

Intersectionality of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Agri-Food Global Production Networks (GPN)

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine the relationship between Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the agri-food global production network (GPN). The changing trend of the CAP decoupled direct payment by the introduction of eco-schemes/"greening" measures to farmers have significantly impacted the EU's participation into the GPN, particularly in the period from 2010 to 2022. This paper will start by explanation on the significance of agricultural subsidies in the agri-food sector of the European Union and its business activities. In the observed period, EU's participation in the agri-food GPN steadily increased. The paper comes into the conclusion that CAP through the introduction of eco-schemes measures has become the EU's "coupling" strategy into agri-food GPN, through priority on producer organizations. This paper used convergent mixed methods by combining interview findings and regression analysis to reach this conclusion.

Keywords: Global Production Network, Common Agricultural Policy, Agri-food

JEL Classification codes: F68, N54, Q18

INTRODUCTION

Discussions on the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the global agri-food sector have been around for decades. Since the CAP's establishment in 1962, debates regarding the CAP's impact towards the global agricultural market came from both multilateral and bilateral trade regimes. Previous literature and academic papers have analyzed CAP and its reforms from various points of view such as CAP's impacts on farmers' productivity and on developing countries. However, there's a gap to answer how the EU's domestic agricultural subsidies correlate with its performance in the agri-food global market.

Global Production Network (GPN) theory provides the analytical tool to connect a domestic policy such as the CAP and the global market. This paper's purpose is to investigate the CAP's role in promoting integration of EU in the agri-food GPN. Agricultural subsidies determine the landscape of European agri-food sector and are a highly political policy. To have a grounded understanding, this paper will focus on the implementation in the form of subsidy funding. Specifically, this paper will analyze the correlation between decoupled direct payment CAP subsidy (excluding the eco-scheme that started in 2016) and the processed food export, a type of agri-food product that is ideal for a longer value chain and the global production network.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, more studies have used the GPN theory in agricultural sector, particularly in relation to developing countries' "coupling" strategies into the global agricultural market. The coupling strategy that most countries use is by supplying to the lead firms that either move in food processing or multinational retail (Kalvelage et al., 2023; Krishnan, 2023). To meet the international standards imposed by the multinationals, primary producers/farmers then will need support to "upgrade" their business practices. Here, the role of state is usually important, providing the capacity building and protection for local producers to upgrade into global network (Thomas, 2024; Yang & Liu, 2022; Yeritsyan et al., 2024). CAP fills this role of extra-firm actor in GPN as the state intervention towards its agri-food sector. Through various subsidy instruments, the CAP intervenes with the value creation activities of European farmers and supports the integration into agri-food GPN (Coe & Yeung, 2015).

CAP is a significant extra-firm actor in the EU's agri-food sector. Not only farmers, but also other actors, such as food processors and land owners, are influenced to a certain extent by the CAP in the European agri-food production network (Coe & Yeung, 2015; Gorton & White, 2007; Valenti et al., 2021). The subsidy can create a trend amongst the agri-food value chain actors and direct them to certain behaviors. The subsidies are implemented through Pillar 1 (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund / EAGF) and Pillar 2 (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development / EAFRD) (Burrell, 2009). Pillar 1 is direct payment, consists of subsidies for farmers' basic income (decoupled) and coupled subsidies that depend on the farmers' production output. Pillar 2 is mostly concerned with rural area development, such as infrastructure, support to areas with natural constraints, and training/education for young farmers. Through the two pillars, CAP attempts to address all aspects of agricultural challenges in the EU, and CAP interventions are so influential in shaping the trajectory of the EU's agri-food production network (Dudu & Kristkova, 2017; Kohut, 2023; Williams et al., 2023).

Not all subsidy instruments deliver the same result, which has been covered by previous literature that analyzed the subsidy impacts among farmers. Among all, decoupled payment of Pillar 1 has been found to be the subsidy that correlates positively with farmers' productivity (Garrone et al., 2019; Rizov et al., 2013), though this payment is not connected to their yield. It is also the subsidy that does not cause market distortion according to the WTO Green Box rules (WTO, n.d.).

For the observed period (2010-2022) the CAP experienced a reform in 2013. The final adoption of the reform was on 16 December 2013, it entered into force from January 2014, and the new measures were implemented into the CAP funding management from the fiscal year of 2015 onwards (European Council, 2019). The reformed CAP eco-scheme measures that are incorporated into the Pillar I decoupled payments. The reform of CAP Post-2013 has changed the implementation of this subsidy and attributed 25% of the decoupled payment into eco-schemes or "greening" measure (European Commission, 2024a). Eco-schemes introduced performance measures that must be attained by the CAP recipients if they wish to access the funding.

Together with eco-schemes measure, the reform also claimed to increase farmers' position in agri-food value chain by promoting shorter value chain that reduces "unfair trading practices" (European Commission, 2024b). The understanding is that concentration of food retailing in the agri-food sector will cause most of the value added to the brokers/intermediaries, and both consumers and farmers are less benefited (Gorton & White, 2007; Majewski et al., 2020; Mustapa & Kallas, 2025); so promoting shorter value chain in the agri-food GPN usually involves activities that will put producers/farmers and consumers into direct contact whether through spot market or farmers' online sale (Gorton & White, 2007; Majewski et al., 2020).

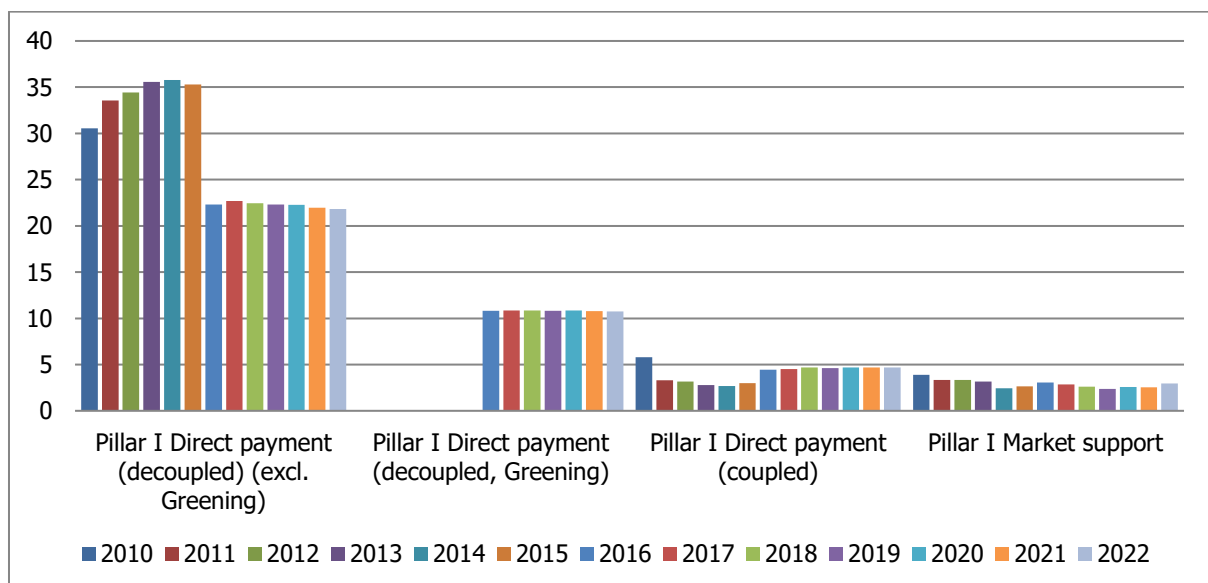
Hypothetically, if this were the goal, CAP is supposed to promote activities that will cause strategic decoupling in the agri-food GPN (Pavlínek, 2024). On the other hand, upgrading activities in agri-food GPN usually involves farmers supplying longer value chains in the form of processed food (Hansen, 2024; Yang & Liu, 2022). In the case of the EU, after the CAP introduced the eco-schemes, the export of processed food products steadily increased, together with an increase in the import of primary agriculture products. By analyzing this trend, the question this paper wants to answer is: "How does the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) greening eco-schemes support EU's participation into the agri-food GPN?"

2 METHODOLOGY

The main goal of this paper is to find, explore, and establish the relationship between agricultural subsidy implementation domestically in the form of CAP and the integration of the EU in the agri-food GPN. To do so, the paper will use a convergent mixed method, consisting of qualitative and quantitative analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Semi-structured interview was done with nine CAP paying agency bureaucrats of eight different EU member states. The choice to interview the paying agencies is due to their authority in disbursing the Pillar 1 funding, especially the decoupled payment. The paying agencies provided contexts from different localities about how farmers operate and the role of the subsidy. Despite the various local conditions and strategies needed to increase farmers' position in the production network, the interviews shared a common theme that eco-schemes measures are putting an increased burden on farmers. This overarching theme is then used for the quantitative analysis by a statistical test on the data.

The purpose of doing the convergent mixed method is to capture the reality of the agricultural subsidy and to determine its role in EU's coupling strategy in agri-food GPN. By doing semi-structured interviews, the paper gathered the themes surrounding the implementation of the CAP funding. And then, these themes are put into statistical analysis, which confirms that the agricultural subsidies did not promote shortening of value chain but instead promoted activities that are for longer value chain after the implementation of eco-schemes measures.

Fig. 1 CAP Subsidy Expenses (2010-2022)



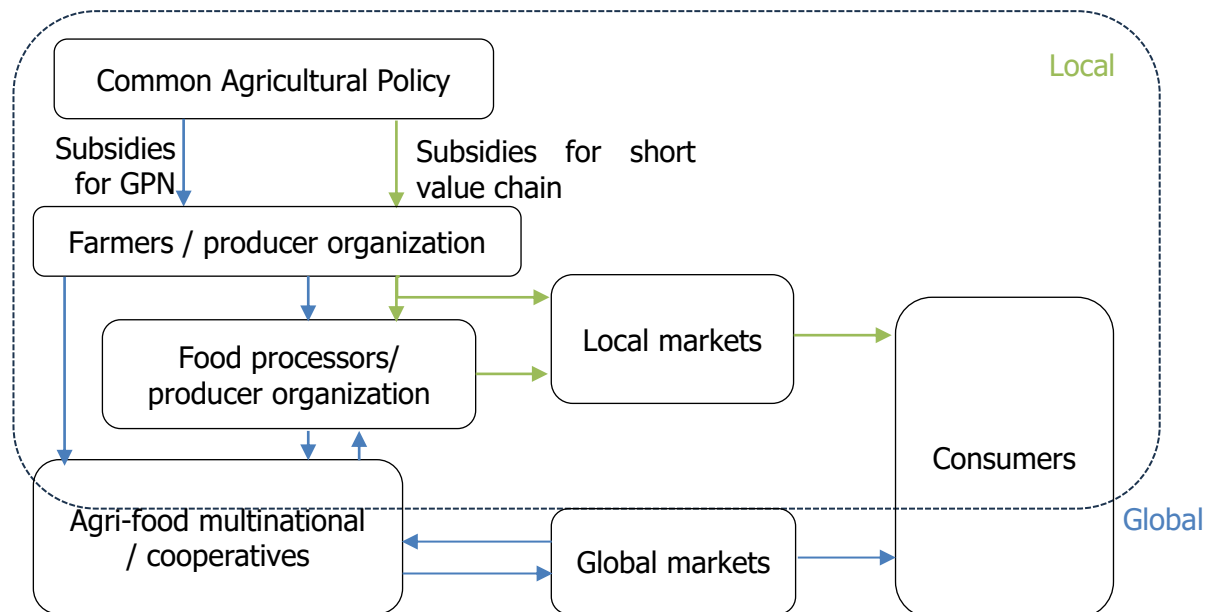
Source: Own elaboration according to European Commission financial reports

To operationalize CAP policies into numerical data, this paper will focus on Pillar 1, particularly the decoupled direct payment of CAP. After the introduction of eco-schemes, decoupled direct payment as the most significant subsidy instrument for farmers' productivity (Dudu & Kristkova, 2017; Garrone et al., 2019) was attributed to extra performance measures (European Commission, 2024a).

Based on the figure of CAP funding structure above, the most significant change happened between 2015 and 2016 with the implementation of "greening" / eco-schemes. It took up about EUR 10 billion, which means one third of the subsidy can only be accessed when farmers conduct "environmentally sound farming practices, such as crop diversification, and maintaining ecologically rich landscape features and a minimum area of permanent grassland" (European Council, 2019). Other than this, the other instruments of Pillar I have been in the same level. The statistical test involves the decoupled payment subsidy trend in 2010-2022 and the export of processed food.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 2 EU's agri-food GPN participation scheme



Source: Own elaboration according to interviews; model by Yang, X. & Liu, W. 2022, p. 4

Based on the previous literature review and the qualitative data collection, there is a need to put the GPN theory into the context of the European Union. The EU's agricultural context is different from that of developing countries, where most agri-food GPN research is conducted in the study cases (Yang & Liu, 2022; Yeritsyan et al., 2024). The specificity of EU context is due to the existence of two entities: CAP as the strong support to agricultural sector (extra-firm actor) and European agri-food MNCs (lead firm) (Baldwin & Wyplosz, 2022; Mayer & Ottaviano, 2008).

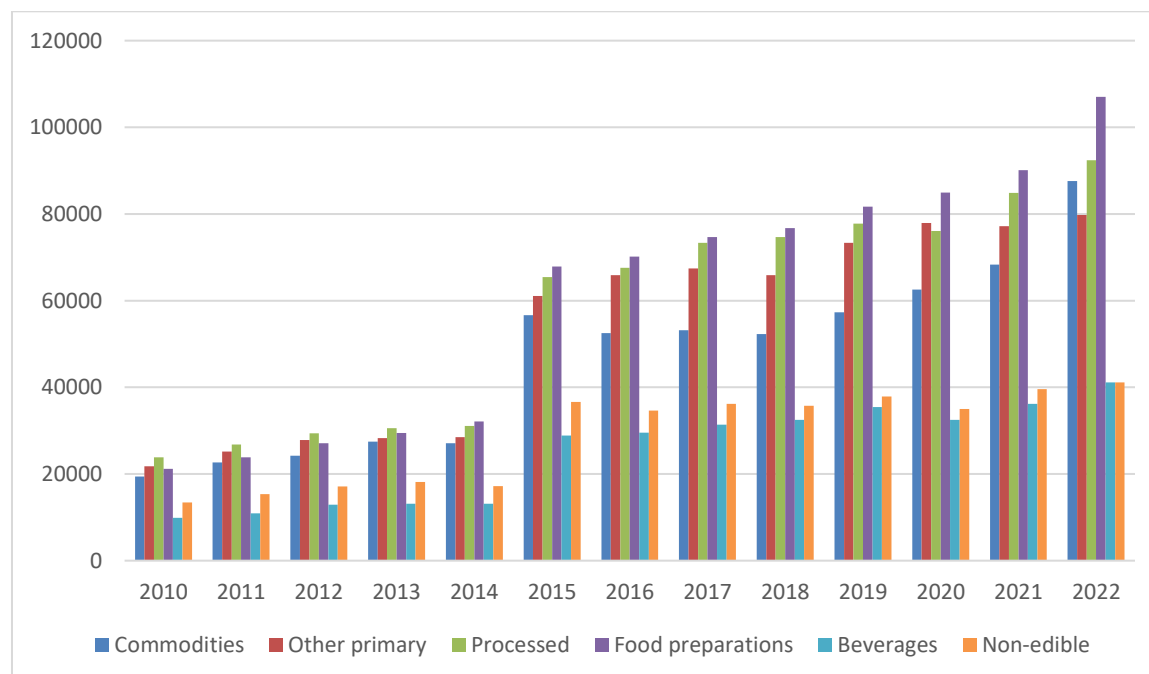
Furthermore, to better suit the EU's agricultural context, according to the interview with participants from eight EU countries, CAP policies translate into subsidies for either short value chain or long value chain (GPN) for farmers/producer organizations (POs). Subsidies for GPN would support farmers & POs to engage with local suppliers to the agri-food multinational corporations (MNCs). Or, as an economy home to numerous agri-food MNCs, there are cases where lead firms (MNCs or cooperatives) interact directly with farmers and export the products

to global market. Meanwhile, the farmers and POs that are not upgraded by the subsidies will stick to fulfilling EU domestic market demands.

At the global level, agri-food MNCs act as the bridge. MNCs channel the participation of the EU through both backward and forward participation (WTO, 2018), by importing from other countries (raw materials or finished products), exporting its own produce (such as piglets), or re-exporting processed food produce (such as packaged coffee). Taking the data from 2010-2022, there was an increasing participation in the agri-food GPN by the EU. Convergently, findings from the qualitative data collection also showed that the CAP subsidies are supporting the line of business that is designed for a longer value chain (food processing), instead of a shorter value chain. Finally, the paper will use regression analysis to check the correlation between trends of the agricultural subsidy and the food preparations export.

3.1 The increasing participation of EU to agri-food GPN

Fig. 2 Extra-EU exports (in million EUR)

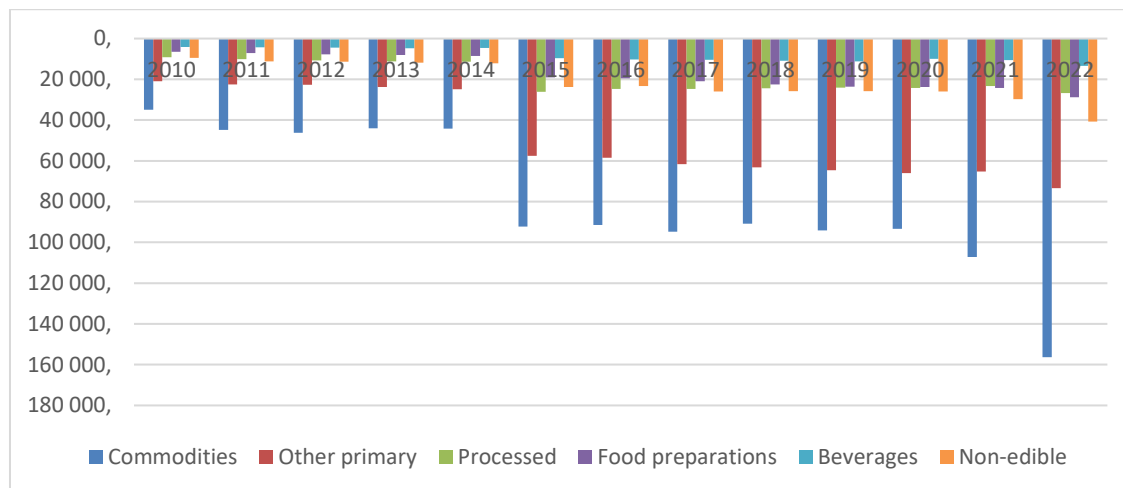


Source: Own elaboration according to European Commission DG AGRI (accessed on 20 February 2025)

For the period of 2010-2022, the EU has become more active in the agri-food GPN. Based on the data from EU's Market Orientation, the EU's agri-food export activities with external parties are increasing in all sub-sectors from 2015 to 2022, with more than 40% increase in total, using the export number in 2015 as the base. Specifically, sub-sectors "other primary", "processed", and "food preparation" enjoyed a steady increase over the years without any reduction in export activities.

The highest increase is enjoyed by "food preparations" sector, amounting to 57.68% increase from 2015 to 2022. Meanwhile, sub-sector "commodities" experienced a slight decrease in 2016-2018 then took off in 2019-2022, and sub-sectors "beverages" and "non-edible" had been fluctuating in steady, positive trends.

Fig. 3 Extra-EU imports (in millin EUR)

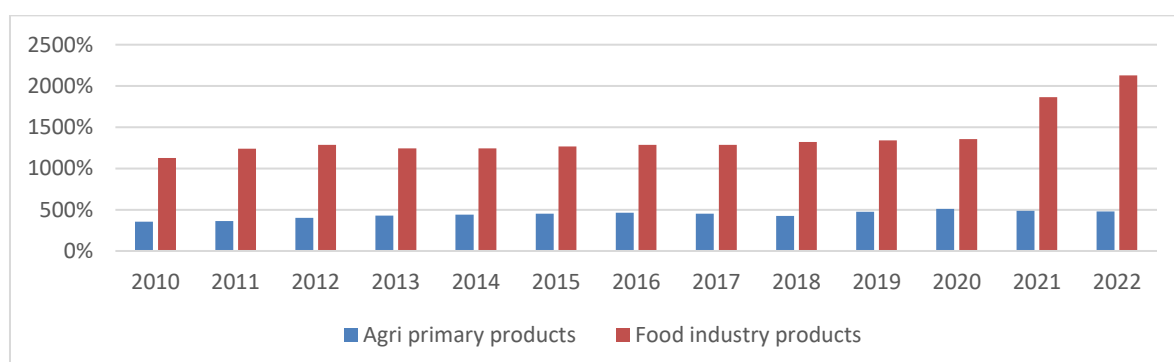


Source: Own elaboration according to European Commission DG AGRI (accessed on 20 February 2025)

Meanwhile, imports into the EU from non-EU countries are also seeing an increasing trend. The increase reached 48% from 2015 to 2022. Like the exports counterpart, EU imports, in general, experienced an increase across all sub-sectors. The difference, however, none of the sub-sectors experienced a steady increase, but all sub-sectors were fluctuating. The two sub-sectors that underwent the most increase are "commodities" and "non-edible". "Commodities" from extra-EU saw an increase of 69,32% from 2015 to 2022; and "non-edible" experienced an increase of 71.62% in the same period. There was an especially high increase of "non-edible" import from 2021 to 2022.

Both data above showed the apparent increase in agri-food trade between the EU and the rest of the world. Compared to other data regarding the exports in EU production value, it is also confirmed that the increase in exports comes from the food industry rather than primary agricultural products. Looking at the charts stated at Figure 2, 3, and 4 alone, there is an alleged scenario where food processing firms in the EU actively participated in the agri-food GPN by importing commodities and exporting them to other countries in the form of processed items.

Fig. 4 Exports in EU production value (%)



Source: Own elaboration according to European Commission DG AGRI (accessed on 20 February 2025)

3.2 The minimum support for short supply chain

Previous findings show that in 2015-2022, the EU increased its activity in agri-food GPN through food processing export, after the transfer of budget from the decoupled direct payment into eco-schemes measures. The eco-schemes measure is one of the attempts by the EU to fulfil its commitment to Green Deal, which then translates into increasing farmers' performance measures to access the CAP subsidy. This experience was mentioned by most of the respondents, signifying the transition from the decoupled payment before eco-schemes and after.

"Even though at EU level the, the call is always for more, for further simplification. There are many areas where this was not really achieved, in our opinion, cause the burden has always been on the increase..." (Maltese paying agency bureaucrat)

The need by farmers for CAP subsidy is often mentioned referring to small farmers to ensure their cashflow. However, the burden of bureaucracy seems to have driven a lot of farmers not to take on the subsidy. Out of 55.000 farmers in the Netherlands, 11.000 farmers chose not to get CAP subsidies to avoid the "red tape" that comes with it, and the Czech paying agency bureaucrat also gave the experience of farmers not willing to go through the bureaucracy and opted out of the subsidy.

These findings give an explanation of how the eco-scheme measures behave towards the farmers. By the increase of bureaucratic burdens on farmers, the CAP through eco-schemes indirectly reduces support for certain farmers. Reducing support for farmers is not only by putting more administrative bureaucracy on almost 30% of the decoupled income support, but also by minimum support towards farmers to establish business with short supply chain.

The minimum support by CAP towards a shorter value chain is apparent when the respondents were asked whether farmers are supported to conduct their own sales to consumers directly. The respondents noted the entrepreneurial activities that farmers do include opening small grocery, shops or cafes, participating at farmers' markets, and eco-tourism. The respondents also acknowledged that shorter value chains are better for the farmers, however, most participants do not think that the CAP subsidy has supported any of these activities. Another instance is regarding the CAP budget for farmers' promotion activities, where the respondents gave mixed answers about the utilization of this funding. Some member states acknowledged to having a small amount of promotion budget, but some said it is not permitted.

"Maybe something like an open farm where, you know, you have small animals and, you know, children go for birthday parties and, you know, kind of like an open zoo type thing. No, there, there may be small grants available. But not from CAP." (Irish paying agency bureaucrat)

3.3 The CAP subsidy that prioritizes producer organizations (POs) over farmers

The CAP after the introduction of eco-schemes has conditioned the agri-food sector in the EU to be a longer value chain with intermediaries. Intermediaries can be either big suppliers or producer organizations (POs). In the case of EU, POs have become more important in the EU's agri-food value chain. PO is an entity where farmers collaborate and pool together their capital, both physical and social, to help them in "the manufacturing and trading side of the food supply chain" (European Commission, 2025). POs are recognized by the CAP and are mostly given subsidies through industrial agriculture activities such as freezing, packaging, and logistics. Producer organizations are seen as the key players in supporting this objective, not

only to facilitate the food processing activities, but also to negotiate better prices with the retailers.

"... we finance, we provide support to producer organization and association of producer organization that regroup that put together producers, different producers. So that they can negotiate in a bigger number with these big, big players on the globe, at the global level... they have a plan to do some investment in you know for example if it's a fresh products like salad or they need friger, frigidares, or some freezing or you know, packaging, freezer, packaging or logistics." (Italian paying agency bureaucrat)

This reality shows that farmers are still dependent on POs or other intermediaries. And the CAP's focus on giving extensive support to producer organizations is the driver of increasing GPN participation in the EU. This rationale is in line with the reality that there is a reduction of support to farmers, because the support of CAP is now directed to the producer organizations (POs). The priority of CAP is then towards longer value chain by support to producer organizations, not towards farmers nor shorter value chains.

"...the bigger and the more you can work via producers organization, the less you need direct support (for farmers)." (Belgian-Flanders paying agency bureaucrat)

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"Because we didn't have enough producer organizations so, so it was a choice between other direct payment and subsidies for producer organizations." (Belgian-Wallonia paying agency bureaucrat)

There are two instances where farmers do not engage in producer organizations: farmers for niche products and animal farmers. Farmers for niche products (such as a Belgian farmer producing organic Hokkaido pumpkin and a Dutch farmer producing a certain type of cherry tomato) prefer to conduct their business activities by themselves and can negotiate with retail sector independently.

Meanwhile, member states with strong animal farming sectors often could not give clear answer as to why their farmers do not establish producer organizations. One paying agency bureaucrat said it's due to the older generation's mentality, another claimed it is cultural, meanwhile, others could not come up with any answer. In general, there seems to be a pushback against animal farmers not to establish producer organizations, despite POs being important intermediaries in the EU's agri-food sector.

The different treatment between animal farmers and fruit & vegetable farmers is also visible in the different understanding regarding POs amongst the EU members. Respondents from member states with strong animal farming differentiate POs from cooperative companies and refer to PO as nonprofit organization of farmers. Meanwhile, coming from another region that has a strong fruit & vegetable sector, the respondent claimed that POs are basically private, profitable companies that also claims CAP subsidy.

"Well, I think the producer organizations, they can receive a subsidy, but that's, we only have the produce organisations within the vegetable

sector... I think we only have two producer organizations in Denmark. And that's, I think, I think it's because we, we do not see the cooperatives within the vegetable sector as we do in the pork sector and the dairy sector." (Danish paying agency bureaucrat)

"We have, we have, there are support schemes towards producer organizations, but that is, I think, it's for fruit and vegetables only, really." (Swedish paying agency bureaucrat)

One example is in the case of Denmark, with a strong pork farming. The pork farmers' cooperative comprised of a lot of pork farmers in Denmark and has become a global player that export to various countries. Despite the pooling of farmers into one entity, this cooperative is not functioning as a producer organization and cannot ask for the CAP subsidy. Instead, Denmark only has producer organizations in the vegetable sector, even though that is not their most competitive product.

To investigate the impact between the eco-schemes towards the EU's participation into the agri-food global production network (GPN) in the form of processed food, this paper does correlation analysis. To fulfill the required minimum number of data for regression analysis, this paper uses the data on decoupled payment (excluding eco-schemes) from 2010-2022 as the independent variable and the EU's export of processed products from 2010-2022 as the dependent variable. The data showed a strong correlation of -0.84, meaning that the reduction of decoupled income support by eco-schemes led to the increased export of processed food / longer value chain products.

Fig. 5 Regression analysis on Pillar I Direct Payment (decoupled, excl. eco-schemes) subsidy and processed food exports

Correlation					
		<i>Pillar I Direct payment (decoupled) (excl. eco-schemes)</i>		<i>Processed</i>	
Pillar I Direct payment (decoupled) (excl. eco-schemes)	1				
Processed	-0.844728879			1	

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.844728879
R Square	0.713566879
Adjusted R Square	0.687527505
Standard Error	14176.31136
Observations	13

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	5507197110	5507197110	27.40338	0.000279043
Residual	11	2210645841	200967803.7		
Total	12	7717842950			

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	152041.4559	18390.22209	8.267516028	4.77E-06
Pillar I Direct payment (decoupled) (excl. Greening)	-3386.371679	646.8931556	-5.234823787	0.000279

Source: own processing

By the negative correlation of decoupled payment without eco-schemes to the processed food export, the deduction to answer the research question: the introduction of eco-schemes in the CAP subsidy promoted the EU's participation in agri-food GPN through increasing producer organizations (POs)'s capacity in processed food sector by industrializing the farming activity.

"...so the CAP is not supporting the farmer, the CAP is supporting the food processors." (Dutch paying agency bureaucrat)

CONCLUSION

The paper's main purpose was to show how the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after the eco-schemes contributed to the EU's participation in the agri-food global production network (GPN) through processed food products. By the performance measures of the decoupled payment, CAP eco-schemes conditioned the agri-food sector to move to a longer value chain activity. On the political level, CAP states increasing farmers' position in the value chain is one of its objectives; however, the CAP after eco-schemes is implemented to support business activities that are for longer value chains.

The coupling strategy of the EU through CAP eco-schemes translates into reducing support for farmers and instead to direct the support towards producer organizations (POs). POs have gained very crucial position among EU countries to facilitate the farmers' integration into the GPN, and these actors are funded by the CAP funding to facilitate the upgrading through incorporating technology and industrialization of agri-food. There is, however, different treatment on POs amongst the EU member states, depending on their farming type. POs seem to be prioritized towards fruit & vegetable produce, meanwhile, animal farming POs are less available.

These findings answered the question of how the CAP eco-schemes measures promote the EU's participation in agri-food GPN. The CAP's funding after eco-schemes prioritized supporting POs in fruit & vegetable produce and this resulted in the increased food processing activity of that sector. The result is seen from the strong statistical correlation between lowering decoupled basic income support for farmers and a steady increase in processed food exports. Despite the findings, however, the paper still has limitations due to the available data on processed food export that does not differentiate between animal or food & vegetable produce.

This paper serves as a beginning to a deeper analysis of the CAP using the GPN framework to find the dynamics and organization of the EU's agri-food sector. Further research needs to be done to analyse the CAP from multiple perspectives and possibly to look at the specific products and localities that received the benefits from eco-schemes measures as the EU's coupling strategies.

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