

Storyline 3a: Localisation for protection

Local food systems - low level of implementation of agro-ecological practises

This scenario plays out in the future described in the SSP 3, Regional Rivalry – A Rocky Road, scenario. The world experiences a rise in nationalism and regional conflicts which pushes countries to focus on national security issues which includes trade barriers particularly in energy and agricultural markets (O'Neill et al., 2017). Countries aim to reach energy and food security goals within their own nation or region - global cooperation and trade is low (SSP3). The world is separated into several regional blocks of countries that have little exchange between them, which prevents efficient action to reach sustainability goals (SSP3). Reaching environmental sustainability goals have very low priority in this future (SSP3).

In this storyline, we see a development in which nationally or locally produced foods, regardless of production methods, are prioritised over foods produced in agro-ecological farming systems. In some Member states, this development is a consequence of a continued rise in nationalism and protectionism. Some countries are also experiencing discontent with EU membership and aim for greater independence (cf. Brexit). Global trade wars and global political tendencies for less international cooperation and increased competition between regions (SSP3) add to the sensation of the importance of self-sufficiency in food supply. In the wake of this, some Member states are putting policies in place to promote more national food production based on arguments like supporting local farmers and/or reducing the dependency on imported foods e.g. to be prepared for cut-off situations due to conflicts or interruptions due to trade wars.¹ In other Member states, nationalism is not as pronounced and support for continued EU-cooperation (including a large CAP budget) is maintained. However, these countries are also affected by the global political situation and strategies for food production emphasize the need for high level of self-sufficiency and independency from large food imports. Many countries look to Finland for inspiration. Finland has managed to maintain high market shares for Finnish products due to explicit goals, strategies and policy investments into strengthening the competitiveness of Finnish farming and the promotion of Finnish foods².

In terms of agricultural production in the EU, focus is on increased output of bulk commodities and continued growth of the agricultural sector to supply primarily the national population, but also to achieve gains on a growing world market through exports of surplus to countries mainly outside the EU. Although national/local food is commonly marketed as more healthy and sustainable (and perceived as such by consumers) concern for negative health or environmental outcomes is in general secondary. Local production is prioritised over implementing agro-ecological practices or other more sustainable ways of farming, which are often seen as in-efficient use of land. The influence of multinational agro-input and food companies has remained strong but their influence has gradually decreased somewhat for a number of reasons. In countries with nationalist influences for example, people are increasingly suspicious and negative towards anything that relies on cooperation across countries and tend to prefer buying from national companies. New national food

¹ Example from Sweden of a municipality which might abandon their policy to purchase organic food in favour for locally produced and seasonal foods. https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2019-10-28/lunds-kommun-kan-helt-stryka-krav-pa-ekologisk-mat?redirected=1&fbclid=IwAR0KxVmGLKlVln53HCMX8wqMVNFWO_KPpMBjWZ51mVYlv3c_v5qMmDdfV1o

² <https://mmm.fi/en/food-and-agriculture/policy/food-policy>

companies therefore arise and existing ones are strengthened - however power in the food chain continues to be concentrated to a few large food industries and retailers in each country. Due to the focus on national food production and nationalistic trends, local food cultures thrive in many countries. Still, most citizens continue to eat a highly environmentally impacting diet with high levels of animal products, as there are few consumer side policies put in place to steer consumption in a different direction and additionally continued investments and support for intensive livestock production. Food waste decreases slightly due to somewhat higher food prices.

The implementation of agro-ecological practises hence remains low or increase only slightly (maximum 15% of agricultural area in 2050) to support mainly three niches of citizens; 1) those who oppose current nationalist trends and relentlessly, but not very successfully, continue to fight against environmental pollution 2) those that use nationalist arguments for “saving our national environment” and therefore see an interest in agro-ecology³, and 3) rich consumers outside the EU. Agro-ecology is limited to weak agro-ecological practises as the focus on high-yield is prevailing in the agricultural discourse. In the EU, there is a strong push to intensify national agricultural production (both in fertile and marginal areas) with the demand for increased food output overruling objectives to reduce environmental pressures. Globally, investments and development of agriculture is slow (SSP3).

Due to the conflicting views on the role of EU institution between Member states, the centrality of the EU CAP and the contrasting re-nationalization of agricultural policies is heavily debated. The EU has continuously been losing centralised power. However, there is still a common agricultural policy in 2050 but with a smaller budget and Member states are left to make most decisions on how it is to be implemented, i.e. EU-level policies are weak. Member states keep agriculture strongly protected and financially supported. Member states manage to keep up with the international competition due to mainly protective trade policy but also by, although to a lesser extent, consumer willingness to pay a considerable price premium for domestic products. On the demand side, most countries implement policies to promote consumption of local foods, e.g. requiring that public meals are “based on local traditions” and made out of domestically produced commodities and information campaigns to promote local food. Member states find creative ways to put up inter-EU trade barriers, e.g. referring to health effects etc. There is an increasing amount of publicly-funded projects and initiatives to support local production, including labelling schemes⁴ and policies to support short supply chains.

³ Potentially this organisation is such an example <http://www.ecopop.ch/de/>

⁴ E.g. <http://euskolabel.hazi.eus/es/>