



Romanticising Europe? Rural Images in European Union Policies

In periods of rapid modernisation and rural exodus, the notion of the countryside became part of the discourse on modernisation and nation-state building. This article identifies and reflects upon rural images used in farm legislation in the EU.

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European Union (EU) language often seems highly technical, but the technical language can have important symbolic functions, just like political language in general. EU farm legislation provides a good example of seemingly technical language where images are systematically utilised that also have a symbolic function. The area is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, farm policy in the EU has been one of the largest policy areas throughout the EU's history. This is true in terms of actual legislative output, the use of political and administrative resources, and in terms of budgetary allocation (Rieger 2005 provides a good overview). The EU's farm policy therefore constitutes a central pillar of European co-operation. Secondly, the political arguments for maintaining EU support for the farming sector since the early 1960s have been inspired by a few basic images of rural life that all Europeans can recognise – among them that of the family farm as the central institution of agricultural production – regardless of whether these images actually present an accurate picture of life in the countryside.

Rural images found in EU legislation provoke an interesting historical comparison to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where historians have identified the use of idealised rural images in the development of general narratives, images that were also used to generate political mandates for the purpose of implementing national farm support legislation. In a period of rapid modernisation and rural exodus, the notion of the countryside became part of the discourse on modernisation and nation-state building. Such images portrayed the good life and family values on the farm, and the countryside came to symbolise the anti-modern. The use of the dichotomy between the past in the present, so it has been argued, has been an important marker for modernisation in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Therborn 1995).

In light of the historical and symbolic importance of the use of rural images nationally it seems reasonable to reflect upon a similar practice in the EU, and what the use of rural images in EU farm legislation means for the way in which the EU is conceptualised. There exists no methodological template for how to approach such a study. On the one hand, the use of images and symbols in EU policies and legislation has escaped much attention in the literature up to now. To date, scholars have only focused on this in direct relation to the cultural policy of the EU, and to interpretations of the grand

statements in EU treaty preambles such as 'ever closer union'. On the other hand, the imprecise conceptualisation of the EU, and the question of what kind of political institution the EU really is, continue to perplex scholars of European co-operation. Typically it is presented as a question of whether the EU can be characterised as state or a polity, whether it is post-Westphalian, post-modern, a federation or a confederation in the making, or simply national politics by other means, that is, a kind of 'rescue of the nation-state' (Milward 2000). Such interpretations often reflect the scholar's point of departure in international relations theory, and the empirical material used is subsequently shaped by the author's pre-defined theoretical choices.

The ambition of this article is not to solve the riddle of how the EU is to be conceptualised, but to contribute to ongoing reflection concerning the EU as a historical phenomenon by identifying rural imagery found in the language used in EU farm policy. Imagery that we know to contain important symbols, historically. This is a new approach to the study of the EU, and the article therefore can be seen as a first step in a new direction. The article has two main parts. Firstly, it provides an outline of historical and sociological literature about the position of the farmer in the nation-building process in Western Europe and the United States. Then it turns to identifying rural images that have been used in EU farm legislation over time, - that is, from the early 1960s until the latest reform in 2003. This survey is based on EU documentation, and on previous archival studies that I have done concerning the creation of European farm policy (Knudsen 2001).

Two Rural Images

Above all, two images of the countryside are recurrent themes among historians and sociologists: the free peasant and the family farm. The interest in the free peasant relates to the tradition of prominent socialist writers such as Karl Marx, who was concerned with the capitalist transformation of society in general, and Karl Kautsky who focused more on agriculture's position in this development (for instance, Kautsky 1899). One of the central points in Marx' reflections on the countryside was that peasants were being stripped of their "vitality, freedom, and independence" (Marx quoted in Antonio 2003: 155). Interestingly, in order to illustrate the misery of modernity, Marx invoked an idealisation of pre-modern peasant life, one that was mostly incorrect. This is clear because pre-modern peasants had often not been free or independent, and peasant life-



style certainly meant hard manual labour with little reward or choice for most of those involved. Whereas the ideal free peasant may actually have existed in Scandinavia (Østergård 1997), tenant and feudal structures were predominant in many other places in Western Europe until the early twentieth century. To take just one example from the founding six countries of the EU, ownership conditions in southern Italy were still characterised as pre-modern and semi-feudal after the end of the Second World War (Ginsborg 1990).

The image of the free farmer links up with the other rural image broadly used in modern farm legislation, namely that of the family farm as a fundamental institution in the countryside. The notion of the patriarchal family farm came to be seen an inherent component of the bourgeois ideal of the family as a basic human institution. The family farm was seen as independent and free, and in this way it became part of the liberal symbolism of modernity. It was, however, also an ambiguous term which could be used to imply two very different things. For there were those who saw the family farm as a socio-cultural institution, and then there were those who insisted upon looking at the family farm as a unit of economic production. This division can be seen to some extent as a dichotomy between catholic and protestant approaches to the issue. This will be illustrated below, using a comparison of imagery used in French and American discussions of the idea of the family farm.

Nations and Civilisations

The peasant and the family farm became important fixtures in the literature about modernity, nation and civilisation. Writing on western civilisation, Serge Latouche saw agriculture as a fundamental civilising element, and warned against the dangers of rural exodus:

Once modernity has put an end to the peasants and the soil (in that sense) there will be no one left to defend the 'fatherland'. And that will be the end of the order of the nation-state. (Latouche 1996: 43).

The notion of the close link between the countryside and the *fatherland* or *patrie*, has been a recurrent theme in work on modernity and the nation. One of the classical expressions of this comes from France. The seminal work on the civilisation of France by historian Fernand Braudel (Braudel 1995) has argued that farming should not be seen as an economic activity but as "a way of life and a form of civilisation" (quote from Noël 1993: 133, my translation). The French sociologist Henri Mendras summed up the mood of doomsday when he coined the phrase *La fin des paysans* – also the title of his book – because he saw peasant culture disappearing under the pressure of industrial expansion (Mendras, 1970). A few years later historian Eugen Weber described how rural societies in France had succumbed to progress and modernity (Weber 1976). Importantly, Weber also showed that instead of remembering the hardship and incredibly miserable circumstances under which people

lived in many rural communities, visions of rural life became seen as contrary to urban civilised life.

In the national narrative of late nineteenth century France, rural life came to symbolise the anti-modern, and farm policies were developed with a view to preserve the family farm. Such images acquired an iconic status in the national narrative, and positive connotations were attached to them. The family farm – the farmer and his family, who had close links to relatives in the cities, and who were central to the existence of rural communities – became a focal point when farm policy support was negotiated in national parliamentary debates. The family farm in France was broadly viewed as a fundamental socio-cultural institution. Interestingly, the broad support for the cultural view of the family farm did not wane as the population employed in agriculture diminished, nor did the truism of the link between the French nation and its farmers.

Another illustrative case of the link between rural images and modernisation is found in the United States. Here the family farm has been somewhat of an icon in the narrative about the nation. The concept of Jeffersonian agrarianism – that is, agriculture as the basic industry, the farmer as independent, and farm life as the natural and good – refers both to the idea of the fundamental position of the farmer, and to normative statements about the good life in the countryside. It is important to note, however, that in the United States the political reference to the family farm typically emphasised the individual farmer, and less the family. Unlike in France, the surrounding rural community did not play a big role in United States political rhetoric. The individual farmer was the yeoman, and the symbol of the strong and independent male. The family farm was important in terms of providing labour on the farm, but also "as the instrument for raising up new generations of honest, hard working, and independent-minded citizens" (Dalecki and Coughenour 1992: 49).

Interestingly, in the post-second world war period, imagery concerning the family farm began to appear more prominently in the language of farm legislation in the United States, but it was now also used to exemplify the family operated business committed to technological progress. The rural images in US legislation therefore have two different underlying stories, though both contain the "normative belief in importance of the family farm taps values in which the social mores of God, family, and human welfare find expression" (Dalecki and Coughenour 1992: 62). Moreover, the notions of independence, equality, and anti-urbanism are present, and fit nicely into the grand liberal narrative of US history (Hathaway 1963).

In both Europe and the United States, the ideal of the family farm has been used to signify the positive values inherent in rural life, and nostalgic and idealised images have been used as political justifications for creating legislation that supports agricultural activity. But



there is also a difference between the rural images used by most Western Europeans and those in use in the United States. In the historical narrative of the United States, the family farm was always an economically viable unit. Farmers were seen as professionals who were capable of accepting and adapting to technological progress. This is also reflected in post-war U.S. agricultural legislation. In Western Europe it is perhaps only in Denmark and to some extent the Netherlands that family farming is looked upon in this way. In catholic Western Europe there has been a clear tendency to make the economic aspect of farming secondary to the cultural significance of it, as we can see by looking at the example of France. The (catholic) cultural view of the family farm was one of a patriarchal unit with extended family connections, all living on the land, and of a closely-knit rural community bound together by family ties.

A few additional reflections on the rural images are necessary. Firstly, it is important to remember that rural images used to promote and generate farm legislation are romanticised. They are not and have never been authentic representations of the socio-economic conditions of farm life. Farmers never constituted one class in any country, and the social structure of the countryside has traditionally been rigid and hierarchical. The size of farm units differed enormously within countries. Secondly, the inaccuracy of the rural images used to describe living conditions in the countryside did not change the fact that the images themselves became powerful symbols as national narratives were constructed and used in the public sphere, and reproduced in farm legislation. In turn, the romantic ideal of the family farm was largely necessary for creating political agreement on farm policy measures.

Thirdly, in modern life it is clear that the different cultural and economic models of family farming would lead to different real world outcomes (Berger 1972: 179-184; OECD 1964). Economists will typically observe that the family firm – to which the capitalist family farm belongs – is likely to focus its priorities on maintaining structures that defend the values of the family, -at the expense of introducing measures to modernise and rationalise agricultural production. The result is that the cultural family farm (i.e. farm), when seen from a purely economic view, is likely to perform sub-optimally and it will in turn generate less income. Thus in contrast to the economic model of the family farm, which had good chances of surviving modernity on its own, the cultural family farm, most likely, would not. Hence, whether the dominant political view of the family farm is as a cultural or economic entity will to some extent guide the choices of political instruments used in farm legislation. The case of the creation and changes to the EU's farm policy illustrates this.

The Creation of the European Family Farm Image

For most of the life of the EU's farm policy – called the common agricultural policy (CAP) – two central and

interconnected arguments have been applied to justify its existence in *all* important policy documents about it. The first concerned the guarantee of a certain income level for farmers. This is what the EU's Court of Auditors recently called "the real leitmotif running through the whole CAP" (Court of Auditors 2004: item I); I have written extensively about this elsewhere (Knudsen 2001 and 2006). This can be seen as an argument in favour of buttressing farmers' incomes because the market does not allow adequate remuneration to farmers from the sale of their produce. Public income support for farmers, therefore, is part of a strategy of keeping more farmers on the land than would otherwise choose to stay there. This suggests that the CAP has been created as a deliberate political guard against the forces of modernity. It exists to shelter a rural population which otherwise would quickly become marginal. The second argument justifying the CAP is one about the preservation of the core socio-cultural institutions in the countryside: firstly the family farm, secondly agricultural and rural communities¹. In the following, I will describe the Community's ways of using these rural images in CAP legislation.

Since the late nineteenth century, states in Western Europe had continuously extended economic support to farmers in spite of the socio-economic decline of the agricultural sector. By the mid 1950s, about a third of the working population of the six founding countries of the European Community was still engaged in agricultural labour, in addition to others who continued to reside in the rural communities. Against this background, the 1956 Spaak report – the report upon which the Rome Treaty was drafted, written by a small group of politicians and high officials, and chaired by the socialist Belgian foreign minister Paul Henri Spaak – made references to agriculture and the family farm structures in Western Europe, which made intervention into the agricultural sector necessary:

One should, without doubt, recognise the special problems that stem from the social structure of agriculture, based essentially on family farming [original: exploitation essentiellement familiale], the fundamental necessity of stability of supplies, of the instability of markets that rely on the influence of climatic conditions, and the inelasticity of the demand for certain products. It is this particular nature of agriculture that explains the existence in many countries of the need for intervention in this area. (Conférence de Messine 1956: p. 44, my translation)

This emphasis on family farming and on the agricultural community of the Six spilled over into the Rome Treaty that was completed during the following year.

When the Community's agricultural ministers met for the first time with the European Commission at a ten-day long conference in July 1958 in Stresa, Italy, their final resolution made further mention of the central position of the family farm:

¹ Note that agricultural and rural communities seems to be used interchangably in EU legislative language.



Given the importance of family structures in European agriculture and the unanimous agreement to safeguard this family character [in original: la volonté unanime de sauvegarder ce caractère familial], it follows that all means should be taken in order to strengthen the economic and competitive capacity of the family enterprises. (Conférence agricole, 1958: 219-224, my translation).

These documents are important because they show that rural images illustrating the central position of the family farm in agricultural communities were already introduced in policy documents in the early years of the Community. These images stressed the distinctiveness of life in rural areas, and outlined what seemed like a central commonality between the six member states of the Community: the family farm and agricultural communities. This was part of the general appeal of the images. The cultural view of the family farm was dominant, and this was the one implemented into the creation of the Community's farm policy through a series of political decisions in the first half of the 1960s. This led to a highly interventionist and protectionist CAP that worked fairly effectively towards distancing the farm economy from the dictates of market forces.

Interestingly, there were subtle differences between the ways in which the family farm was conceived of by the member states. Although they had accepted the view of the majority of the member states as the foundation of the CAP, the Dutch actually tried on several occasion to argue for an economic rather than a cultural approach to the idea of the family farm. In the decades after the Second World War, the Dutch had the most modern agricultural production in the world. Dutch farmers were generally well-educated professionals, working on relatively small farm units specialising in labour-intensive and high technological agricultural production such as dairy and horticulture. Thus early on, the Dutch government, as well as the first commissioner of agriculture, the Dutchman Sicco Mansholt, made a few unsuccessful attempts to introduce the economic model for family farming as the predominant rural image in the Community.

Mansholt was very active as commissioner in charge of formulating the policy proposals for the Community. He held a central role in the creation of the CAP (Knudsen 2001, Lindberg 1963). There are no indications that Mansholt worked under orders from Dutch governments to do this, but rather that the work that he did, he did against the background of his own experience. He was a social democrat, and a strong believer in the European project. Prior to assuming the post in Brussels he had been minister of agriculture in the Netherlands for 12 years, which is a very long time in a politically sensitive position. Unusual for a Dutch social democrat, Mansholt was originally a farmer himself. He came from the prosperous northern province of Friesland. This background had taught him that the family farm was a professional unit run by father and son. Mansholt was fascinated by the technological progress developed

for farming in the United States. He believed that by promoting the economic model of the family farm in the European Community, a rational division of labour would develop within Community agriculture, and western Europe would subsequently gain competitive strength in world markets (Mansholt 1970; Thiemeyer 1999: 27). In fact, – in the language of the fundamental legislative acts that Mansholt had to work from, the Rome Treaty and the Stresa resolution, there is frequent mention of the importance of strengthening the competitiveness of Community agriculture, – but in the course of the political negotiations that followed, these goals figured as secondary to the implementation of policy that supported ideas of European farming based on the rural images of the cultural family farm.

After meeting German farm leaders Mansholt was forced to compromise his views about the economic family farm in Europe (Knudsen 2001: 164). After the division of Germany, the western part had lost the traditional breadbasket of the former eastern lands, and the Federal Republic was left with a relatively archaic agricultural sector. Yet the relatively close relationship between the dominant farm group, the *Deutsche Bauernverband* (DBV), and the leading Christian Democratic Party (CDU) meant that the farmers had a relatively loud political voice within the government. This meant that the CDU implemented a highly extensive farm bill in 1955 that provided intensive public support for farmers with the view of preserving family farms and rural communities. The DBV was led by a charismatic Bavarian farm leader who fiercely promoted the cultural view of the family farm. The DBV was in principle supportive of the creation of the CAP, but wanted as much as possible for it to conform to pre-existing national farm policy in Germany.

Mansholt met German farm leaders at a meeting in February 1959 to clarify his visions for the CAP. His message to them was that over the next decade, millions of farmers and agricultural workers would be made redundant because they were not economically competitive enough to withstand the forces of modernity. This was, perhaps not surprisingly, *not* the message that German farm leaders wanted to hear from the architect of the new European farm policy. The meeting set the course for a somewhat hostile relationship between the commissioner and the DBV, although the group and Mansholt did in fact agree in principle to the end goal, namely the creation of a CAP with some supportive provisions for western Europe's farmers. After this clash of opinions, Mansholt did not challenge the powerful image of the cultural family farm as the centrepiece of the CAP again, at least not for about a decade.

The CAP was fully implemented at the end of the 1960s. Soon after this, Mansholt tried to re-open the discussion in the Community about the way in which the CAP supported the agricultural sector. To Mansholt, this meant renegotiating the rural images used in the CAP. In a much-debated memorandum from 1969 –



entitled 'Agriculture 80' – he argued that the original CAP framework would never attain its objective of income parity without a more well defined process of modernisation for the farm sector (European Commission 1969). He saw no need to halt the effects of modernity on the agricultural sector, and wished to provide incentives such as early retirement and re-training programmes to farmers who were willing to leave the profession voluntarily. And for those who wished to stay, he suggested that the Community would assist them in creating larger farm units.

Mansholt's memorandum was received with "violent opposition among farm circles" (Tracy 1989: 267). Dramatic historical comparisons were made such as "Hitler got rid of the Jews, Mansholt the farmers" (Westermann 1999: 175). In Italy, the plan was referred to as *la bomba*: the bomb (Amadei 1980, 125f). Mansholt's memorandum also coincided with projections that farm income would continue to decline. Organised political activity on the part of farmers grew to new heights. On one occasion farmers forced their way into a Council of Ministers meeting with a cow, on another occasion a demonstration involving some one-hundred thousand farmers caused violence, injuries, and even one reported death in the streets of Brussels (Tracy 1989: 273; Fennell 1997: 210). Member governments were afraid to face the storm, and dismissed the plan almost instantaneously. Mansholt then officially withdrew his proposals, realising that the end of the 1960s, with social unrest looming in several western European countries, was not a good moment to introduce new liberalising images into Europe's farm policy.

Family Farms at the Heart of Rural Communities

Mansholt's political style had often been confrontational, and in 1969 few would admit that he had initiated an important debate about agricultural support. Nonetheless, the Community took a step in the direction outlined by Mansholt, when it launched three new structural programmes encouraging economic modernisation in the early 1970s (Hill 1984: 40ff). This was accomplished without generating much publicity. The gist of these programmes was that farmers who either wanted to leave the land or consolidate their farms into larger holdings could opt for educational and economic assistance from the Community. So it came to be that the dominant vantage point for looking at the family farm was still cultural, and yet modernising images of farming became more widely accepted at the same time.

Three years later, however, a Council directive was enacted that sent things in the opposite direction. The explicit goal of the 1975 programme was to keep more people on the land than would have chosen to stay there without support. Modernity, so it was argued, had resulted in critical de-population of many remote and mountainous areas both in the original member states, and in at least two of the new member states, Britain and Ireland. Throughout the Community it

seemed clear that many small rural communities were unsustainable and dying, and with them, local traditions, dialects, and so on. The younger generation was prone to migrate from such less-favoured-areas – as they were called in Community jargon – leaving behind the elderly and the less economically competitive. Between 1950 and 1980, for example, mountainous areas in Italy lost an average of thirty percent of their inhabitants, and in some stretches of the Apennines, village population declined by half (Clout 1984: 35f). Less-favoured-areas constituted about one-quarter of the whole territory of the EC, and about 20 percent of all farmland. It was now recognised in Community policies, that the survival of the farmer was key to the survival of small rural communities.

With the 1975 programme came a renewed emphasis not only on the preservation of the cultural family farm, -but also on preserving traditional kinship networks, - which were now to be seen as fundamental factors in maintaining the structure of rural communities (Marsden 1984: 205). Sociologists studying rural culture had observed that the programme followed a particular trend, namely that,

the recent severe and rapid dislocation of the village social structure has led to an *ideology* of 'community' being conferred upon its former qualities, a genuine sense of loss having produced a harking back to a 'golden age' of village life which can be contrasted with an apparently less palatable present. (Newby 1980: 258, emphasis in original).

From the first half of the 1970s, the CAP developed into a two-pillar policy, as figure 1 illustrates. Both pillars were based on a nostalgic and somewhat idealised image of the countryside that remained central for the justification of maintaining the interventionist policy.

Figure 1:

The common agricultural policy in the 1970s

Pillar I: Farm income support	Pillar II: Structural measures
Image applied: The family farm	Image applied: Rural communities

Reprints of Rural Images in the 1990s

Next we fast forward to the early 1990s. This was a time when a series of fundamental reforms of the CAP were initiated. The original CAP, (described above as pillar I) had been created in the early 1960s, and had remained unchanged for three decades. The structural policies represented by pillar II were implemented in the 1970s and in addition as part of other unrelated EU structural legislation, separate from programs existing as part of CAP. Over this period of time the farm income support policies of pillar I had been criticised from many sides for failing to achieve the goal of providing income sup-



port for farmers in the Community. The key policy instruments of the CAP were mechanisms the function of which was to support farmers' production volume. But this had also produced a series of negative side effects such as artificially high food prices for consumers and an abundance of food surpluses described variously as *butter mountains* and *wine lakes* by the press. In addition, intensive farming impacted negatively on the environment in a variety of ways. Finally, the program led to constant complaints about protectionism from Europe's external trading partners. In addition, the CAP claimed up to 75 per cent of the Community's budget (Hill 1996). One effect of the program had been to keep more people on the land than would have stayed without economic support from the European agencies, but the share of the total working population engaged in agriculture had nonetheless declined to around 6% by the early 1990s.

In 1992 Ray McSharry, the Irish commissioner of agriculture, managed to launch the first reform of the CAP's pillar I. MacSharry was one who understood that more than half of the people in the Community actually still lived in so-called rural areas, and that the utilisation of rural imagery, as part of the public discourse regarding reform of European agricultural support, would continue to play a decisive role in making these reforms politically acceptable. Early policy papers leading up to the reform reminded politicians that the

basic objective was to retain a sufficient number of farmers to carry out on behalf of society the tasks of food and raw material producer and protector of the natural environment, in the framework provided by family farming ... [and] ... a strong rural development had to be put in place to work alongside the CAP to maintain the rural population and strengthen the rural economy. (Fennell 1997: 169-170).

As the quote illustrates, the reform was not about eliminating public support for agriculture in Europe, as critical economists might have advised. It was still directed towards maintaining the family farm and rural communities as core features of the European model of society. The policy documents emphasized the positive values inherent in life in the countryside and the close relationship between the farmer and nature..

The language used in the policy instruments of the reform underlined the political desirability of maintaining population levels in the countryside by gradually switching from production support, initiated by Mansholt, to direct income support for family farms. In technical jargon this was called *de-linkage*, that is, essentially removing the link between production volume and income on the farm. De-linkage was also an attempt to move away from a somewhat unfortunate distribution of aid that had existed as a component of the original programs outlined in pillar I. For as part of the original policy large producers had benefited more than small producers because support had been linked directly to the volume of production. So that, one issue addressed in McSharry's reforms was the notion of

maximum limits on the amount of support that large producers could receive, a measure known as *modulation* (Grant 1997: 77-78). Although the implementation of this aspect of McSharry's reforms was limited in its extent, the rural image of the CAP was still clear after the reform: The purpose of the CAP should be to make possible the continued existence of smaller farms whose capacity for economic survival would be critical without this support. Economics mattered less than the symbolic value of guarding the cultural family farm from the forces of modernity. The symbolic value of the family farm was seen as a defining characteristic of Europe's cultural heritage.

With the MacSharry reform the CAP became a full-fledged social policy, and the family farm was put on public welfare regardless of size, or how many members of the family actually worked on the farm (see also Rieger 2005). MacSharry's successor, the Austrian Franz Fischler expanded upon the policy of de-linkage – or *de-coupling*, as Fischler's administration preferred to call it – implementing the program in many additional agricultural sectors (European Commission 2002).

Fischler went further in reforming the CAP by adding two new guiding principles between 1999 and 2003: *cross-compliance* and *multi-functionality*. Disguised in administrative technical language, both principles were based on distinctly positive rural images. Their introduction can be seen in light of three other political developments that all influenced farming in Europe at this time. Firstly, the emergence of environmental measures from the 1970s, introduced with the aim of limiting the environmental impact of intensive farming practices that had been implemented in response to previous legislation. Environmentalists worked hard to reveal what they saw, namely that Europe had a population of modern industrial farmers. This image differed significantly from those promoted as part of the original CAP.

Secondly, the creation of a more coherent regional policy, along with the structural programmes existing as part of the second pillar of the CAP. This was partially triggered by the enlargement of the EU to include Greece, Spain and Portugal in the 1980s, since these countries all had large rural populations. At this time regional disparities were seen as a barrier to harmonious economic development throughout the community. Thus as part of the Single European Act of 1986 large structural funds were created with the purpose of preserving rural communities (Allen 2000: 245). A particularly ambitious initiative for rural development came with the Leader programmes initiated in 1988. Various cohesion and structural funds were merged into the second pillar of the CAP, combining rural development objectives, agro-environmental schemes, and other pre-existing agricultural structural mechanisms (Buller 2001: 3). This essentially reinforced the use of rural images used in language that had helped launch the 1975 programme, and thus since the mid-1980s an important objective of the rural policy was to maintain population



levels in the countryside. Here the images of family farm life and of rural communities were re-invoked in the language of the legislation (Fennell 1997: 169).

The third development was the outbreak of bovine spongiforme encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease that erupted in the early 1990s. It was not caused by the CAP, but had significant consequences for it (Grant 1997: 121-129). As beef and veal consumption dropped dramatically, cattle farmers faced serious economic effects. There were some human fatalities, and millions of cattle were destroyed. Politics and science became mixed up with emotional national culinary campaigns, for instance the *Eat British Beef* campaign in Britain. The crisis demonstrated very clearly the direct link between farming methods and food safety. Food safety was of direct concern to every person, and it raised the question of how to secure safe foods in Europe. The EU responded to the food safety crisis by making institutional changes in the way that it dealt with such issues. The position of Commissioner for Consumer Policy and Health Protection was created in 1995. The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 included a reference to food safety and public health, and gave the European Parliament influence on policy decisions in this area. It was at this time that the European Food Safety Authority came into being, modeled to some extent on the FDA, or Food and Drug Administration in the United States.

In legislative terms, the crisis led the EU to develop a more comprehensive body of food quality legislation, including the integrated food safety strategy of 2000, – *From the Farm to the Fork* – a strategy that involved not one but several Commissioners. Commissioner Fischler saw the situation as a reminder of the core functions of the agricultural sector and of the value of producing a higher quality of foodstuffs:

[W]e should not forget that the production methods required for these quality marks often entails higher costs or lower yields, which up to now have not always been adequately compensated by the market. Therefore it is right that only producers who are willing to sign up to such quality rules should continue to benefit from public funding. (Fischler 2003a).

The mad cow crisis was successfully turned into a reminder about the fundamental position of agriculture in European societies. Moreover, it reminded the general public that there was a discrepancy between the rural images being presented to them about farming in Europe, – that of small-scale farming, and family farms responsibly producing wholesome foods – and what was actually occurring in parts of the European agricultural sector – industrial scale cattle ranches utilising assembly-line strategies leading to the production of unsafe foods. Thus there was still political capital to be gained from supporting the cultural image of the family farm.

Fischler understood this and constructed an argument that linked food quality and improved farming methods to continued public financial support for Europe's family farmers. He proposed extending the goals in the CAP's pillar II to comprise issues such as food safety and quality, animal welfare, and agro-environmental topics relating to the maintenance of the countryside. The goal was to set conditions for farmers receiving public support from pillar I only if they comply with goals in pillar II. This is what was called *cross-compliance*.

De-coupling and cross-compliance were therefore closely related in the Fischler reform. Fischler explained that "The main objective of this payment is to stabilise their incomes. With decoupling, the farmers get back their entrepreneurial freedom" (European Commission 2003). Cross-compliance was the key-word for providing "entrepreneurial freedom", as farmers would be able to choose to focus on a variety of issues beyond simply increasing production levels. As he explained:

[I]t does not mean that we pay farmers 'for doing nothing' [but rather that the farmer] will have to keep his land in good shape, and he will have to meet a number of cross-compliance requirements. That means that he will have to meet environmental food safety, animal health and animal welfare, and occupational safety standards. (Fischler 2003b).

The move was supported in a series of studies by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a turnaround of sorts for this organisation that had previously opposed all forms of agricultural support in industrialised countries (OECD 1994 and 2001).

Cross-compliance became part of the strategy of maintaining EU support for rural areas, though with the objective of "improving Europe's natural heritage", and thus to "preserve Europe's rural heritage" (European Commission 2000: p. 7). It added up to a plea for much broader public support for the maintenance of the CAP and income support because it managed to combine support for farmers with policy that took into account public concerns about food quality and safety, and environmental concerns.

Two different sets of issues were dealt with here as part of the environmental aspects of the CAP reforms. On the one hand, farmers were encouraged to produce healthy foods in an ecologically friendly way. On the other hand, the role of farmers in preserving nature and the countryside in general was rewarded. Here the popularity of the notion of agro-tourism also comes into play. In several speeches, Fischler and other politicians expounded upon the image of millions of city-dwellers in the EU going on holiday each year in the countryside. When on holiday, the politicians argued, Europeans do not want to look at industrial farms or deserted rural communities, but rather wish to see beautifully maintained landscapes, rolling hills, happy



farming communities, and small-scale farming. The mid-term review of Fischler's reform argued that: The products and services which society at large expects farmers and rural areas to provide must justify agricultural expenditure. (European Commission 2002).

Fischler proclaimed that farmers were custodians of the European countryside. As such they were providing a service expected by society. In this way it was argued that farmers were in fact providing a public good. This line of reasoning then set the stage for the introduction of the idea of *multi-functionality*. Multi-functionality acknowledges that the farmer's tasks are multiple and go beyond simple agricultural production. It also assumes that farmers should be rewarded for performing these tasks, tasks that are seen as essential services for the general public.

Interestingly, on this point the OECD has also issued what could almost be seen as a set of blue-prints for multi-functionality in the agricultural policies of its member states. For instance, the OECD has advised that.

[I]t is more efficient to pay directly for public services such as maintaining an agreeable countryside, and to charge those whose activities pollute the environment. Payments for a public service would contribute to rising farmers' incomes. (OECD 2003)

Thus within the principle of multi-functionality therefore also is contained a highly idealised and retrospective view of farmers. Traditionally maintaining a farm included executing a variety of tasks. Utilising the EU's concept of multi-functionality, farmers are thus rewarded for fulfilling this traditional role. A traditional role that can be seen in sharp contrast to the work done by most other professionals in Europe, work which by and large has become more and more specialised rather than more and more general. The policy of rewarding multi-functionality therefore squares the circle, and cements the ideal of the cultural family farm in Europe.

Romanticising Europe?

The purpose of this article has been to identify and reflect upon rural images used in farm legislation in the EU. It has done so against the background of examples illustrating how the notion of the European farmer has been used historically in national narratives and various pieces of national farm legislation. In the modernisation process ideas about the free peasant/farmer and the family farm became icons of the nation and the anti-modern, and brought into focus notions of the basic elements of society. Farm life was idealised not only in the national narratives, but also in art and literature. This view was reflected in farm legislation enacted at the national level in various countries already at the end of the nineteenth century. This legislation was created to function as a buffer for the rural population against the forces of modernity. And while there was a constant de-population of the countryside during this

period, it was not as dramatic as it might have been, had it not been for these acts of public intervention.

The image of the free family farm at the centre of rural communities has also played a significant role in the EU's history. The article has illustrated how the family farm has been a significant image as it has been applied in the creation and reform of the EU's farm legislation. The symbol has been useful because it referred back to well-known national ideas of European civilisation and nation-building. Masked in technical jargon, the European project therefore includes an often overlooked anti-modern dimension that evolves around historical ideals of the rural. Rural societies were common and not that distant in the memory of most citizens of EU member states. When Europe's agricultural sector developed in a direction not in sync with the cultural family farm image, EU's legislators responded by adjusting policy according to the dominant and desirable rural images. Multi-functionality underlines how EU farm legislation – still one of the largest areas of EU policy domain– is still rooted in historical ideals. Multi-functionality can perhaps also be seen as a kind of romanticised view of Europe. The past-present dichotomy that has been a defining character of modernity is still alive, only now the past has almost taken the form of "virtual reality" (Therborn 1995: 4f) in Europe's modernity.

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