

Article

European Citizens' Evaluation of the Common Agricultural Policy

Fernando Mata ^{1,*}  and Maria J. P. L. Dos-Santos ^{2,3}

¹ CISAS—Centre for Research and Development in Agrifood Systems and Sustainability, Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo, Rua da Escola Industrial e Comercial Nun'Alvares 34, 4900-347 Viana do Castelo, Portugal

² IUL DINÂMIA CET, ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Av. das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisbon, Portugal; maria.jose.santos@iscte-iul.pt

³ Escola Superior de Comunicação Social, Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa, Campus de Benfica do IPL, 1549-014 Lisbon, Portugal

* Correspondence: fernandomata@ipvc.pt

Abstract: The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is crucial in ensuring food safety and security in Europe. Providing a stable and diverse food supply also supports rural economies and promotes social, environmental and economic sustainability. However, as CAP consumes approximately 30% of the EU budget, debates regarding its pertinence have arisen. This paper aimed to understand European citizens' perceptions of CAP, its associated benefits and their level of agreement regarding the allocation of the EU budget. Ultimately, the goal was to gain insights into EU citizens' attitudes and perceptions towards the CAP. Information and data come from the European Survey Eurobarometer. The methods include statistical inferential techniques adjusted to the nature of the variables and goals. The findings confirm that European citizens generally perceive the CAP positively and have positive attitudes about the CAP. While some differences among various social groups may exist, the results did not identify any specific group strongly opposing the CAP. Overall, European citizens hold a favorable attitude towards the CAP, its associated benefits and budget allocation. This paper brings new insights into new European CAP measures and programs to promote food security and the sustainability of agriculture among European countries and citizens. These insights may be useful for public decision-makers to define better policies and measures adjusted to European citizens and to promote food security and sustainability.

Keywords: Common Agricultural Policy; EU budget; environmental sustainability; European citizen perception; food security



Citation: Mata, F.; Dos-Santos, M.J.P.L. European Citizens' Evaluation of the Common Agricultural Policy. *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 3970. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16103970>

Academic Editor: Jacopo Bacenetti

Received: 21 March 2024

Revised: 30 April 2024

Accepted: 7 May 2024

Published: 9 May 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

European agricultural policy plays a crucial role in ensuring food safety and security while meeting the demands of food production. It provides a stable and diverse food supply, supports rural economies and promotes environmental and economic sustainability [1,2].

European agriculture has been supported by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) since its inception in 1962, with evolving goals over time. In 1962, the primary priority was promoting food security as Europe emerged from food scarcity following the Second World War. Therefore, during this period, CAP aimed to enhance competitiveness to ensure food security and self-sufficiency [3].

However, in the 1980s, the European Economic Community (EEC) achieved self-sufficiency and initiated discussions to address the developing issue of production excesses. As a result, it was decided to reduce funding for production while simultaneously providing an alternative source of income to sustain rural development [4]. The first CAP reform aimed to tackle the dual problems of overproduction and environmental degradation; characteristic of EEC pesticide-rich agriculture practiced at that time [5]. In 1992, the first CAP reform began integrating environmental measures into agricultural policies [6].

The CAP shifted away from price support, moving toward direct payments to farmers, thereby decoupling subsidies. This reform introduced the Single Payment Scheme (SPS), which linked payments to farming areas and animal units [7].

The Doha Agreement was initiated in 2001 under the World Trade Organization (WTO). It aimed to promote development, reduce trade barriers and enhance market access for developing economies. It covered various areas, including agriculture, non-agricultural market access and trade facilitation [8].

The second CAP reform, which took place in 1999 under the Agenda 2000, redefined European farmers as ‘environmental guardians’. This added new responsibilities to farmers focused on protecting the rural environment rather than solely concentrating on food production. As part of this initiative, a new CAP pillar (Pillar II) introduced the Rural Development Program. This encompassed several measures, including the structural adjustment of the farming sector, support for farming in less favourable areas, remuneration for agro-environmental activities, support for investments in processing and marketing, and forestry measures to promote adaptation and development of rural areas [8].

In 2013, the third CAP reform was approved to address new concerns related to animal welfare, climate change, sustainable use of natural resources and food safety. This reform came after the full enlargement of the EU to include Eastern European countries, which created greater pressure to allocate funds among all 28 EU countries. These demands were addressed by including payments for greening practices, equalising support by limiting the budget for large farms, providing support for smaller farms and offering incentives for young farmers [9].

Finally, the fourth and latest CAP reform, scheduled for implementation in 2023 following its approval in 2021, establishes a new regulatory framework introducing changes to the objectives, instruments and evaluation mechanisms. Its aims include improving environmental and climate performance, achieving a more equitable distribution of direct payments and aligning with the UN SDGs [10]. When implemented, the new CAP is expected to play a significant role in promoting the transition to a fairer, healthier and more environmentally friendly European food system [11], as envisioned by the European Commission in the ‘European Green Deal’ and reflected in the ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy [12]. This involves the EU budget, making it a sensitive and prominent topic of discussion [13]. Understanding the stance of European citizens toward CAP is crucial for assessing their agreement with EU governance.

The main aim of this paper was to delve into the responses to questions concerning the importance of CAP, its associated benefits, including economic and environmental sustainability, and agreement levels regarding budget allocation. These responses were cross-analysed with demographic, social and political variables. We intend to bring new insights into the attitudes and perceptions of EU citizens towards CAP.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Information and Data

Data were retrieved from the Eurobarometer 97.1 survey (dataset) [14], conducted between 21 February and 22 March 2022, and include $n = 26,502$ interviews. Eurobarometer subscribes to the International Statistical Institute’s Declaration on Professional Ethics, and therefore informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the survey. Anonymous responses were also guaranteed.

The following questions about the CAP were used as dependent variables:

QA1: ‘Do you think that, in the EU, agriculture and rural areas are . . . for our future?’ Answering options were ‘very important’, ‘fairly important’, ‘not very important’, ‘not at all important’ and ‘don’t know’.

QA2: ‘Have you ever heard of the support that the EU gives farmers through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?’ Answering options were ‘Yes, and you know the details’, ‘Yes, but you don’t really know the details’, ‘No, you have never heard or read about it’, and ‘don’t know’.

QA3: ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) benefits all European citizens and not only farmers’. The possible answers were ‘totally agree’, ‘tend to agree’, ‘tend to disagree’, ‘totally disagree’ and ‘don’t know’.

QA9: ‘The EU gives financial support to farmers to help stabilise their incomes. This aid represents around 1% of the combined public expenditure of the 27 Member States of the EU and around 30% of the total EU budget. Do you think that this support is too low, about right or too high?’ The possible answers were ‘too low’, ‘about right’, ‘too high’, ‘don’t know’.

QA11: ‘Over the next 10 years, would you like to see an increase, decrease or no change in EU financial support to farmers?’ The possible answers were ‘increase’, ‘decrease’, ‘no change’ and ‘don’t know’.

The number of interviewees answering ‘don’t know’ was marginal and not considered in the study.

The following were used as independent variables:

1. Socioeconomic variables:

(i) ‘Gender’—‘male’, ‘female’

(ii) ‘Social Class’—Do you see yourself and your household belonging to ...? 1—The working class of society, 2—The lower-middle class of society, 3—The middle class of society, 4—The upper-middle class of society, 5—The higher class of society.

(iii) ‘Community Size’—Size of locality 1—Rural, 2—Town, 3—City.

The following continuous variables were also used as independent variables:

(iv) ‘Economy’—During the last twelve months, would you say you had difficulties to pay your bills at the end of the month ...? 1—Most of the time, 2—From time to time, 3—Almost never/Never.

2. Attitudes of respondents towards EU public policies, features and forthcoming:

(a) ‘EU Direction’—At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in the EU? 1—Things are going in the right direction, 2—Neither the one nor the other, 3—Things are going in the wrong direction.

(b) ‘EU Democracy’—On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU.

(c) ‘EU Image’—In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?

(d) ‘EU Future’—Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the EU?

2.2. Statistical Methods

Due to the categorical nature of variables, Pearson’s chi-square tests applied to contingency tables were used to examine the association between the variables. These categorical variables can also be viewed as ordinal variables since the various answer categories can be ordered. Therefore, the Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel test was used to assess the presence of any linear-by-linear association between ordinal variables. The correlation among the independent variables was conducted via Spearman’s rho tests.

Political positioning was considered a continuous variable and was tested for significant differences using an ANOVA, with the categories of the dependent variables serving as factors. Post-hoc analysis was conducted using the LSD test. For all analyses and graph production, we used the software SPSS (version: 29.0.0.0 (241)).

3. Results

3.1. The Dependent Variables

The distribution of responses for the questions used as dependent variables is presented in Figure 1. Overall, most interviewees believe that the EU agriculture and rural areas are important. Furthermore, most interviewees are aware of CAP, though most are

not familiar with its details. Moreover, a majority of interviewees either agree or tend to agree that CAP benefits all EU citizens, not just farmers.

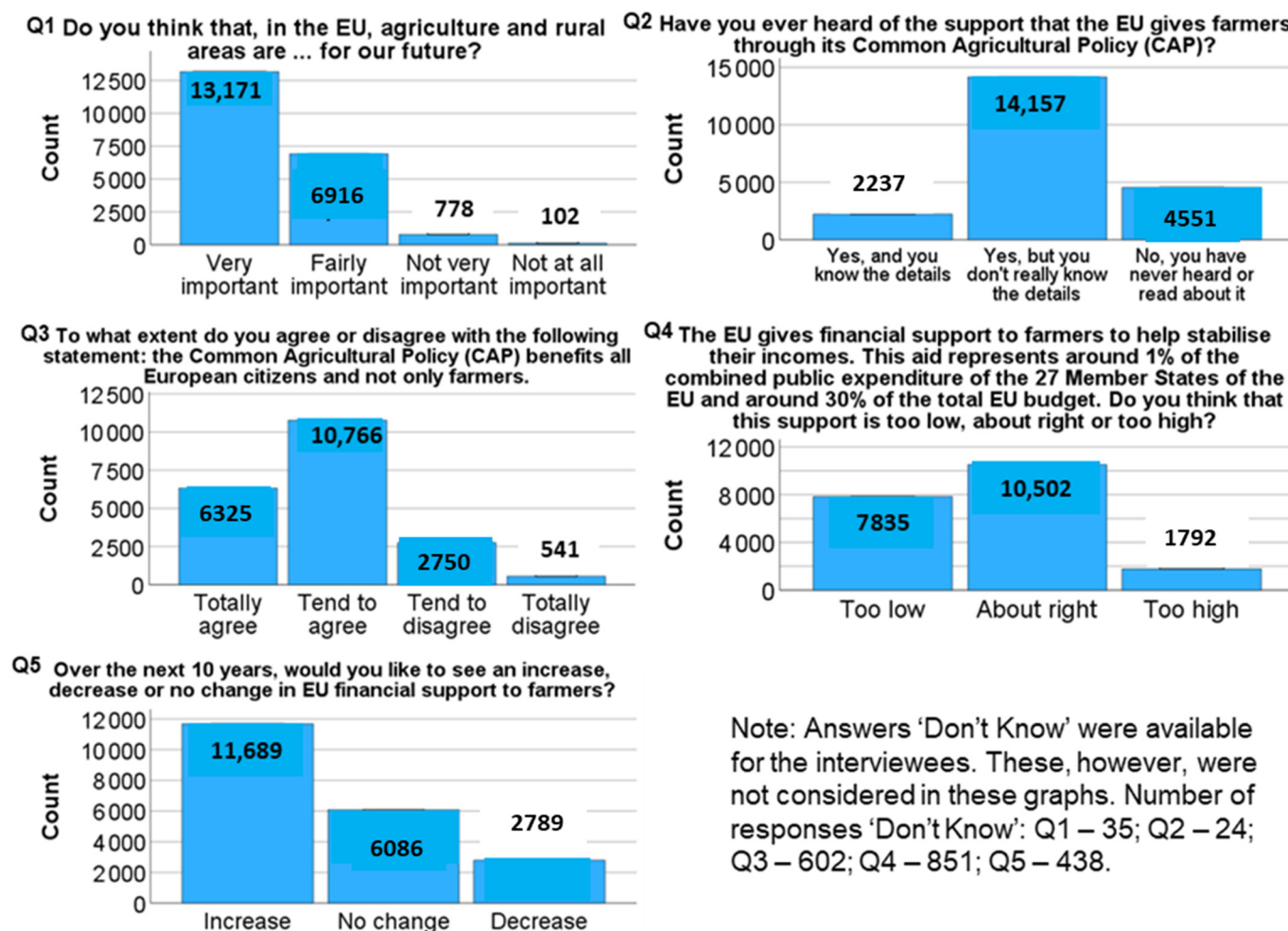


Figure 1. Histograms showing the distribution of answers to the 5 questions identified in the titles and used as dependent variables in the present study.

In relation to the EU budget allocated to CAP, more interviewees believe it is about right compared to those who consider it too low or too high. However, a greater number of EU citizens believe the budget is too low compared to those who consider it too high. Furthermore, most interviewees believe that financial support to farmers should increase.

The levels of significance indicating any linear associations between the questions used as dependent variables are presented in Table 1.

European citizens (ECs) who consider EU agriculture and rural areas important are more likely to be aware of CAP. They are also more likely to agree that CAP benefits all European citizens, not just farmers. Additionally, they believe that the EU budget allocated to CAP is low and agree that it should increase over the next 10 years.

ECs who are aware of the CAP are also more likely to agree that the CAP benefits all European citizens and not just farmers, and they are more likely to believe that the EU budget allocated to the CAP should increase over the next 10 years.

ECs who agree that the CAP benefits all European citizens and not just farmers are also more likely to believe that the EU budget allocated to the CAP is low, and they are more likely to consider that the EU budget allocated to the CAP should increase over the next 10 years.

ECs who believe that the EU budget allocated to the CAP is low are also more likely to think that the EU budget allocated to the CAP should increase over the next 10 years.

Table 1. Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel linear-by-linear association between the dependent variables (Questions) used in the present study. The answers ‘don’t know’ were not considered in the calculation of this statistic.

Questions	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA9
QA2	333.04 ***			
QA3	1192.94 ***	240.45 ***		
QA9	256.56 ***	0.045 NS	525.01 ***	
QA11	322.17 ***	10.351 **	13.03 ***	83.00 ***

Notes: p -values NS $p > 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; QA1—‘Do you think that, in the EU, agriculture and rural areas are ... for our future?’; QA2—‘Have you ever heard of the support that the EU gives farmers through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?’; QA3—‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) benefits all European citizens and not only farmers.’; QA9—‘The EU gives financial support to farmers to help stabilize their incomes. This aid represents around 1% of the combined public expenditure of the 27 Member States of the EU and around 30% of the total EU budget. Do you think that this support is too low, about right or too high?’; QA11—‘Over the next 10 years, would you like to see an increase, decrease or no change in EU financial support to farmers?’.

3.2. The Ordinal Independent Variables

While analysing the effects of independent variables on the dependent variables, we observe some similar effects, which can be explained by the correlations between these variables. As shown in Table 2, significant correlations exist among all the variables, but the correlations are particularly strong among ‘EU Image’, ‘EU Direction’ and ‘EU Future’. In these cases, interviewees with positive expectations about one variable tend to hold positive views about the others.

Table 2. Spearman’s rho correlation between the different ordinal independent variables used in the present study.

Variables	EU Image	Economy	Community	EU Direction	EU Democracy	EU Future
Economy	−0.124 ***					
Community	−0.064 ***	0.019 ***				
EU Direction	0.476 ***	−0.113 ***	−0.044 ***			
EU Democracy	0.569 ***	−0.126 **	−0.040 ***	0.459 ***		
EU Future	0.587 ***	−0.146 **	−0.027 ***	0.454 ***	0.560 ***	
Social class	−0.116 ***	0.252 ***	0.120 ***	−0.116 ***	−0.104 ***	−0.138 ***

Significance level ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

3.3. QA1—Do You Think That, in the EU, Agriculture and Rural Areas Are Very Important, Fairly Important, Not Very Important, or Not at All Important for Our Future?

The application of ordinal independent variables to QA1 yielded the statistics in Table 3, and the resulting charts can be seen in Figure 2. Table 4 presents the ANOVA applied to the continuous variable.

More ECs belonging to the working and lower-middle classes than expected believe that agriculture and rural areas are ‘very important’ for the future of the EU, whereas the opposite trend is observed among the middle class and upper-middle class. Conversely, for the responses ‘fairly important’, ‘not very important’ and ‘not at all important’, the inverse pattern is observed. There is a linear association between interviewees’ social class and the importance they attribute to agriculture and rural areas for the future of the EU, with lower social classes tending to assign higher importance.

ECs with better economic situations are more likely to consider agriculture and rural areas important for the future of the EU. There is a linear association between interviewees’ economic situations and the importance they attach to agriculture and rural areas for the future of the EU, with those in better economic situations more likely to attribute higher importance.

Table 3. Association (Person’s Chi-square test) and linear-by-linear association or correlation (Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel test) between the independent variable, the question ‘Do you think that, in the EU, agriculture and rural areas are ... for our future?’ and the independent variables indicated.

Independent Variables	Pearson’s Chi-Square			Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel		
	Value	df	p-Value	Value	df	p-Value
Gender	8.22	3	=0.042			
Social Class	67.00	6	<0.001	47.64	1	<0.001
Economy	170.48	9	<0.001	68.93	1	<0.001
Community Size	37.87	6	<0.001	10.23	1	<0.001
EU Direction	80.82	6	<0.001	2.7	1	>0.05
EU Democracy	329.94	9	<0.001	17.09	1	<0.001
EU Future	324.26	9	<0.001	42.93	1	<0.001
EU Image	469.27	12	<0.001	134.27	1	<0.001

Notes: df—degrees of freedom.

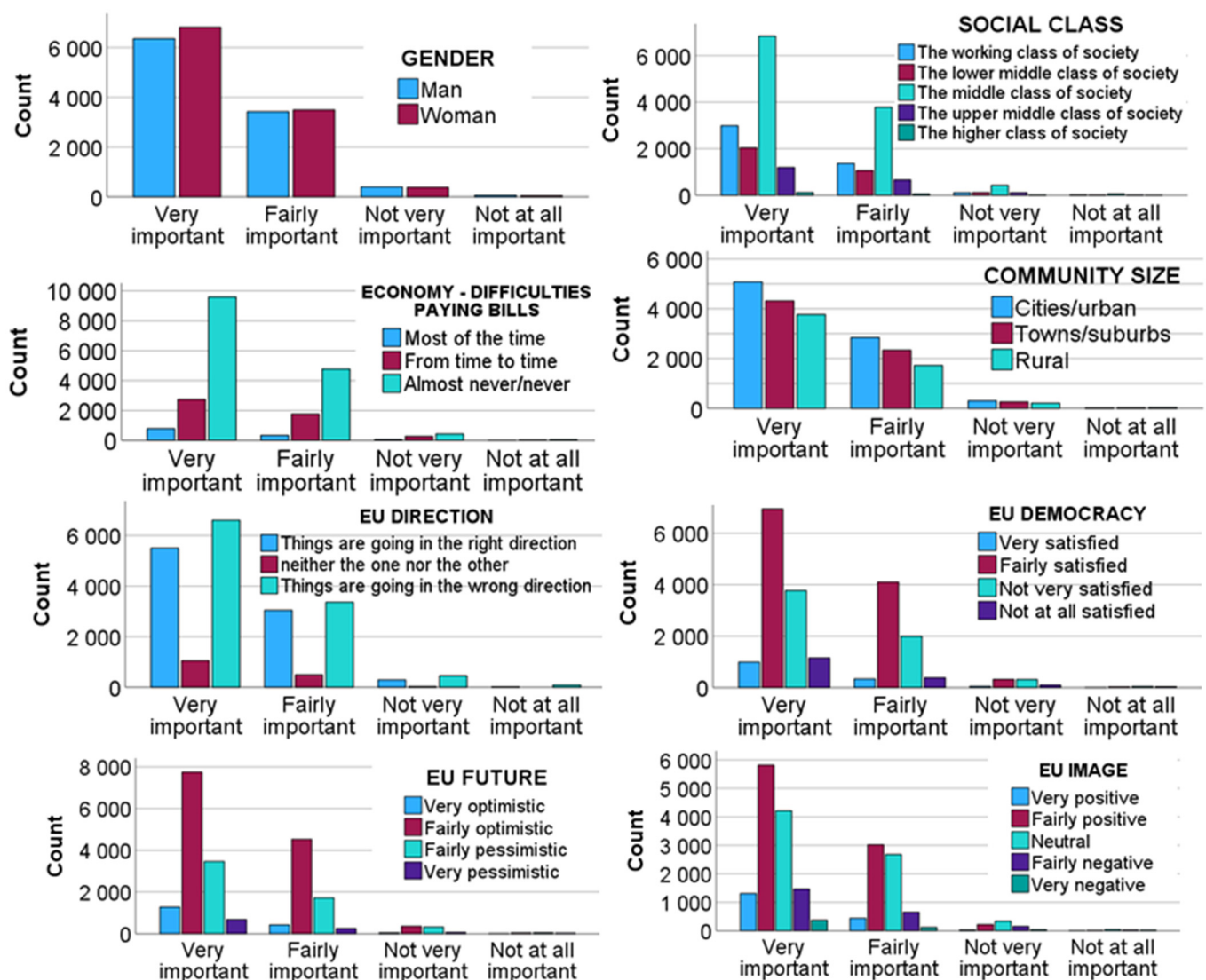


Figure 2. Cluster bar charts resulting from the cross-tabulation between the independent variables identified and the dependent variable, the question ‘Do you think that, in the EU, agriculture and rural areas are ... for our future?’.

Table 4. Results from the ANOVA using the question ‘Do you think that, in the EU, agriculture and rural areas are . . . for our future?’ as a factor and the continuous independent variables indicated.

Variable	Very Important	Fairly Important	Not Very Important	Not at All Important
Political Position *	5.33 ^a	5.27 ^a	5.49 ^b	5.44 ^{a,b}

Notes: p -value of the F test * $p < 0.05$; Different letters in superscript are indicative of significant differences between the levels of the factor; the post-hoc test used was the Least Significant Differences.

More women and fewer men than expected consider agriculture and rural areas ‘very important’ for the future of the EU, while the opposite is observed for the other three categories.

More ECs than expected living in rural areas believe that agriculture and rural areas are ‘very important’ for the future of the EU, while the opposite is observed for individuals living in cities and towns. There is a linear association between the size of the community where individuals live and the importance they assign to agriculture and rural areas for the future of the EU, with smaller communities in rural areas expressing higher degrees of importance.

More ECs with a neutral position on the direction of the EU believe that agriculture and rural areas are ‘very important’ for the future of the EU.

More ECs who are satisfied with the way ‘EU democracy’ works agree that agriculture and rural communities are ‘very important’ for the future of the EU. There is also a linear association between the degree of importance given to agriculture and rural communities and the degree of satisfaction with ‘EU democracy’.

Similarly, regarding ‘EU democracy’, more ECs who are optimistic about the ‘EU future’ believe that agriculture and rural communities are ‘very important’ for the future of the EU. There is also a linear association between the importance of agriculture and rural communities and optimism about the future of the EU.

The association of the variables ‘EU democracy’ and ‘EU future’ with the importance of agriculture and rural communities for the future of the EU is similar. The two variables, ‘EU democracy’ and ‘EU future’, correlate positively.

More ECs who believe that the EU has a ‘very positive image’ also think that EU agriculture and rural areas are ‘very important’. Conversely, more individuals than expected perceive the EU as conveying a ‘fairly negative’ or ‘very negative’ image believe that EU agriculture and rural areas are ‘not very important’ or ‘not important at all’. There is a linear association between the degree of importance attributed to EU agriculture and rural areas and the perceived positivity of the EU’s image.

Left-wing tendency ECs tend to assign higher importance to EU agriculture and rural areas.

3.4. QA2—Have You Ever Heard of the Support That the EU Gives Farmers through Its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?

Question A2 yielded the statistics in Table 5, and the resulting charts are shown in Figure 3. Table 6 presents the ANOVA applied to the continuous independent variable.

More men and fewer women than expected are aware of the CAP, whether including or excluding the details, while the opposite trend is observed for unawareness of the CAP.

More EC individuals belonging to higher social classes than expected are aware of the CAP, including the details, whereas more individuals belonging to the working class than expected responded as unaware of the CAP. There is a linear association between individuals’ social class and CAP awareness, with higher social classes tending to exhibit a higher degree of awareness.

Table 5. Association (Person’s Chi-square test) and linear-by-linear association or correlation (Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel test) between the independent variable, the question ‘Have you ever heard of the support that the EU gives farmers through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?’ and the independent variables indicated.

Independent Variables	Pearson’s Chi-Square			Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel		
	Value	df	p-Value	Value	df	p-Value
Gender	146.86	2	<0.001			
Social Class	156.39	8	<0.001	124.99	1	<0.001
Economy	186.35	4	<0.001	138.40	1	<0.001
Community Size	60.27	4	<0.001	44.81	1	<0.001
EU Direction	104.42	4	<0.001	86.62	1	<0.001
EU Democracy	117.71	6	<0.001	55.12	1	<0.001
EU Future	207.83	6	<0.001	113.64	1	<0.001
EU Image	231.13	8	<0.001	111.62	1	<0.001

Notes: df—degrees of freedom.

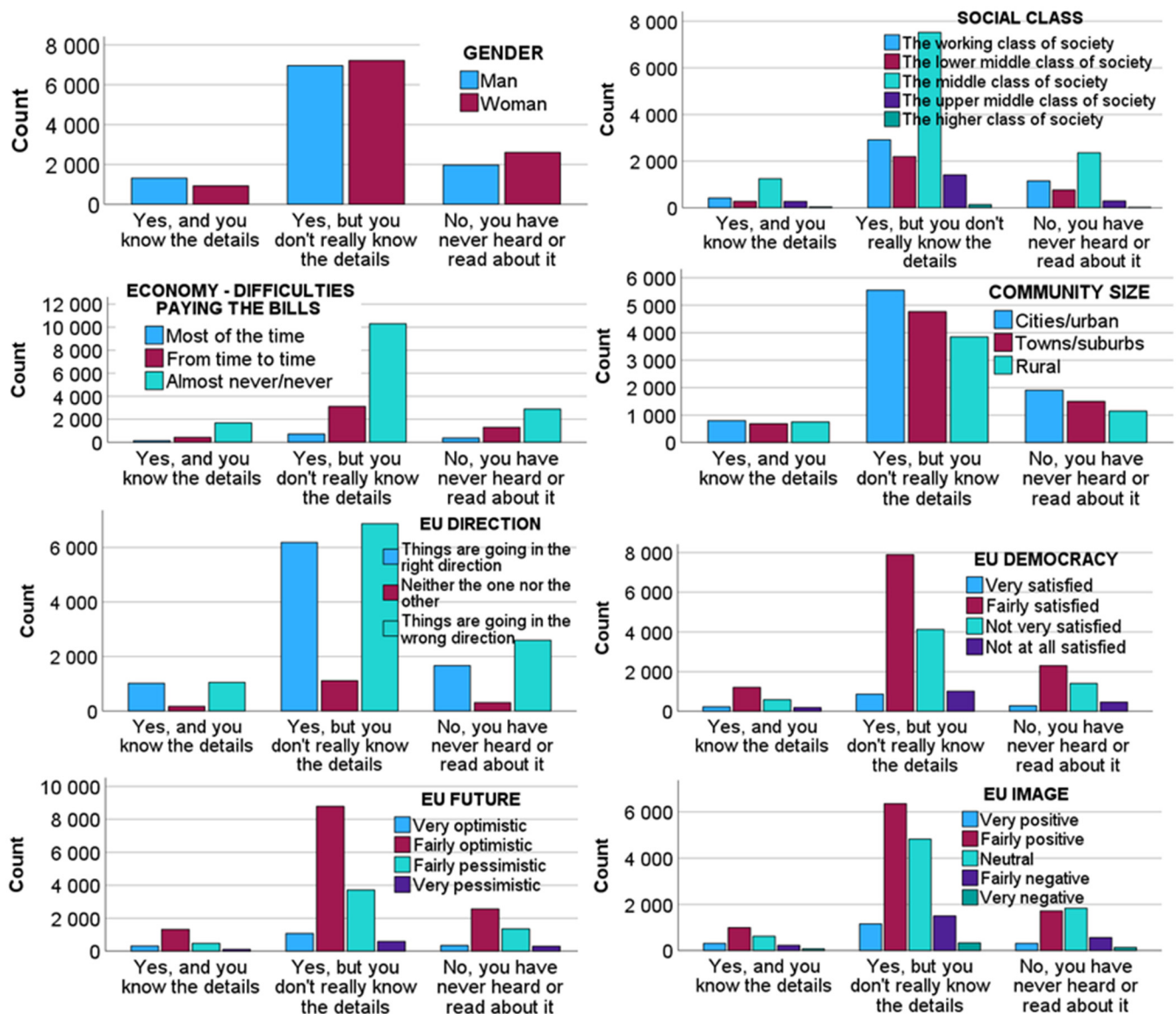


Figure 3. Cluster bar charts resulting from the cross-tabulation between the independent variables identified and the dependent variable, the question ‘Have you ever heard of the support that the EU gives farmers through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?’.

Table 6. Results from the ANOVA using the question ‘Have you ever heard of the support that the EU gives farmers through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?’ as a factor and the continuous independent variables indicated.

Variables	Yes, and You Know the Details	Yes, but You Don’t Know the Details	No, You Have Never Heard or Read about It
Age ***	53.18 ^a	52.41 ^b	46.46 ^c

Notes: p -value of the F test *** $p < 0.001$; Different letters in superscript are indicative of significant differences between the levels of the factor; the post-hoc test used was the Least Significant Differences.

ECs with better economic situations tend to be aware of the CAP, including the details, whereas the opposite is observed for ECs in worse economic situations. There is a linear association between individuals’ economic situations and CAP awareness, with ECs in better economic situations tending to exhibit higher degrees of awareness, whether including or excluding awareness of the details.

More EC individuals than expected, living in rural areas, are aware of the CAP and know the details, while the opposite is observed for ECs living in towns and cities. There is a linear association between community size and awareness of the CAP, including the details, with smaller communities showing higher degrees of awareness.

Similarly, more ECs than expected, who feel optimistic about the EU’s future, are aware of CAP and its details, while the opposite is observed for those who are pessimistic. There is also a positive linear association between CAP awareness and optimism about the EU’s future.

The association between the variables ‘EU democracy’ and ‘EU future’ with CAP awareness is similar, and these two variables positively correlate.

More EC individuals than expected, who believe that things in the EU are going in the right direction, are aware of the CAP, including the details, while the opposite trend is observed for those who believe things are going in the wrong direction. There is a linear association between these two variables.

More ECs than expected, who are satisfied with the way EU democracy works, are aware of the CAP, whether including or excluding the details. There is also a positive linear association between CAP awareness and satisfaction with EU democracy.

More ECs than expected, who think the EU conveys a ‘very positive image’, are also aware of the CAP, including the details, while more ECs than expected, who perceive the EU as conveying a ‘fairly negative’ or ‘very negative’ image, are not aware of the CAP. There is a linear association between CAP awareness and the degree of positivity conveyed by the EU’s image.

Right-wing ECs tend to exhibit higher levels of awareness of CAP and its details.

3.5. QA3—To What Extent do You Agree or Disagree with the following Statement: The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Benefits All European Citizens and Not Only Farmers?

Question A3 produced the statistics presented in Table 7, and the resulting charts can be visualised in Figure 4. Table 8 presents the ANOVA applied to the continuous independent variable.

More women and fewer men than expected agree or tend to agree that the CAP benefits all ECs, not just farmers, while the opposite trend is observed for disagreement or a tendency to disagree.

More ECs than expected, belonging to the higher, upper and lower-middle classes, tend to disagree or totally disagree that the CAP benefits all ECs, not just farmers. The lower-middle class agrees or tends to agree, while the working class has mixed features.

More ECs than expected, with worse economic situations, totally disagree with the statement that the CAP benefits all ECs, not just farmers. There is a linear association between variables, with individuals in better economic situations showing higher degrees of agreement.

Table 7. Association (Person’s Chi-square test) and linear-by-linear association or correlation (Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel test) between the independent variable, the question ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) benefits all European citizens and not only farmers’ and the independent variables indicated.

Independent Variables	Pearson’s Chi-Square			Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel		
	Value	df	p-Value	Value	df	p-Value
Gender	37.99	3	<0.001			
Social Class	96.27	12	<0.001	0.07	1	>0.05
Economy	65.87	6	<0.001	11.83	1	<0.001
Community Size	26.19	6	<0.001	0.01	1	>0.05
EU Direction	508.98	6	<0.001	417.63	1	<0.001
EU Democracy	1446.56	9	<0.001	845.50	1	<0.001
EU Future	1513.56	9	<0.001	904.17	1	<0.001
EU Image	1859.31	12	<0.001	1172.07	1	<0.001

Notes: df—degrees of freedom.

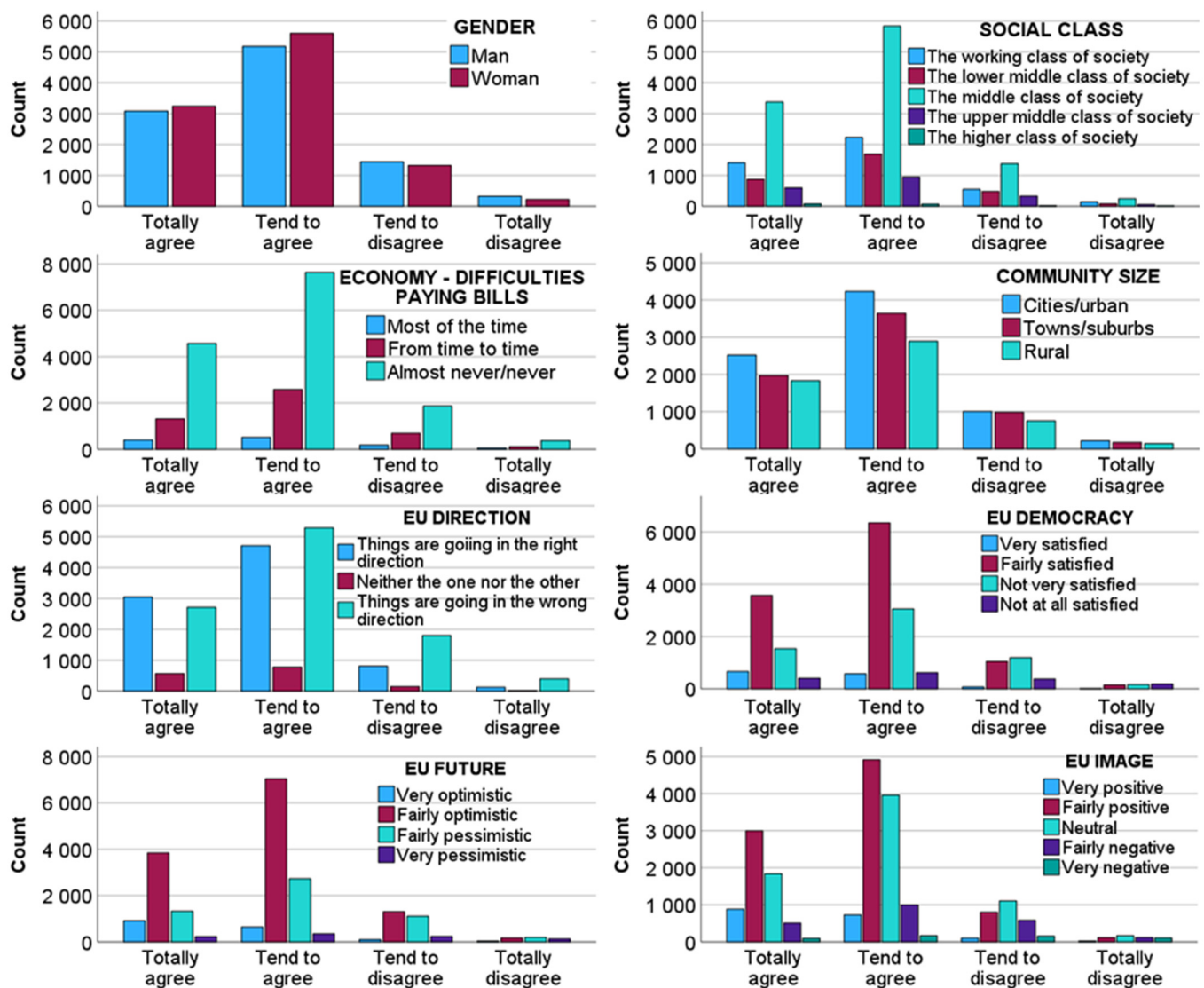


Figure 4. Cluster bar charts resulting from the cross-tabulation between the independent variables identified and the dependent variable, the question ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) benefits all European citizens and not only farmers’.

Table 8. Results from the ANOVA using the question ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) benefits all European citizens and not only farmers’ as a factor and the continuous independent variables indicated.

	Totally Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Totally Disagree
Age ***	52.94 ^a	50.30 ^b	50.62 ^b	53.53 ^a

Notes: p -values of the F test *** $p < 0.001$; Different letters in superscript are indicative of significant differences between the levels of the factor; the post-hoc test used was the Least Significant Differences.

More ECs than expected, living in rural areas, totally agree that the CAP benefits all ECs, not just farmers. More ECs than expected in cities totally agree or tend to agree with the statement, but also totally disagree. More ECs than expected in towns tend to agree or tend to disagree with the statement.

More EC individuals than expected, answering that things in the EU are going in the right direction, agree or tend to agree that the CAP benefits all ECs, not just farmers, while the opposite is observed for ECs answering that things are going in the wrong direction. There is a linear association between the two variables.

More ECs than expected, feeling satisfied with the way EU democracy works, agree that the CAP benefits all ECs, not just farmers, while the opposite is observed for those not satisfied at all. There is a linear association between the degree of satisfaction with democracy and agreement with the statement.

Similarly, with ‘EU democracy’, more ECs than expected, feeling optimistic about the ‘EU future’, agree that the CAP benefits all EU citizens, not just farmers, while the opposite is observed for the more pessimistic. There is also a linear association between agreement with the statement and optimism about the future of the EU. The association of the variables ‘EU democracy’ and ‘EU future’ with awareness of the CAP is similar, and these two variables positively correlate.

More ECs than expected, thinking the EU conveys a very positive image, also agree that the CAP benefits all ECs, not just farmers, while more ECs than expected, thinking the EU conveys a fairly negative or very negative image, disagree. There is a linear association between the degree of agreement with the statement and the degree of image positivity conveyed by the EU.

ECs tending politically to the right tend to be more in agreement that the CAP benefits all ECs, not just farmers.

3.6. QA9—The EU Gives Financial Support to Farmers to Help Stabilise Their Incomes; This Aid Represents around 1% of the Combined Public Expenditure of the 27 Member States of the EU and around 30% of the Total EU Budget; Do You Think That This Support Is Too Low, about Right or Too High?

Question A9 produced the statistics presented in Table 9, and the resulting charts can be visualised in Figure 5. Table 10 presents the ANOVA applied to the continuous independent variable.

More women and fewer men than expected agree or tend to agree that the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘too low’, while the opposite trend is observed for men. More men than women also think the support is ‘about right’.

More ECs than expected, belonging to the working and lower-middle class, think the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘too low’, while the opposite is observed for the middle, upper-middle and higher classes of society. There is a linear association, with lower classes of society tending to think the support is ‘too low’ and higher classes thinking the support is ‘too high’.

More ECs than expected, with worse economic situations, believe that the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘too low’, while the opposite is observed for those in better economic situations. There is a linear association between variables, with individuals in worse economic situations showing higher support.

Table 9. Association (Person’s Chi-square test) and linear-by-linear association or correlation (Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel test) between the independent variable, the question ‘The EU gives financial support to farmers to help stabilise their incomes. This aid represents around 1% of the combined public expenditure of the 27 Member States of the EU and around 30% of the total EU budget. Do you think that this support is too low, about right or too high?’ and the independent variables indicated.

Independent Variables	Pearson’s Chi-Square			Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel		
	Value	df	p-Value	Value	df	p-Value
Gender	186.15	2	<0.001			
Social Class	518.30	8	<0.001	387.92	1	<0.001
Economy	136.73	4	<0.001	90.84	1	<0.001
Community Size	62.31	4	<0.001	56.41	1	<0.001
EU Direction	158.46	4	<0.001	68.73	1	<0.001
EU Democracy	304.89	6	<0.001	28.65	1	<0.001
EU Future	213.17	6	<0.001	26.88	1	<0.001
EU Image	331.18	8	<0.001	37.92	1	<0.001

Notes: df—degrees of freedom.

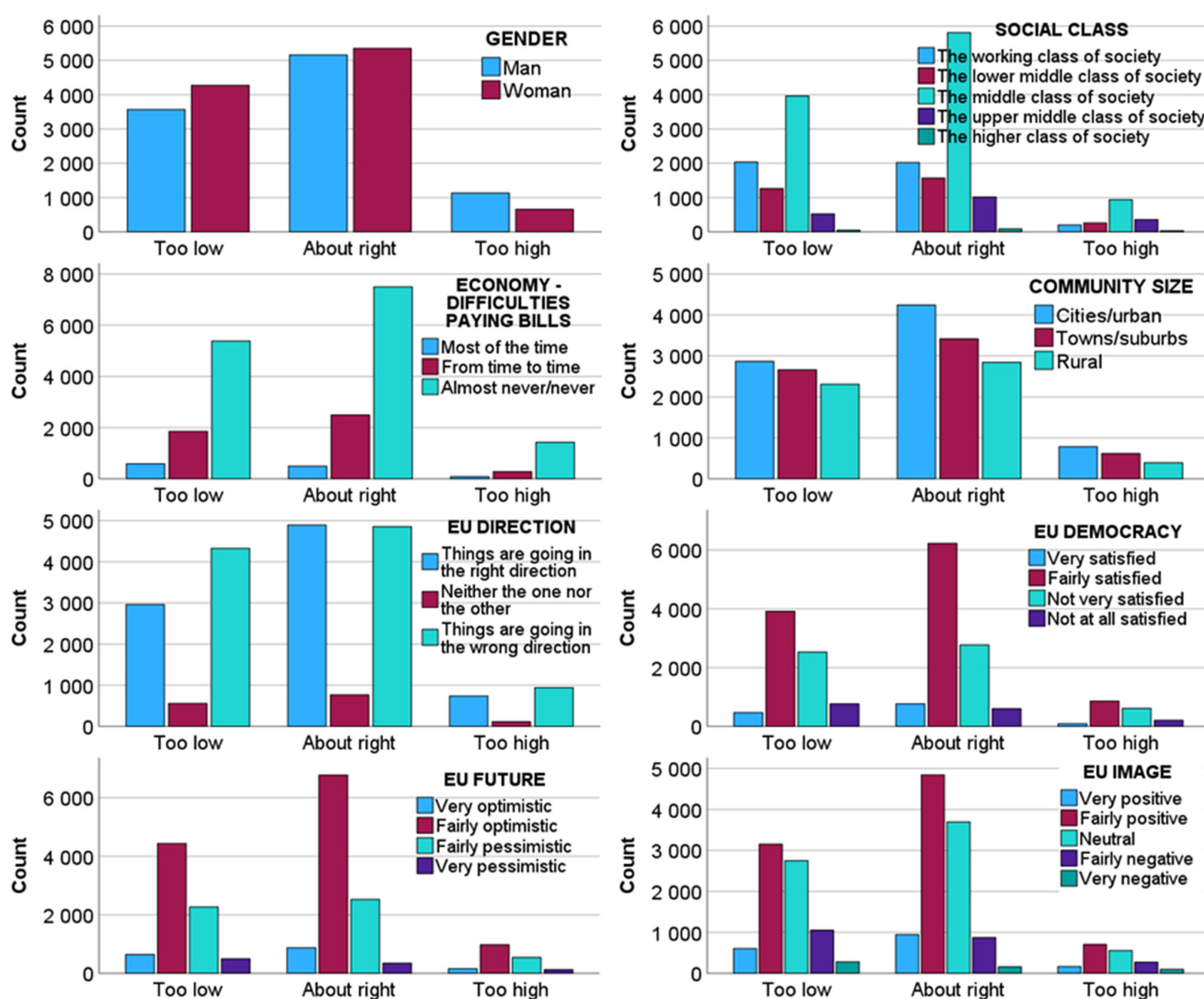


Figure 5. Cluster bar charts resulting from the cross-tabulation between the independent variables identified and the dependent variable, the question ‘The EU gives financial support to farmers to help stabilise their incomes. This aid represents around 1% of the combined public expenditure of the 27 Member States of the EU and around 30% of the total EU budget. Do you think that this support is too low, about right or too high?’.

Table 10. Results from the ANOVA using the question ‘The EU gives financial support to farmers to help stabilise their incomes. This aid represents around 1% of the combined public expenditure of the 27 Member States of the EU and around 30% of the total EU budget. Do you think that this support is too low, about right or too high?’ as a factor and the continuous independent variables indicated.

Variables	Too Low	About Right	Too High
Age ***	51.33 ^a	50.52 ^b	53.18 ^c

Notes: p -value of the F test *** $p < 0.001$; Different letters in superscript are indicative of significant differences between the levels of the factor; the post-hoc test used was the Least Significant Differences.

More ECs than expected, living in rural areas, think the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘too low’, while more individuals than expected, belonging to towns or cities, think it is ‘about right’ or ‘too high’. There is a linear association with individuals in smaller communities (rural areas) tending to think that the support given by the EU to farmers is ‘too low’.

More ECs than expected, believing that things in the EU are going in the right direction, think the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘about right’ or ‘too high’, while more individuals than expected, thinking things are going wrong in their own country, think the support is ‘too low’. There is a linear association between the two variables.

More ECs than expected, feeling satisfied with the way EU democracy works, think the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘about right’. More individuals than expected, feeling fairly or very satisfied with ‘EU democracy’, think the support is ‘about right’. There is a linear association between the degree of satisfaction with ‘EU democracy’ and thoughts about the support being ‘about right’.

Similarly, with ‘EU democracy’ and ‘EU future’, more ECs than expected, feeling optimistic about the ‘EU future’, think the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘too high’ or ‘about right’. There is a linear association between the degree of optimism about the future of the EU and thoughts about the support being ‘about right’ or ‘too high’.

Results are like ‘EU democracy’ and ‘EU future’ with more EC individuals than expected, thinking the EU conveys a very positive image, believing that the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘about right’. There is a linear association. ECs tending politically to the right tend to think the economic support given by the EU to farmers is ‘about right’.

3.7. QA11—Over the Next 10 Years, Would You like to See an Increase, Decrease or No Change in EU Financial Support to Farmers?

Question A11 produced the statistics presented in Table 11, and the resulting charts can be visualised in Figure 6. Table 12 presents the ANOVA applied to the continuous independent variable.

More women and fewer men than expected believe that financial support to farmers in the EU should increase over the next 10 years, while more men are neutral.

More ECs than expected, in the working and lower-middle class, think the economic support given by the EU to farmers should increase, while the opposite is observed for the middle, upper-middle and higher classes of society. There is a linear association, with the lower classes of society tending to support an increase in EU support for farmers.

More ECs than expected, with worse economic situations, believe that the economic support given to farmers should increase, while the opposite is observed for those in better economic situations. There is a linear association, with individuals in worse economic situations advocating an increase in support.

More ECs than expected, living in rural areas, think the economic support to farmers should increase, while more individuals than expected, in towns or cities, think it is about right or too high. There is a linear association, with individuals in smaller communities (rural areas) tending to support an increase in support for farmers.

More ECs than expected, believing that things in the EU are going in the right direction, think the economic support given to farmers should remain unchanged or ‘decrease’, while

more individuals than expected, thinking things are going wrong in their own country, believe the support should ‘increase’ or ‘decrease’.

Table 11. Association (Person’s Chi-square test) and linear-by-linear association or correlation (Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel test) between the independent variable, the question ‘Over the next 10 years, would you like to see an increase, decrease or no change in EU financial support to farmers?’ and the independent variables indicated.

Independent Variables	Pearson’s Chi-Square			Cochran–Mantel–Haenszel		
	Value	df	p-Value	Value	df	p-Value
Gender	150.15	2	<0.001			
Social Class	457.67	8	<0.001	397.80	1	<0.001
Economy	96.64	4	<0.001	29.85	1	<0.001
Community Size	20.82	4	<0.001	14.73	1	<0.001
EU Direction	35.75	4	<0.001	0.042	1	>0.05
EU Democracy	69.61	6	<0.001	5.06	1	<0.05
EU Future	51.33	6	<0.001	9.75	1	<0.01
EU Image	136.72	8	<0.001	33.96	1	<0.001

Notes: df—degrees of freedom.

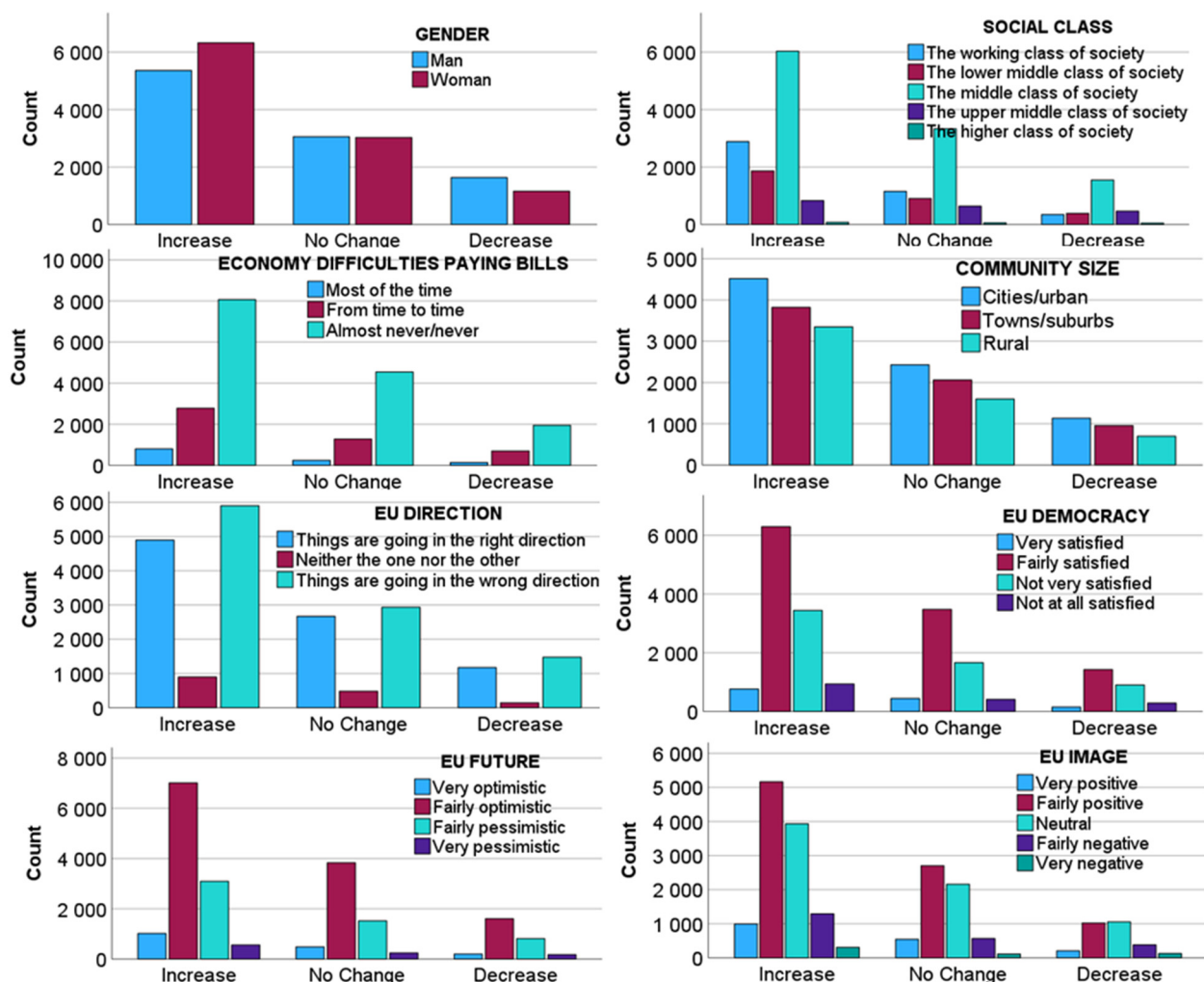


Figure 6. Cluster bar charts resulting from the cross-tabulation between the independent variables identified and the dependent variable, the question ‘Over the next 10 years, would you like to see an increase, decrease or no change in EU financial support to farmers?’.

Table 12. Results from the ANOVA using the question ‘Over the next 10 years, would you like to see an increase, decrease or no change in EU financial support to farmers?’ as a factor and the continuous independent variables indicated.

Variables	Increase	No change	Decrease
Political Position *	1.62 ^a	1.55 ^b	1.48 ^c

Notes: p -values of the F test * $p < 0.05$; Different letters in superscript are indicative of significant differences between the levels of the factor; the post-hoc test used was the Least Significant Differences.

More ECs than expected, feeling optimistic about the ‘EU future’, think the economic support given to farmers should ‘increase’, while the opposite is observed for the pessimistic. There is a linear association between a higher degree of optimism about the future of the EU and thoughts about an ‘increase’ in support for farmers.

More ECs than expected, feeling satisfied with the way EU democracy works, think the economic support given to farmers should remain unchanged or ‘decrease’. In contrast, those not very satisfied or not at all satisfied tend to believe the support should ‘increase’. There is a linear association between the degree of satisfaction with democracy and support, with those more satisfied agreeing a ‘decrease’ in support.

More ECs than expected, thinking the EU conveys a ‘very positive’ image, believe the economic support given by the EU to farmers should ‘increase’. There is a linear association.

ECs tending politically to the right tend to believe that the economic support given by the EU should ‘increase’.

4. Discussion

The Utilized Agricultural Area represents approximately 41% of the total land area of EU member states [14]. This encompasses a diverse range of landscapes, agricultural systems, farm sizes, ownership structures, natural environments and socio-economic conditions among EU member states and falls under the purview of the CAP [15]. Alongside its economic advantages, the CAP incorporates social and environmental dimensions, fostering a resilient agricultural framework oriented towards sustainability across the EU [16]. A previous survey in 2014 ([17]), also aimed to evaluate the CAP’s perception and attitudes among the ECs. The main results confirmed that the EC attaches high importance to agriculture and rural areas, approves of financial support at the EU level and recognises the societal benefits of agricultural production for their supply, rural economic sustainability and environmental sustainability. Moreover, a significant majority of ECs believed that the CAP supports not only farmers but also all ECs [17,18]. In 2017, the European Commission assessed the CAP’s performance. The results also affirm that European Citizens’ opinions generally align with the main objectives of the latest CAP reform and budget [19].

The survey used in the present study reveals that most of the EU respondents support the CAP. They agree that EU agriculture and rural areas are important, are aware of the CAP and tend to agree that the CAP benefits all EU citizens and not only the farmers. The majority of the EU Citizens agree that the EU budget allocated to the CAP is about right or high and therefore think that the financial support to farmers in the EU should stay the same over the next 10 years [20]. However, notable differences exist among various groups of ECs.

Women place greater importance on agriculture and are more likely than men to agree that the CAP benefits all EU citizens, not just farmers. However, women are generally less aware of the CAP. Additionally, a larger proportion of women than men believe that the economic support provided to farmers is currently too low and should increase over the next 10 years. Gender theories discuss human and gender-nature relations. These theories depict natural processes as reproductive, which is often associated with women, while production and consumption processes are considered productive, and typically linked to men [21] which may explain the results.

European citizens from the lower classes of society think EU agriculture and rural areas are very important; however, they manifest less awareness of the CAP including the

details. More EU respondents of higher classes of society disagree that CAP benefits all EU Citizens and not only the farmers. More EU Citizens from the lower classes of society think the economic support being given to EU farmers is low and should increase over the next ten years. Most farms in the EU are classified as family farms (95.2% of a total of 10.5 million farms in 2016) [22], which may explain the tendencies observed. Support under the CAP has brought farm incomes closer to those of non-agricultural sectors on average, yet this assistance has predominantly benefited larger farms, exacerbating inequalities within the agricultural sector [23]. Wealthier EU Citizens tend to be more in favour of agriculture and rural areas are important for the future of the EU, manifest more awareness of the CAP and its details and agree that CAP benefits all EU Citizens and not only the farmers.

EU citizens from rural areas tend to agree that agriculture and rural areas are very important for the future of the EU. They are aware of CAP and its details and agree that CAP benefits all EU citizens and not only the farmers. The rural areas are also more in agreement that the economic support given by the EU to farmers is too low and should increase over the next 10 years. These are expected results as rural communities perceive the CAP objectives as job creation in rural areas and the provision of a fair standard of living in these areas, therefore contributing to the sustainability of the rural economy through the socioeconomic sustainability of small farms [22].

The difference between EU Citizens in urban areas and rural areas about the support to be given to farmers in the next ten years may need to be addressed as in recent times farmers across Europe have been demonstrating their dissatisfaction with the impact of the CAP in their income [24]. Many of these protests are aimed at policymakers, with the argument being that excessive regulation hampers European farmers' ability to compete with imported products that do not adhere to the same regulations [25].

EU respondents feeling satisfied with the way EU democracy works acknowledge the importance of agriculture and rural communities for the future of the EU, show awareness of the CAP and its details and agree that CAP benefits all EU citizens and not only the farmers. The more satisfied EU Citizens tend to agree the economic support given by the EU to farmers is too high and therefore should not change or should decrease over the next ten years. Similar results are observed for EU Citizens more satisfied with the EU's Future and confident about an EU positive image. The results agree with the findings of Dabrowski et al. [26], as there is a positive correlation between a positive EU image and fund allocation, as poorer regional economies relate to more negative images of the EU. Authors such as De Simone [27] have related the satisfaction of citizens with democracy with political competence and positive perceptions about the future.

Over the past three decades, the process of shaping CAP policies has been progressively moving towards establishing a socioeconomic and environmentally sustainable framework for European agriculture, fostering environmental awareness across all levels of decision-making within the EU's intricate multilevel governance structure [28]. However, the need for a modern CAP capable of completely addressing all the sustainability challenges has been identified [29]. The satisfaction and confidence about the future and the image of the EU can only be achieved with a CAP capable of addressing these challenges.

In today's society, consumers are increasingly discerning about the products they consume, facilitated by globalisation and accelerated agricultural industrialisation. Factors like geopolitical conflicts, extreme weather events and market shifts significantly shape citizens' perspectives, causing concerns. The scientific community is concerned about how policies are perceived in a society increasingly aware of environmental issues, climate change and food system sustainability. Consumer habits reflect a growing preference for sustainable, healthy products, food safety and support for local economies. Our research underscores European citizens' desire for a more sustainable and equitable food system, boosting employment and quality of life.

Addressing rural challenges through development measures, local initiatives and promoting smart villages is crucial for European policy. Attracting young farmers is vital for rural sustainability, fostering job creation, economic growth, gender equality and social

inclusion. European citizens urge European institutions to prioritise EU agriculture in meeting society's demands for quality, safe and sustainable food, while also enhancing animal welfare.

This study is based on a robust set of data, drawn from diverse sources across multiple countries, underscoring the complex nature of self-perceptions. However, it is crucial to recognise the potential influence of various factors beyond those examined here. Future research could explore geographic profiles and their interaction with current socio-political contexts. Furthermore, examining the practical applications of EU policies, including CAP, is essential. The agricultural sector faces challenges reconciling policies aimed at environmental conservation with the need for increased food production. Given the multifaceted goals of food systems, effective agricultural and food policies are vital for ensuring food security, environmental and economic sustainability, affordability, farmer livelihoods and animal welfare. These policies should align with the interests of both farmers and citizens.

5. Conclusions

European Citizens perceive the CAP positively and reveal positive attitudes about the CAP and EU policies and direction. Some differences between the different social groups may occur; however, the findings did not identify any group decisively opposing the CAP. European Citizens have a positive attitude towards CAP, its associated benefits and budget allocation. EU Citizens more optimistic with the direction of the EU, manifest more awareness of the CAP and its details and tend to agree that the CAP benefits all EU Citizens and not only the farmers. However, these EU Citizens manifest a neutral position about the importance of agriculture and rural areas for the future of the EU. These EU Citizens also tend to agree that the economic support given by the EU to farmers is about right or too high and should not increase over the next ten years. However, in rural areas, EU Citizens tend to agree that support for farmers should increase over the next ten years.

At the European level, there should be a strong effort of communication and dissemination to the citizens about the main aims, targets and benefits of future public policies to promote European sustainability and the 'Green Deal'. These insights may be useful for public decision-makers to define better policies and measures adjusted to EU citizens.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, F.M.; methodology, F.M.; formal analysis, F.M.; writing—original draft preparation, F.M. and M.J.P.L.D.-S.; writing—review and editing, F.M. and M.J.P.L.D.-S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by Eurobarometer.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The original data used in the present study are openly available from GESIS, in The Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences Eurobarometer, web page at <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14101>.

Acknowledgments: To the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT, Portugal) for financial support to CISAS UIDB/05937/2020 and UIDP/05937/2020.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Streimikis, J.; Baležentis, T. Agricultural sustainability assessment framework integrating sustainable development goals and interlinked priorities of environmental, climate and agriculture policies. *Sustain. Dev.* **2020**, *28*, 1702–1712. [[CrossRef](#)]
2. Sgroi, F.; Maenza, L.; Modica, F. Exploring consumer behavior and willingness to pay regarding sustainable wine certification. *J. Agric. Food Res.* **2023**, *14*, 100681. [[CrossRef](#)]
3. Nugroho, A.D.; Prasada, I.Y.; Lakner, Z. Comparing the effect of climate change on agricultural competitiveness in developing and developed countries. *J. Clean. Prod.* **2023**, *406*, 137139. [[CrossRef](#)]

4. Kam, H.; Smith, H.; Potter, C. Public money for public goods: The role of ideas in driving agriculture policy in the EU and post-Brexit UK. *Land Use Policy* **2023**, *129*, 106618. [CrossRef]
5. Rizov, M. Rural development perspectives in enlarging Europe: The implications of CAP reforms and agricultural transition in accession countries. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2006**, *14*, 219–238. [CrossRef]
6. Auffray, M.; Clement, F. Looking for the local ‘grant-grabbers’: Cattle farmers’ criticisms and emerging environmental subjectivities in southwestern France. *J. Rural Stud.* **2023**, *102*, 103091. [CrossRef]
7. Acs, S.; Hanley, N.; Dallimer, M.; Gaston, K.J.; Robertson, P.; Wilson, P.; Armsworth, P.R. The effect of decoupling on marginal agricultural systems: Implications for farm incomes, land use and upland ecology. *Land Use Policy* **2010**, *27*, 550–563. [CrossRef]
8. Holtman, N.; Aguiar, A.; Devadoss, S. The effects of freer trade on global agriculture. *J. Agr. Appl. Econ. Assoc.* **2022**, *1*, 446–458. [CrossRef]
9. Erjavec, K.; Erjavec, E. ‘Greening the CAP’—Just a fashionable justification? A discourse analysis of the 2014–2020 CAP reform documents. *Food Policy* **2015**, *51*, 53–62. [CrossRef]
10. Petsakos, A.; Ciaian, P.; Espinosa, M.; Perni, A.; Kremmydas, D. Farm-level impacts of the CAP post-2020 reform: A scenario-based analysis. *Appl. Econ. Perspect. Policy* **2023**, *45*, 1168–1188. [CrossRef]
11. Kowalska, A.; Bieniek, M. Meeting the European green deal objective of expanding organic farming. *Equilibrium. Q. J. Econ. Econ. Policy.* **2022**, *17*, 607–633.
12. Schebesta, H.; Bernaz, N.; Macchi, C. The European Union Farm to Fork Strategy. *Eur. Food Feed Law Rev.* **2020**, *15*, 420–427.
13. Buckwell, A.E.; Harvey, D.R.; Thomson, K.J.; Parton, K.A. *The Costs of the Common Agricultural Policy*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2019.
14. European Commission. *Eurobarometer 97.1*; GESIS: Cologne, Germany, 2022; ZA7886 Data file Version 2.0.0.
15. The World Bank. Agricultural Land (% of Land Area). Available online: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.AGRI.ZS> (accessed on 23 January 2024).
16. Smędzik-Ambroży, K.; Guth, M.; Stępień, S.; Brelik, A. The Influence of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy on the Socio-Economic Sustainability of Farms (the Case of Poland). *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 7173. [CrossRef]
17. European Commission. *Special Eurobarometer 440: Europeans, Agriculture and the CAP*; Publications Office of the European Union: Brussels, Belgium, 2016.
18. Schüler, S.; Noack, E.M. Does the CAP reflect the population’s concerns about agricultural landscapes? A qualitative study in Lower Saxony, Germany. *Land Use Policy* **2019**, *83*, 240–255. [CrossRef]
19. European Commission. *Modernising and Simplifying the CAP: Socio-Economic Challenges Facing Agriculture and Rural Areas*; European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development: Brussels, Belgium, 2017. Available online: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-05/soc_background_final_en_0.pdf (accessed on 23 January 2024).
20. European Commission. *Special Eurobarometer 520: Europeans, Agriculture and the CAP*; Publications Office of the European Union: Brussels, Belgium, 2022.
21. Burandt, A.; Mölders, T. Nature–gender relations within a social-ecological perspective on European multifunctional agriculture: The case of agrobiodiversity. *Agric. Hum. Values* **2017**, *34*, 955–967. [CrossRef]
22. Volkov, A.; Balezantis, T.; Morkunas, M.; Streimikiene, D. Who benefits from CAP? The way the direct payments system impacts socioeconomic sustainability of small farms. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 2112. [CrossRef]
23. Guth, M.; Smędzik-Ambroży, K.; Czyżewski, B.; Stępień, S. The economic sustainability of farms under Common Agricultural Policy in the European Union countries. *Agriculture* **2020**, *10*, 34. [CrossRef]
24. Boutelet, C.; Bran, M.; Girard, L.; Morel, S.; Stroobants, J.-P. Farmers’ Anger Is Mounting across Europe. *Le Monde*, 26 January 2024. Available online: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2024/01/24/farmers-anger-is-mounting-across-europe_6460470_19.html (accessed on 23 January 2024).
25. Camut, N. Frustrated Farmers Slam EU ‘Technocrats’ Who ‘Call the Shots’ in Brussels Protest. *Politico*, 24 January 2024. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-eu-farmers-protest-fizzles-brussels/> (accessed on 23 January 2024).
26. Dąbrowski, M.; Stead, D.; Mashhoodi, B. EU Cohesion Policy can’t buy me love? Exploring the regional determinants of EU image. *Reg. Sci. Policy Pract.* **2019**, *11*, 695–711. [CrossRef]
27. De Simone, E.; Cicatiello, L.; Gaeta, G.L.; Pinto, M. Expectations about future economic prospects and satisfaction with democracy: Evidence from European countries during the COVID-19 crisis. *Soc. Indic. Res.* **2022**, *159*, 1017–1033. [CrossRef]
28. Doukas, Y.E.; Salvati, L.; Vardopoulos, I. Unraveling the European Agricultural Policy sustainable development trajectory. *Land* **2023**, *12*, 1749. [CrossRef]
29. Pe’er, G.; Bonn, A.; Bruelheide, H.; Dieker, P.; Eisenhauer, N.; Feindt, P.H.; Hagedorn, G.; Hansjürgens, B.; Herzon, I.; Lomba, Â.; et al. Action needed for the EU Common Agricultural Policy to address sustainability challenges. *People Nat.* **2020**, *2*, 305–316. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.