

## **Proposal for International Workshop**

### **Agricultural discontents : Protests and Political action in Europe**

**7- 8 January 2027, University of London Institute in Paris (Paris, France)**

#### **Organisation team:**

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#### **Statement:**

In 2024, Europe experienced an unprecedented wave of agricultural protests, whose intensity and recurrence year after year suggest more than a punctual crisis. Few European countries were spared from the roadblocks and demonstrations involving hundreds of tractors, some of which even reached Brussels, expressing the distress of a sector whose difficulties appear widely shared across borders. Common grievances emerged across Europe: persistently low incomes and rising production costs, perceived unfair standards in EU and non-EU imports, and environmental regulations considered untenable (Bujdei-Tebeica 2024; Finger et al. 2024; Matthews 2024; Mazzocchi *et al.* 2024). At the same time, farmers' demands varied significantly depending on the national, regional and local contexts – differences that this workshop seeks to focus on through its comparative perspective. Far from being an isolated episode, these mobilisations might appear as a broader reconfiguration of political action in rural Europe.

The transnational scope of recent farmers' protests tells us something about the current state of European agriculture. Given the intensity of the revolts, what seems to be at stake is not merely a conjunctural crisis but the very continuity of a sector whose dominant productivist model has entered a multifaceted crisis at the European level. Recent political developments, including the adoption by the European Parliament of the Mercosur agreement, indicate that these tensions are likely to intensify in the future; indeed, new waves of protests have already begun

to emerge.

As is often the case with large-scale social mobilisations, there is a lag between events and scholarly analysis. Nevertheless, a growing body of research has already begun to examine different dimensions of the recent protests across Europe. Existing studies explore, among other issues, the ambiguous and weakened role of farmers' unions in the protests (Veitch 2025); farmers' shifting social positions, caught between environmental demands and economic pressures (Mc Loughlin 2024); the social and professional profiles of protesters (Franz et al., 2025); dynamics of politicisation and depoliticisation (Nagel et al. 2025); competing quests for recognition within the profession (Bono and Purseigle 2024); variations in media coverage across national contexts (Jarynowski 2025); farmers' perceptions of CAP regulations (Dujany and Drury 2025); and the cultural specificities shaping national protest repertoires (Zaretsky 2024).

These analyses have contributed substantially to our understanding of the recent agricultural protests by documenting their diversity, meanings, and political implications across different contexts. Building on these efforts, the workshop seeks to create a space for collective dialogue across national borders, disciplinary fields and theoretical traditions. The workshop seeks to place these different analyses in conversation and to further enrich comparative and transnational perspectives on what increasingly appears as a lasting Europe-wide phenomenon.

**The workshop will be structured around three core angles :**

### **1. Mapping agricultural discontents across Europe**

At a first level, the workshop seeks to take stock not only of the events of the Winter of 2024 but also of the protest cycles that followed. What forms did agricultural discontents take? What was unique about them and what wasn't? What demands were put forward and by whom? Which groups or sections of the agricultural sector were notably absent or invisibilised during these protests (e.g. agricultural workers, migrant labourers, women...), and what does this tell us? Comparative perspectives will allow us to move beyond invocations of "the farming community" or the figure of the "rebellious peasant" and instead highlight the tensions and divides that cut across rural worlds more broadly – class, gender, generational, and regional divides among others. We wish to prioritise qualitative analyses rather than statistical generalisations, in particular, by building on ethnographic studies and qualitative research.

Which “agricultural worlds” are currently under threat at the European level, and which segments of the farming profession are being strengthened, notably through the deepening of neoliberal restructuring?

## **2. Political representation, collective action, ideological realignment**

A second angle looks at the political restructuring currently unfolding both within the farming profession and in broader relation to rural politics. Analysing these movements and the divergent interests raises pressing questions about the crisis of union representation, and, more broadly, about the array of political and ideological intermediaries operating within the agricultural sector. What do these mobilisations tell us about the voice and place of farmers in contemporary politics? To what extent does the farming calendar or their farming practices influence their political activism? Who acts in their names? What forms of political activism do their material conditions permit? Who are the winners and losers of systems of political representations for farmers and farm workers? The proximity of certain movements with far right unions, movements, parties, and ideas compel us to once again interrogate the dominating representations of the agricultural world as being reactionary. Far from assuming ideological homogeneity, this angle invites analyses of competing political strategies and shifting alliances. This section will also importantly help to identify winning and losing political strategies at the European level that have enabled to reduce the impacts of neoliberal restructuring.

## **3. The futures of European agriculture**

Finally, the conference seeks to open a broader reflection on the futures of European agriculture as they are imagined, debated, feared, or hoped for by different actors. Beyond immediate grievances, the recent farmers’ protests were also saturated with projections of the future: narratives of decline and disappearance, calls to “save” farming, promises of protection or sovereignty, and competing visions of ecological transition or technological modernisation.

This axis explicitly invites contributions engaging with the rise of agrarian populism as a political and symbolic force (Mamonova & Franquesa 2020). How are populist narratives mobilised in agricultural struggles? In what ways do discourses of abandonment, resentment, authenticity, or national sovereignty intersect with farmers’ experiences and claims? To what extent do protest movements contribute to, resist, or reconfigure populist logics?

This axis invites contributions that consider the symbolic and emotional dimensions of agricultural mobilisations. What futures are being articulated by farmers, farm labourers, unions, political parties, institutions, and social movements? How are notions of hope, despair, resentment, dignity, or nostalgia being mobilised through these struggles? To what extent do discourses express attachment to threatened ways of life, fears of downward mobility, or aspirations for recognition, autonomy, and continuity across generations?

Placing these imaginaries in a broader political and economic context also allows us to examine how power relations shape dominant understandings of desirable and legitimate futures. Between competing claims around food sovereignty, stalled or uneven ecological transitions, technological promises, and citizen mobilisations around agriculture and the environment, rural Europe appears as a space of contested horizons. Which futures are promoted through public policies, market actors, or environmental agendas - and which ones are marginalised or silenced? How do farmers position themselves vis-à-vis these projected futures, and with what emotional and/or political resources?

By focusing on the future as a site of struggle, we wish to connect agricultural protests to wider debates on social reproduction, intergenerational justice, and the transformation of agriculture and rural areas. In doing so, the workshop seeks to map the conflicting temporalities and political projects currently reconfiguring European agriculture, and to better understand how collective action is shaped not only by present constraints, but also by fears and hopes about what lies ahead.

**The conference will take place over two days. We welcome contributions from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, political science, geography, as well as interdisciplinary and multimodal formats (roundtables, film, photo essays, and sound recordings, and other artistic expressions). We also explicitly welcome contributions from activists, union members, farmer and farm worker collectives, journalists and other engaged actors. By bringing academic and non-academic voices into dialogue, the conference seeks to create a space where different ways of understanding social movements can be discussed.**

**Submission guidelines and deadline:**

Speakers will have 30 minutes to present their work, followed by a discussion with the audience and other speakers. Summaries of no more than 3,000 characters should be sent by **29th May 2026 at the latest** to [farminganger2027@proton.me](mailto:farminganger2027@proton.me). They will be reviewed by the scientific committee and decisions will be communicated in July 2026..

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### **Cited literature:**

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Veitch, Amelia. 2025. « Unions out of their league? Ethnographic insights into the 2024 French farmer protests ». *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 0 (0): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2025.2457081>.

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