascertain their social and territorial significance.

3. Results

The results show that CAP funds have not only become a decisive financial support to maintain farmers and stockbreeders' income (representing between 32% and 50% of their income) and to, thus, ensure the viability of agricultural activity. They have also allowed different recipient categories with an unequal relation to the sector to be well-established, which directly impacts demographic problems in the rural area.

4. Discussion

After considering the volume of managed resources, their spatial distribution and the demographic development of the different types of towns in Castilla y León, discussion is about the inequalities observed in aid-sharing. To do so, a series of categories is established according to the economic intervals they are paid, and their municipal distribution is cartographically represented. The results suggest that the first analysed category, called "low aid receivers" (up to 12,450 euros), is being linked slightly, or extremely slightly, with the true professional agricultural or stockbreeding practice and its related problems. So as this link is broken, its presence in the rural area is not always justified. Many of the holders of these rights no longer live in these places, but go about their work or enjoy their retirement in the main cities of the region. The cartographic representations reveal that only 10 of the 2,248 towns in the region, which are essentially urban, group 15.1% of the beneficiaries in this category. Conversely to this category, the "very high aid beneficiaries" category of CAP aid (those receiving more than 60,000 euros) is small in number with barely 3% of the total, but is better compensated (26.1% of all available resources). This category is made up of a singular group of receivers, which does not always match the stereotype image of an absentee owner of a large estate. Instead it is a representation of a diverse range of stakeholders linked with the regulation and control of the whole agro-food system in Castilla y León. It is similar to the category formed by the marginal and low aid receivers in terms of its concentration in urban areas, and not in terms of the number of beneficiaries, but of the volume of received resources (26.6%).

The third category is that of the "farm professionals", made up of the receivers of aid from 12,451 to 60,000 euros. This category includes the most representative examples of the transformation process that family-based agriculture has gone through: competitive professionalisation, specialisation, concentration, and intensifi-

cation. Yet beyond all this, there is the matter of finely tuning farming problems and being rooted in the rural area. Those in this category barely represent one third of beneficiaries (32.3%), but receive 56.9% of the resources. Their presence is perceived in larger sized town centres and regional centres that offer services, which are the privileged nodes in the population concentration process. However, those towns spread out in all the centres of the region predominate and explains the specialisation in agricultural activities in small towns. Nonetheless, the most relevant point here is that the most fundamental part of one of the CAP objectives is shouldered by them: caring for the countryside and maintaining rural economy alive in Europe.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions indicate that two large EAGF aid receiver types have become well-established: one type includes those that neither live off agricultural activity nor participate in its problems. The other type comprises those professionals who attempt to live off, or be included in, the sector. The larger number of the former type explains their concentration in urban areas, which evidences that support goes to production means more than to producers. This diffuses a distorted image of farming and introduces relevant imbalances (entitlements market, inflexible access to land, sharp rises in rentals, etc.) that limit generational replacement. The latter type includes some who have been prime examples of success in the competitive facet on a global scale, while others have sought alternative models, and others, who come in considerable numbers, have been quite unable to make any progress and have had to succumb to business concentration processes.

The gradual abandonment of those who fall less in line with the global model bear witness to the family-based agricultural crisis, which explains the backward movement in the number of the professional farmers in the area, and all this opens up a way to service companies and large agricultural firms. This is the result of an intensive model, which favours a double concentration (economic and spatial), and contributes to decompose the social fabric in the countryside. The analysis performed of the EAGF aid for Castilla y León, at a time when the CAP is about to enter a new stage, allows one conclusion to be drawn: in short, identifying the "real farmer" who is linked with and committed to the land where concentrating efforts with better criteria is not only urgent, but so is reconsidering the "agricultural model", if we wish agriculture to fall in line with rural development and the fight against depopulation.

6. Future research lines

The definition of alternative agricultural models to productivism opens up lines of work about the territory alliance and agricultural multifunctionality. Accordingly, multifunctional and territorialised agro-food systems are a very important body of research because they integrate matters like landscape, environmental, social and economic services from agricultural activity into specific spaces and lands (Objective 6 of the CAP post 2020 Strategic Plan).