

Mardi du quai Voltaire, June 15, 2021

### **The Issue of Protein Transition**

<https://youtu.be/PU62MZH61z8>

#### Key findings

The *Mardi du Quai Voltaire* on protein transition (June 15, 2021) discussed important issues of the Common Agricultural Policy while the final negotiations of the CAP reform were unravelling. The reduction of soya dependence is a priority for the French government. As a result, the French protein plan is designed to ensure stronger "meshing" ("*maillage*") of food and feed chains as well as of agricultural regions, with the particular aim of bringing livestock production closer to local fodder.

Agriculture is relatively specialized in France, albeit less so than in Europe as a whole; substantial cereal exports and soya imports are evidence of its openness to international trade. The protein plan and its meshing agenda should strengthen the autonomy of the French farm while reducing tropical forest destruction.

The question arose whether the ultimate form of meshing should not be farm level integration of animal and crop production. From this standpoint, the debate questioned the importance given in the protein plan to agricultural investments relative to income incentives, particularly given the powerful impact of CAP payments.

Pending the reduction in meat consumption, which will inevitably be slow, the ultimate logic of the protein plan makes mixed farming appear more or less as an accepted reference. Should this be understood as the effective aim of the government's protein plan and should it represent a policy objective, per the farmer representative's request for clear policy goals?

Four issues were identified in the introduction:

1. the extensive share of land allocated to livestock and feed production,
2. greenhouse gas emissions from livestock farming,
3. European food sovereignty in plant protein,
4. a more balanced protein diet.

The two rounds of discussions were each followed by questions from the audience. The first round pointed out that:

- France has a rich and varied agricultural potential, where crop (especially protein) and livestock production appear to be fully complementary,
- the government's priority protein plan aims at integrating agricultural sectors and regions, and is designed to encourage research and investment,
- the advantages of pulses are the reverse side of their historical handicaps: they can be produced in abundance (which made them the staple of the poor) and can be stored at room temperature (however, their preparation requires moisturing) ...

Turning to the future, the second round pointed out:

- the role and influence of the food industry in food consumption trends,
- the evidence of the current inflection in meat consumption in France, notwithstanding the past valuation of meat at the expense of vegetables, which is retarding the transition,
- in collective catering, the capacity of inexpensive pulses to compensate for the higher cost, imposed by the French EGALIM law, of organic and local food products,
- the consistency of protein and agroecological transitions, from technical, ecological and economic viewpoints,
- farmers' call for clear agricultural policy goals, accordingly supported by proper means and incentives, rather than command and control approaches,
- the advantages of a more collaborative approach in agriculture to enhance field innovation, waste control and consumer information on production methods and food valuation.

While the reduction of meat production, an issue for the debate, was finally relegated to the background, "eating less and better quality", especially meat, emerged as the closing consensus.

Paris, June 20, 2021