

III. Economics

Mass Farm Protests Across Europe Call for a New, Productive Economy

by Rainer Apel and Marcia Merry Baker

Feb. 3—Farm leaders of the Europe-wide mass demonstrations pledged they would continue their protests after the heads of state of the 27 member nations of the European Union met Feb. 2 at their Brussels Summit, offering only very limited responses to farmers' demands. By Feb. 3, certain protest barricades had been removed from French and Belgian highways, but many farm leaders issued warnings that fundamental questions remain. Arnaud Rousseau, head of FNSEA, France's largest farm association (*Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles*), issued an ultimatum. He told media that new government farming remedies must be implemented by Feb. 24, the start of France's huge trade fair, *Salon de l'Agriculture*, and new laws passed by June, or else.

Outside the EU Summit's meeting hall some 1,400 tractors and a huge crowd kept watch, with banners and bonfires. At the same time, demonstrators blocked highways into Brussels and staged shutdowns at access points along the main motorways all across Europe with tractors and trucks, barriers of hay bales, dumps of imported food, and manure piles. Demonstrators are targeting sites of the agro-food cartel—Carrefour warehouses, Danone, McDonalds, and other trans-nationals that underpay and over-exploit, protected by the EU and national governments.

Standing with the farmers are demonstrators from



X/Santosh Gupta

French farmers blocking the A51 highway north of Marseille. Signs read: "Have you no shame?" "Gentlemen distributors: We do not object to paying fair prices to farmers in your stores," and "Agriculture: It was my choice. It has become my Way of the Cross."

all economic sectors—fishermen, truckers, railway and dock workers, teachers, health care workers, skilled tradesmen, retail workers, and people from all kinds and sizes of business, construction, and other occupations. Farmers and their allies are in the streets—from Poland and Greece to Ireland and Spain.

The same day as the farmers surrounded the Brussels Summit, 15,000 striking German workers shut

down 11 major airports in Germany. After a six-day rail strike ended Jan. 29 in Germany, the longest in recent history, 90,000 transit workers went on strike Feb. 3 on buses and light rail in 15 out of 16 states. Port workers are conducting occasional shut-downs from Hamburg in Germany to Zeebrugge in Belgium.

The demands differ from sector to sector and nation to nation, but taken all together they call for government measures—emergency and long term, to restore functioning national economies. This means in all sectors, from energy and infrastructure to health care and education. The fact that farmers can no longer produce food is the clear call to action for everyone.

The present impossible conditions for farming in the EU include high prices for energy and other inputs; lack of infrastructure for water supplies; lack of defenses against floods and droughts; Green Deal “Farm-to-Fork” restrictions on land use, livestock numbers, and agro-chemicals, plus crazed “biodiversity” and “anti-emission” rules; and overall income so low that farm families cannot survive. At the same time, EU and national governments support the agro-cartels and the green finance complex, including imports of food commodities from Ukraine.



X/@steve_hanke

Hammered by Green legislation, protesting French farmers flood the streets of Draguignan with sheep, Jan. 26, 2024.

The EU Summit scrambled to offer a semblance of concessions, including approval to France to give a year’s delay on the EU order that farmers must not produce anything on 4% of their farmland. The EU offered to cushion any bad effects on imports of (cartel) poultry, grain, and sugar coming into the EU from Ukraine, but said the imports will continue. The EU promised that any trade deal with South America—the Mercosur deal, for example—will disallow dumping of beef and other American food onto EU markets. In other words, the European Commission said, “trust us.”

Not only does no one trust the EU’s European Commission, but its President, Ursula von der Leyen, is a focus of ridicule, and is targeted for removal. The European Parliament elections are scheduled for June 6-9. Oblivious to the anger against her, von der Leyen held a meeting Jan. 25 on the “Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture,” which included participation by representatives of the food cartels and the World Wildlife Fund.

A banner popular in the German farmers’ Jan. 8-15 Week of Action was: “They Don’t Sow, They Don’t Reap, But They Think They Know Everything.” And demonstrators outside the EU Summit Feb. 2 had signs proclaiming, “Ursula, We Are Here.” The capstone of the EU Summit’s snub of Europe’s farmers and its economy was its Feb. 2 vote to send \$54 billion in EU funds (over four years) to Ukraine to support its military and its economy. The



X/Sputnikint

German farmers block an access ramp to a major highway in Saxony-Anhalt, as part of actions there and in Bavaria, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Thuringia, Jan. 29, 2024.



XI@stillgray

European farmers continue their protest against the European Union's ruinous policies hostile to food production. Here, German farmers turn out in their thousands in Stuttgart, Jan. 31, 2024. Note tractors in the background.

Brussels Summit message: Tanks not tractors.

Economic Program Proposals

In Germany on Jan. 25, in Stollberg, in the state of Saxony, activists from one of the leading co-organizers of the nationwide demonstrations, the *Land schafft Verbindung* (LSV, "Countryside Creates Connection"), held a regional meeting on economic policy, including participation of farmers and mayors of the region. They discussed and passed a policy petition for which they are now gathering signatures among citizens of Saxony.

The so-called "Stollberg Declaration" comprises 12 demands, going beyond strictly agrarian concerns. For example, Demand No. 10 calls for a shift of developing-sector policy to a new approach that puts the genuine interest of the developing nations at the center. That opens the door to a real discussion about cooperation with the Global South.

Many points in the Declaration make clear that the farmers are working for an alliance with the entire Mittelstand (small to mid-sized enterprises) of Germany—craftsmen, construction workers, bakers, truck drivers, and others, who have stated support for the farmers' cause.

In France, on Jan. 24, the *Solidarité & Progrès* party issued a non-partisan "Letter to Farmers" by Jacques Cheminade, Chairman of the party and also a leader of the Schiller Institute. In mass circulation as a leaflet, the Letter presents eight points as "a few ideas" towards "a new system for the common good."

Germany: Stollberg Declaration

Issued Jan. 25, 2024 by the LSV (Countryside Creates Connection) group. (Simplified translation by EIR.)

WE DEMAND:

1. Rejection of the 2024 draft budget in the Bundesrat, as long as it contains disproportionate tax increases for SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises).
2. Ending restrictions on entrepreneurial activity that are claimed to be imposed for scientific reasons, but are not.
3. Improving the position of agriculture in the value chain.
4. Introduction of an environmental and social levy on imported products of all kinds that are not manufactured according to German standards.
5. Introduction of mandatory and detailed country-of-origin labeling of all foodstuffs.

6. Protection of the transportation industry from unfair competition, withdrawal of the toll increase and CO₂ tax.

7. Introduction of colored agricultural diesel fuel, along the lines of the United States and United Kingdom, and promotion of alternative fuels.

8. Securing a regional crisis-proof and affordable energy supply.

9. Reorganization of municipal finances and administrative reforms at state and federal level for immediate savings measures, and for reduction of bureaucracy through consolidation of authorities, for the purpose of providing more proximity to citizens.

10. Immediate review of all state payments abroad. [The Berlin government is increasing military and state spending in Ukraine to support its economy and the Kiev government].

11. Simplification of building regulations; fixed fee rates for the planning of public buildings; and amendment of the procurement and contract regulations for construction services to ensure fair competition.

12. Preventing abuse of the welfare state; promoting appreciation of productive work; a policy of practical education, including regular teaching days in regional companies in the school curriculum.

France: Letter to Farmers

Issued Jan. 24, 2024, by [Solidarité et Progrès](#). (Translated by EIR.)

LETTER TO FARMERS

“People Should Be Fed, Not Die! Your Revolt Is Our Common Good!”

The current economic system condemns our farms to deliberate euthanasia in the name of financial profit. Between 1955 and 2020, the number of farmers has been reduced by 80%, purchasing power has fallen, and all prices paid to farmers are heading for a collapse by 2024, whether for wheat, corn, milk, sugar, or meat. It’s time to change the system.

We must first deal with the effects of the “crisis” with concrete measures, since this is an emergency: Abolish the tax hike on farm-use diesel, get rid of harmful standards, stop imposing European standards, do everything possible to enable young people to set up in business and ensure a fair retirement for the elderly. No crocodile tears, just concrete action on the ground!

But this is only the first step. What you have achieved will be snatched from you by inflation or by force, if we

don’t get to the root causes and change the system.

Going to the root causes means fighting the financial oligarchy, its food and agriculture cartels and its political accomplices, which include a financial system that imposes the ecological transition or the Green Deal to eat you alive, between “farm and fork.”

(1) Convince the majority of our citizens that we can and must make agriculture a great profession for the future, by uniting producers and consumers against financial manipulation. Defeat pessimism with enthusiasm for projects that work for all!

(2) Demand a new international financial and monetary architecture that takes power away from the oligarchy and gives priority to mutual development, of which agriculture must be the pillar.

(3) Stop the “agro-holdings” that crush us under the pretext of “free and undistorted” competition or hypocritical philanthropy. For example, we must not let the “agro-holdings” invade by means of Ukrainian grains, which don’t benefit the Ukrainian people, but only the financiers who control the land there!

(4) Stop the free import of foreign products that don’t respect our production conditions: We find New Zealand milk powder in our products, while our own milk producers can barely survive! We must put an end to “free trade” treaties and conclude bilateral agreements in our mutual interest.

(5) Ban bank speculation in the food and beverage sectors.

(6) Increase all means to clip the wings of financial vultures.

(7) Organize a moratorium on and restructuring of farmers’ debt.

(8) Provide producers with the financial resources they need to use the most advanced production technologies and ensure them medium- and long-term markets for their products.

These are just a few ideas. What’s essential is that our farmers get a fair parity price, which enables them to live well and finance their investments without being strangled by their lenders. It also means that the world’s farmers are not pitted against each other in a financial Wild West controlled by crooked sheriffs.

This is not utopian! Without this new system of the common good, we would be condemning ourselves to war. When our leaders talk about war economy, they’re moving all of us to war!

Agriculture is the key to a peaceful future. We support you! We unite with you to make it happen!