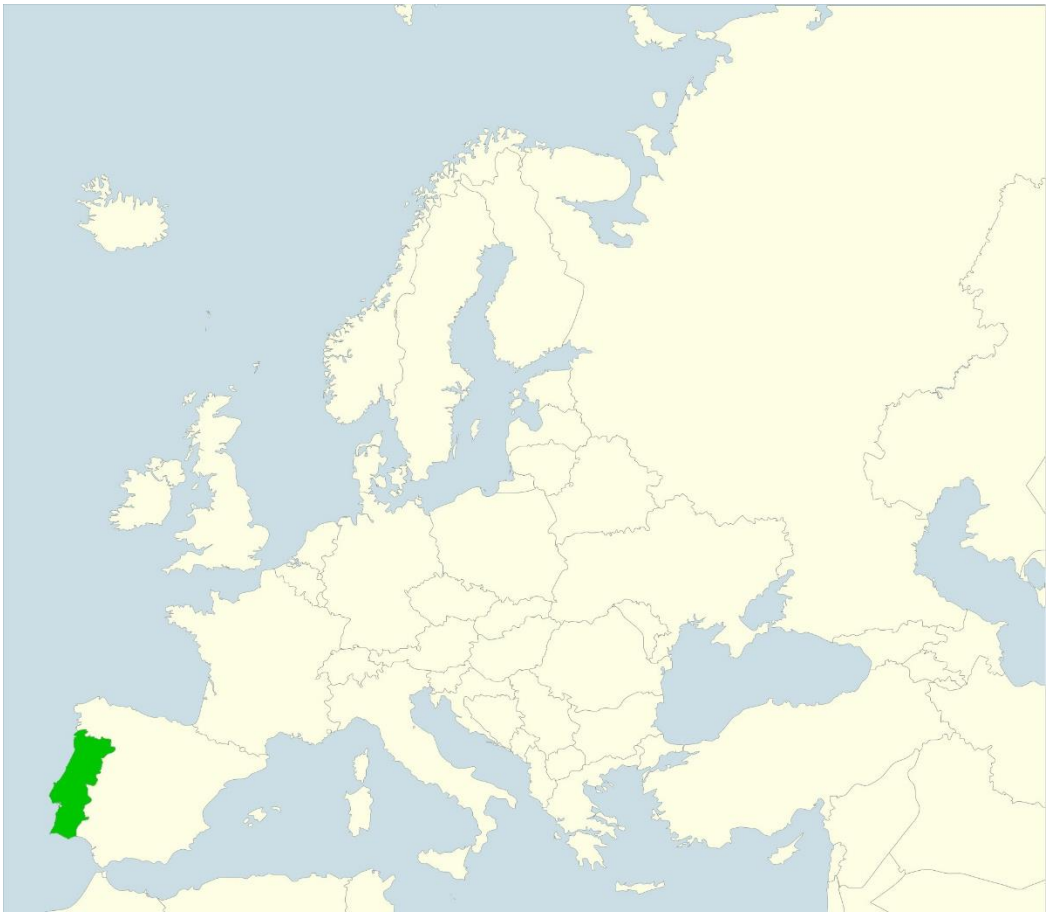
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EUROPEAN UNION CITIZENS' PERCEPTION OF THE REASONS FOR THE COST OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

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Abstract: The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a major instrument to regulate the sustainable use of resources while guaranteeing social cohesion. Understanding people's perception of this policy is mandatory to formalize it without disruptions. This research report was designed to understand the EU citizen's perception of the reasons why we should spend around 30% of the EU budget on the CAP. We used a Eurobarometer survey containing 26,502 interviews with EU citizens and modelled their answers using a significant statistical model. The study reveals that respondents' perceptions of European agriculture, and the CAP are influenced by gender, age, education, household size, and social class. Women's views highlight the EU's role in funding agriculture, food security, and adherence to production standards. Men focus on the economic demands of agriculture and its sustainability. Age differences show older individuals' historical understanding of CAP and younger individuals' focus on sustainability. Education level impacts perceptions, with less educated individuals recognizing the importance of financial aid for food security and higher production costs due to regulations, while more educated individuals understand the significant investments required and the environmental benefits of CAP. Larger communities emphasize regulatory impacts on production costs, whereas rural residents focus on the practical economic challenges of farming. Higher social classes are aware of centralized agricultural funding and its investment needs, while lower social classes prioritize environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation.

Keywords: agriculture; citizenship; rural policy; social perception; sustainability

Sumário: A Política Agrícola Comum (PAC) é um instrumento importante para regular a utilização sustentável dos recursos, garantindo ao mesmo tempo a coesão social. Compreender a perceção das pessoas sobre esta política torna-se necessário para que esta seja formalizada sem inconvenientes. Este estudo foi concebido para compreender a perceção dos cidadãos da UE sobre as razões pelas quais devemos gastar cerca de 30% do orçamento da UE na PAC. Neste estudo, utilizámos um inquérito efetuado pelo Eurobarómetro contendo 26 502 entrevistas a cidadãos da UE e modelámos as suas respostas utilizando um modelo estatístico que se mostrou significativo. O estudo revela que as perceções dos inquiridos sobre a agricultura europeia e a PAC são influenciadas pelo género, idade, educação, dimensão do agregado familiar e classe social. As opiniões das mulheres destacam o papel da UE no financiamento da agricultura, na segurança alimentar e na adesão aos padrões de produção. Os homens concentram-se nas exigências económicas da agricultura e na sua sustentabilidade. As diferenças de idade mostram a compreensão histórica da PAC por parte dos indivíduos mais velhos e o foco dos indivíduos mais jovens na sustentabilidade. O nível de educação tem impacto nas perceções, com os indivíduos menos instruídos a reconhecerem a importância da ajuda financeira para a segurança alimentar e os custos de produção mais elevados devido às regulamentações, enquanto os indivíduos mais instruídos compreendem os investimentos significativos necessários e os benefícios ambientais da PAC. As comunidades maiores, nas cidades, enfatizam os impactos regulamentares sobre os custos de produção, enquanto os residentes rurais se concentram nos desafios económicos da agricultura. As classes sociais mais altas estão conscientes do financiamento agrícola centralizado e das suas necessidades de investimento, enquanto as classes sociais mais baixas dão prioridade à sustentabilidade ambiental e à mitigação das alterações climáticas.

Palavras chave: agricultura; cidadania; politicas rurais; perceção social; sustentabilidade

Highlights:

- Gender influences CAP views: women value food security; men focus on investments
- Age impacts priorities: older groups value history, youth focus on sustainability
- Education shapes concerns: less educated prioritise food; educated stress investments
- Urban vs rural divides: urban areas focus on costs, rural areas on local economies
- Social classes differ: higher classes note funding; lower classes value green benefits

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1. Introduction

Sustainable land use policies have become increasingly important in addressing the negative impacts of unsustainable practices. The preferences for policy instruments play a crucial role in shaping policy decisions and aiding policymakers in crafting effective land use policies (Diriye et al., 2022).

Agriculture plays an essential role in the European society and its economy (Nazzaro and Marotta, 2016). Agriculture has a major impact on land use through its different functions, including the production of biomass, landscapes, and biotypes, as well as influencing socio-economic structures and requiring agricultural policies to stimulate the achievement of these functions (Grethe et al., 2018). However, the adoption of a holistic approach in this sector is rare (De Castro et al., 2020), despite being indispensable for the sustainability of agriculture and the environment (Shafi et al., 2020). Agriculture plays an important role in the model of community well-being based on practices of diversification and multifunctionality (Pillarisetti and Tisdell, 2013) and land appropriation as an effect of policies (Nazzaro and Marotta, 2016). The new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform emphasizes the role of farmers in finding solutions against the impact of climate change, in producing high-quality and healthy food, in ensuring environmental protection, biodiversity, and rural landscape preservation (Popescu et al., 2021). Thus, the agricultural sector plays an important economic, health, landscape, and social role.

Research has often overlooked the CAP's effects, undervaluing social perceptions of public funding in this sector. In this study, understanding European Citizens' perceptions of the composition of funding and some of its effects allows for identifying social representations of reality and anticipating people's attitudes and behaviour towards the CAP.

The CAP accounts for approximately one-third of the EU budget, sparking considerable impact and debate among both citizens and policymakers (Buckwell et al., 2019). Consequently, farmers and other citizens need to reach a consensus or "agreement of understanding" that ensures the compensation for farming activities reflects the value of the services provided to the broader EU community.

Agriculture, although contributing only about 1.5% to the EU's overall GDP, is a cornerstone of European society, extending far beyond its economic value. It ensures food security, providing diverse, high-quality, and safe food products that meet the dietary needs of a growing population, preventing major food crises in difficult times such as the one we live with Ukraine's war (Rabbi et al., 2023). Beyond this, agriculture provides foundations for rural livelihoods by sustaining employment and preventing depopulation in remote areas, which is vital for maintaining vibrant local communities and economies (Lillemets et al., 2022).

Environmental sustainability is another critical function of agriculture. Through sustainable practices, such as agroecology and precision farming, the sector contributes to biodiversity preservation, soil conservation, and carbon sequestration (Hussain et al., 2021). Agriculture also plays a role in climate change mitigation by adopting practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance resilience to extreme weather events (Balasundram et al., 2023).

In addition, agricultural landscapes embody Europe's cultural heritage, supporting agritourism and preserving traditions integral to the continent's identity (Mueller et al., 2021). The sector is crucial for the bioeconomy, contributing to renewable energy production, bioplastics, and other bio-based materials, thereby aligning with the EU's circular economy goals (Samer et al., 2022). In today's context,

agriculture serves not just as an economic activity but as a multidimensional force addressing global challenges and fostering sustainability across economic, social, and environmental domains.

This article addresses the CAP and its impact, seen as procedural and multidimensional, on the European agricultural sector. The research question is “What are the perceptions of the European population regarding the composition and orientation of community funding for agriculture in Europe?” To answer the question, we investigated factors such as demography social, and political positioning as explanatory variables. In addition, optimism about the future of the EU and place of dwelling (rural, suburban, or urban areas) were also used as explanatory variables.

While answering this question, we aim to characterise the EU population’s perceptions of CAP to contribute to the improvement of knowledge about the dialectical relationship between common European agricultural policy and the evolution of the agricultural sector.

2. Theoretical background

The first version of the CAP was formulated in the early 1960s during the post-World War II era. Its initial priorities were to stimulate agricultural production by providing farmers with generous production subsidies and guaranteeing minimum prices for targeted products. This aimed to stabilise the agricultural population and reduce rural exodus, while also promoting public health (Birt, 2016). Increased agricultural productivity was crucial for food security and ensuring a stable supply of affordable food (Gay et al., 2005). Subsequent reforms aimed to improve policy measures in production, competitiveness, labour force, and food security (Mavrodin, 2015).

The 'Farming Programme for 1980' initiated by Mansholt sought to reduce the agricultural workforce, promote rural exodus, reorganize production structures, and modernize agricultural enterprises. It also encouraged the creation of producer cooperatives and reforestation initiatives (Wirth, 1970).

The 'MacSharry reform' marked the first significant CAP overhaul, shifting subsidies from price and market support to direct support for farmers. This reform moved price support from consumers to taxpayers and changed subsidies from sales to production, allowing more market freedom in setting product prices (Gay et al., 2005).

'Agenda 2000' aimed to make European agriculture more market-oriented and environmentally focused, integrating forestry into rural development and emphasizing the multifunctional role of forests. Despite these changes, price support and income payments remained dominant (Gay et al., 2005). The CAP evolved to promote rural income diversification and social cohesion.

During the 2014–2020 cycle, the CAP addressed new challenges like economic crises, globalization, and environmental pressures. It adopted a two-pillar approach: financing agriculture based on economic and ecological criteria, and multi-annual rural development planning promoting competitiveness and sustainable resource management (Nazzaro and Marotta, 2016). The CAP shifted from focusing solely on farm production to encompassing social, rural, and environmental support (Bailey et al., 2016).

In the 2021–2027 cycle, the CAP aims to reconcile vital agriculture with a resilient agri-food system that benefits the entire community. It emphasizes agriculture's role in combating climate change and integrating environmental policies with agricultural practices (De Castro et al., 2020). The policy underscores the importance of aligning agricultural activities with climate and biodiversity goals (Heyl et al., 2021). Despite its significant policy directions, research has not adequately addressed perceptions of the CAP's objectives (Popescu et al., 2021).

The funding of agriculture in Europe is a systemic and multidimensional issue. Systemically, the CAP, established post-war, has seen little change in its funding mechanisms. Multidimensionally, it involves supply, market demand, demography, climate, technology, and both European and global competition. External pressures have pushed for the elimination of Europe’s agricultural funding model. Despite these pressures, such as EU enlargement, trade talks, and third-world development, the CAP has maintained the socialization of production costs. The McSharry reform of 1992 replaced price support with direct

subsidies partially linked to production, but the disconnection of EU subsidies from production subsidies has been largely cosmetic(Grossman, 1994).

CAP negotiations involve various stakeholders motivated by different objectives, reflecting their relative political influence more than community interests (Matthews, 2013). Consequently, CAP results from intense negotiations among diverse stakeholders.

Since its inception in 1962, these multiple CAP reforms evolved to address arising challenges. Initially, the CAP focused on market price support. However, by the 1980s, the 1992 MacSharry reforms shifted by reducing price supports and introducing direct payments to farmers, aiming to align production with market demand and reduce surpluses. Subsequent reforms, including the 2003 Fischler reforms, further decoupled subsidies from production, promoting environmental sustainability and rural development. These measures have been effective in mitigating overproduction and enhancing environmental stewardship. However, critiques persist regarding the equitable distribution of subsidies and the CAP's impact on global trade. While CAP reforms have progressively addressed inefficiencies and environmental concerns, ongoing adjustments are necessary to balance agricultural productivity with socio-economic and environmental objectives (Cunha and Swinbank, 2011).

The CAP has exhibited contradictions in its reforms, particularly concerning rural demographics. Initially, the CAP's focus on increasing agricultural productivity led to the consolidation of farms and the adoption of intensive farming practices (Olper et al., 2012). This shift contributed to rural depopulation, as smaller farms became economically unviable, prompting migration to urban areas (Renwick et al., 2013). In response, later CAP reforms aimed to revitalise rural communities by promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development initiatives (Davoudi and Stead, 2002). Another significant contradiction is the tension between environmental objectives and agricultural productivity. While reforms since the 1990s have introduced "greening" measures to promote biodiversity and sustainability, subsidies still support intensive farming practices, leading to habitat destruction and increased emissions (Quiroga et al., 2017). Additionally, CAP's focus on food security often clashes with global trade fairness, as subsidies distort international markets, disadvantaging developing countries (Giuliani and Baron, 2023). Another contradiction lies in the policy's claim to equitable rural development, despite larger farms disproportionately benefiting from subsidies, exacerbating inequalities within rural economies (Doukas et al., 2023).

Sustainability, combining agriculture with ecosystem preservation, has gained importance. In sustainable agriculture, all spheres (environmental, economic, and social) are crucial (Zegar and Wrzaszcz, 2017). Agriculture aims to produce market goods and environmental, social, and cultural services (Zegar and Wrzaszcz, 2017). Sustainable agriculture aims conservation of natural resources and environment protection while encouraging efficient and competitive production, and enhancing the quality of life (Ikerd, 1993; Shrestha et al., 2021). CAP is a major driver of reform towards sustainable agriculture, viewing agriculture as heterogeneous, requiring an institutional setting that addresses interactions efficiently and sustainably (Öhlund et al., 2015).

However, implementing sustainable agriculture faces various obstacles, including limited local adaptations within the current EU framework (Siebrecht, 2020). The concept's versatility leads to differing scientific conclusions; economically, public funding helps agricultural enterprises achieve sustainability (Guth et al., 2022), while ecologically, CAP's shortcomings hinder sustainability (Pe'er et al., 2019). Thus, CAP is context-dependent, politically influenced, and embodies a contradiction between its goals and means regarding sustainability.

The literature emphasises the need to adopt and apply a holistic approach to the analysis and intervention in agriculture (e.g., (Brown et al., 2023; Kerr et al., 2023; Zegar and Wrzaszcz, 2017)). Finding socially rational solutions requires a holistic approach to agricultural sustainable development, which implies combining horizontal elements (action plans) and vertical elements (planetary, national, and local), including production and commercialisation processes, but also environmental, social, and cultural goods and services. In a more technologically advanced version, the holistic perspective offers a holistic approach to highly productive and environmentally friendly agriculture, combining the Internet of Things

(IoT) and data management in precision agriculture in the fourth agricultural revolution, also referred to as Agriculture 4.0 (Kazakis and Tsirliganis, 2023; Zegar and Wrzaszcz, 2017). This study is inspired by the holistic approach to perceptions, as it analyses the effects of climate (planetary level), population and human communities (macro level), gender, age, education, and agricultural training (micro level).

Perception is procedural, contingent, and selective. Specifically, perceptual selection depends not only upon the primary determinants of attention but is also a servant of one's interests, needs, and values (Bodenhausen et al., 2012). It lacks the typology of reality that organises the objects of the world into categories. Categorisation is paramount to human cognition serving a basic epistemic function of organising and structuring our knowledge about the world (Bodenhausen et al., 2012). Additionally, perception mediates the relationship between signs and significance. People perceive and think about the social world differently from what would be expected based solely on the stimulus information and principles of formal logic (Higgins and Bargh, 1987; McMahon and Isik, 2023). Perceptions arise in the context of activity and guide individual actions (Rhodes, 2017). Thus, perceptions play a fundamental role in defining reality and human conduct.

Studies conducted in the agricultural sector have highlighted the importance of farmers' perceptions for the success of the CAP (e.g., (Bernués et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2021; Simoncini et al., 2019). Knowledge forms the basis of perceptions, which can change beliefs, beliefs can change attitudes, and attitudes can stimulate behaviour (Akhtar et al., 2018). Understanding farmers' perceptions is crucial for influencing farm management and the implementation of agro-environmental policies (Huttunen, 2016). Predisposition to buy crop insurance depends on risk perception (Trujillo-Barrera et al., 2016). The perception of the impacts of the CAP depends on factors such as the clarity of objectives, the complexity of implementing some measures, and the need to adapt measures to the context (Recanati et al., 2019). However, farmers reveal insufficient knowledge of the CAP and that their practices can be greatly influenced by the behaviour of people in their social environment, which would require many efforts in terms of time and money, public training programs enabling farmers to acquire the necessary complete understanding of the new policy design (Donati et al., 2015). Therefore, understanding farmers' perceptions is fundamental for designing and implementing agricultural policies (Akhtar et al., 2018).

Perceptions of the CAP vary across socio-cultural and economic groups. Politically, individuals with left-leaning ideologies often criticise the CAP for favouring large agribusinesses, while those on the right may support it for ensuring food security and supporting rural economies (Bertoni and Olper, 2012). Social class influences views, with higher-income groups potentially benefiting from land ownership subsidies, whereas lower-income individuals may see the CAP as exacerbating inequalities (Vainio et al., 2021). Community size also plays a role; residents in urban areas might be more critical of the CAP due to concerns about environmental impacts and the use of public funds, whereas rural communities often view it as essential for economic stability (García del Horno et al., 2024). Occupationally, those within the agricultural sector generally support the CAP for providing financial support, while individuals outside the sector may question its fairness and efficiency (Tienhaara et al., 2024).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Data source and variables

The set of data is open access through GESIS, The Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences Eurobarometer, web page and was captured during the European survey Eurobarometer 97.1 survey (EC, 2023). This survey was conducted from the 21st of February to the 22nd of March in 2022 and contains n = 26502 interviews with European citizens from all 27 EU countries.

For this particular study, we used as a dependent variable the answers to the question QA10 – 'What do you think are the main reasons why the EU spends a significant proportion of its budget (around 30% of the total EU budget) on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?'.

The interviewees were asked to make a maximum of two choices from the following list to answer the question:

1 – 'Agriculture is a sector financed almost entirely by the EU budget, rather than at national or local level';

2 – 'Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to guarantee the food supply of Europeans';

3 – 'Agriculture requires heavy human and financial investments';

4 – 'Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to ensure sustainable farming';

5 – 'The production of food products in the EU is more expensive than in other countries, because of stricter standards, e.g., Animal welfare';

6 – 'Addressing the environment and climate change issues in rural areas';

As independent variables, we used 'Gender' as a factor and as covariates:

'Age' – How old are you?

'Age Education' – How old were you when you stopped full-time education? 'Refusal' and 'Don't Know' were also available as options but were excluded from the analysis;

'Political Position' – In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". How would you place your views on this scale? rated from 1 (left) to 10 (right). 'Refusal' and 'Don't Know' were also available as options but were excluded from the analysis;

'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. The options 'Other', 'None', 'Refusal', and 'Don't know' were also available but were excluded from the analysis;

'Community Size' – Size of locality 1 – Rural, 2 – Town, 3 – City.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'.

'EU Future' – Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the EU? 'Refusal' and 'Don't Know' were also available as options but were excluded from the analysis;

3.2 Statistical analysis

The dependent variables are dichotomic (being chosen or not). As such, we have adjusted each of the dependent variables with multivariable logistic regressions using the independent variables. The independent variables entering the models were selected with a backward stepwise procedure using the Wald chi-square as the significance test. The test of significance of the models was the likelihood ratio chi-square. The odds ratios of the models' parameters were also calculated. The level of significance was set for all the tests as $p < 0.05$.

The models were adjusted without intercept via Generalised Linear Models, using the statistical package IBM Corp.® SPSS® Statistics, Armonk, NY, USA. Version: 29.0.2.0 (20).

4. Results

The EU surveyed citizens' choices to the main question 'What do you think are the main reasons why the EU spends a significant proportion of its budget (around 30% of the total EU budget) on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?' are represented in Figure 1. The choice 'Agriculture is a sector financed almost entirely by the EU budget, rather than at national or local level' was the most frequent choice, followed by 'Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to ensure sustainable farming'. All the six options offered were a noteworthy number of times chosen; therefore, we can assume that all the options are very relevant for EU citizens. The options 'Other', 'None, this proportion is not justifiable' and 'Don't know' were chosen a marginal number of times and were, therefore, excluded from further analysis. After

the chi-square goodness of fit test ($\chi^2 = 2353$, 5df, $p < 0.001$), it is concluded that there are statistically significant differences in the numbers of chosen options to answer the main question.

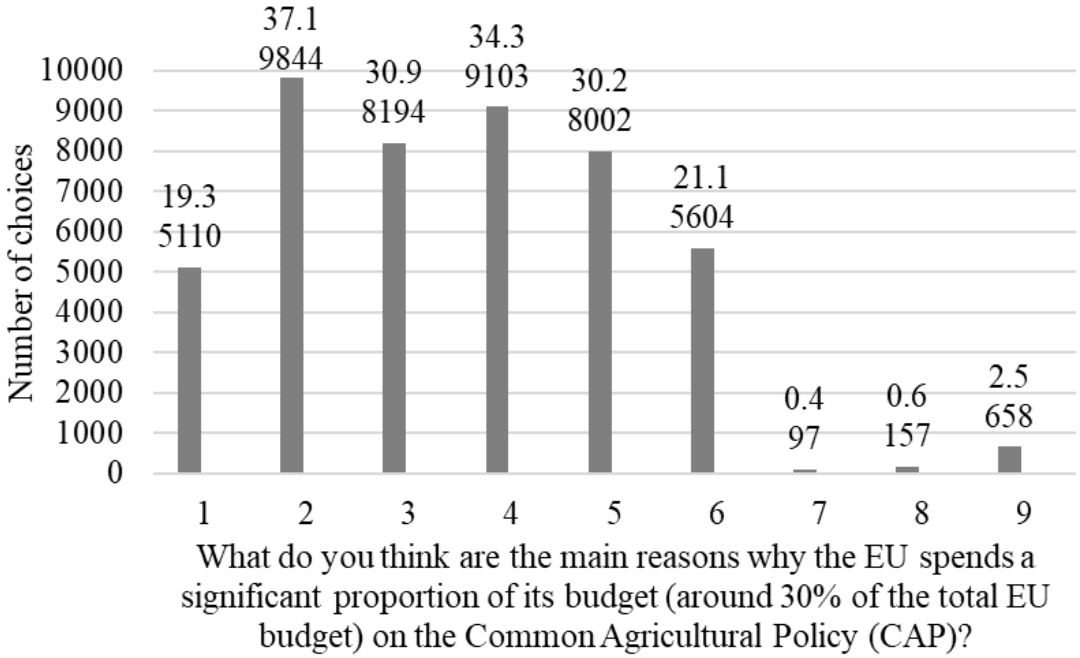


Fig 1. Choices to the question 'What do you think are the main reasons why the EU spends a significant proportion of its budget (around 30% of the total EU budget) on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?'. *Source: own elaboration*

The n = 26502 Interviewees were allowed to pick up only one of the options. Notes: 1 – Agriculture is a sector financed almost entirely by the EU budget, rather than at national or local level; 2 – Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to guarantee the food supply of Europeans; 3 – Agriculture requires heavy human and financial investments; 4 – Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to ensure sustainable farming; 5 – The production of food products in the EU is more expensive than in other countries, because of stricter standards, e.g., Animal welfare; 6 – Addressing the environment and climate change issues in rural areas; 7 – Other; 8 – None, this proportion is not justifiable; 9 – Don't know.

Of the seven explicative variables, 'Political position' and 'EU future' did not show significance and, therefore, were not entered into the models. In Table 1 we can find the parameterization of the fitted models. The odds ratio for each of the parameters in the models is given in Table 2.

Model 1 – Agriculture is a sector financed almost entirely by the EU budget, rather than at national or local level

The significant variables in this model are 'Gender', 'Age', and 'Social Class'.
The probability of this being one of the chosen options of an EU citizen:

- tends to decrease if this citizen is a man (46.8% lower in comparison with women);
- tends to increase with the age of the individual (0.3% per year of age);
- tends to decrease as the social class tends to be higher (8.8% per progression point).

Model 2 – Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to guarantee the food supply of Europeans

The significant variables in this model are 'Gender' and 'Age education'.
The probability of this being one of the chosen options of an EU citizen:

- tends to decrease if this citizen is a man (12.1% lower in comparison with women);
- tends to decrease as the education level tends to be higher (0.8% for each more year of full-time education completed).

Tab 1. Omnibus test (likelihood ratio chi-square), and parameters (β) of the indicated independent variables of the multivariable logistic regression models fit to each of the choices (1 to 6) to the question 'What do you think are the main reasons why the EU spends a significant proportion of its budget (around 30% of the total EU budget) on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?'. Cells left blank are indicative of the non-significance of the respective independent variable (p >0.05) in the indicated model. Source: own elaboration

	Models					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Likelihood Ratio χ2 (df)	7984(4)***	3356(3)***	3381(4)***	1891(3)***	3167(5)***	7018(4)***
Independent Variables	Models' parameters (β)					
Gender Men	1.428***	0.658***	0.346***	0.839***	0.934***	1.096***
Women	1.434***	0.719***	0.235***	0.733***	1.021***	1.040***
Age	0.003*		0.006*	-0.003***	0.004***	
Age Education		0.009***			-0.015***	0.019***
Community Size					-0.046*	
Social Class	-0.092***		0.169***			-0.062***

*Notes: df – degrees of freedom; p-value *<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001; 1 – Agriculture is a sector financed almost entirely by the EU budget, rather than at national or local level; 2 – Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to guarantee the food supply of Europeans; 3 – Agriculture requires heavy human and financial investments; 4 – Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to ensure sustainable farming; 5 – The production of food products in the EU is more expensive than in other countries, because of stricter standards, e.g., Animal welfare; 6 – Addressing the environment and climate change issues in rural areas.*

Tab 2. Odds ratio (eβ) for the parameters (β) of the models indicated in Table 1. Source: own elaboration

	Exp(β)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender Men	4.169	1.931	1.413	2.314	2.544	2.991
Women	4.637	2.052	1.265	2.088	2.776	2.830
Age	1.003			0.997	1.004	
Age Education		0.991	1.006		0.985	1.019
Community Size					0.955	
Social Class	0.912		1.185			0.940

Notes: 1 – Agriculture is a sector financed almost entirely by the EU budget, rather than at national or local level; 2 – Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to guarantee the food supply of Europeans; 3 – Agriculture requires heavy human and financial investments; 4 – Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to ensure sustainable farming; 5 – The production of food products in the EU is more expensive than in other countries, because of stricter standards, e.g., Animal welfare; 6 – Addressing the environment and climate change issues in rural areas.

Model 3 – Agriculture requires heavy human and financial investments

The significant variables in this model are 'Gender', 'Age Education', and 'Social Class'.

The probability of this being one of the chosen options of an EU citizen:

- tends to increase if this citizen is a man (14.8% higher in comparison with women);
- tends to increase as the education level tends to be higher (0.6% for each more year of full-time education completed);
- tends to increase as the social class tends to be higher (18.5% per progression point);

Model 4 – Financial aid to farmers makes it possible to ensure sustainable farming

The significant variables in this model are 'Gender' and 'Age'.

The probability of this being one of the chosen options of an EU citizen:

- tends to increase if this citizen is a man (22.6% lower in comparison with women);
- tends to decrease with the age of the individual (0.3% per year of age);

Model 5 – The production of food products in the EU is more expensive than in other countries, because of stricter standards, e.g., Animal welfare

The significant variables in this model are 'Gender', 'Age', 'Age education', and 'Community size'.

The probability of this being one of the chosen options of an EU citizen:

- tends to decrease if this citizen is a man (23.2% lower in comparison with women);
- tends to decrease with the age of the individual (0.4% per year of age);
- tends to decrease as the education level tends to be higher (1.5% for each more year less of full-time education completed);
- tends to decrease as the community of the individual tends to be larger (4.5% per point of progression from rural to town and another 4.5% from town to city).

Model 6 – Addressing the environment and climate change issues in rural areas

The significant variables in this model are 'Gender', 'Age Education', and 'Social Class'.

The probability of this being one of the chosen options of an EU citizen:

- tends to increase if this citizen is a man (16.1% higher in comparison with women);
- tends to increase as the education level tends to be higher (1.9% for each year less of full-time education completed);
- tends to decrease as the social class tends to be higher (6.0% per progression point).

5. Discussion

The survey results analysed in this study are the product of the situated perceptions of the respondents. Even if they do not correspond to the reality of European agriculture, these perceptions shape what people think about it and the CAP. The survey was used to infer the following assumptions: there is a positive association between independent variables (gender, age, formal education, household size, and social classes) and the dependent variable (perception of European agricultural funding); quantitative research allows a desirable ontological separation between the researched subject and the research object. The explanatory theory of the results of the associations emerges from the literature review and was selected based on the criterion of ability to explain the results obtained.

Results show that gender-specific perceptions of CAP funding differ between men and women. Women are more likely than men to recognize that agriculture in the EU is primarily financed through the EU budget rather than national or local budgets. This awareness may stem from a broader understanding or concern about the centralized nature of agricultural funding and its implications for national policies. Women are also more likely to recognize CAP funding as a guarantee of food supply. Women also tend to appreciate more the role of financial aid in ensuring a stable food supply for Europeans, which shows concerns for food security and therefore maintenance of a reliable food system within the EU. Women are also more capable of adhering to stricter production standards which indicates an understanding of the regulatory landscape and its impact on production costs and prices.

On the other hand, men are more likely to point out that agriculture requires substantial human and financial investments, which reflects a focus on the economic and labour-intensive nature of the sector, recognizing the significant resources needed to maintain agricultural productivity. Men show also a greater tendency to believe that financial aid to farmers is crucial for ensuring sustainable farming practices, which suggests an emphasis on the role of CAP in the promotion of long-term environmental benefits. Men are also more likely to consider the importance of addressing environmental and climate change issues in rural areas through CAP funding.

Gender is a social construct that encapsulates the perceptual and material interactions between men and women, including the traits and roles that each society attributes to each sex (Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015). Gender differences in roles, responsibilities, choices, and decisions can significantly impact

the provision of ecosystem services, the functionality of landscapes, and environmental sustainability (Jackson et al., 2021). The significance of understanding gender-specific perceptions and priorities in agricultural contexts underscores the necessity for tools designed to gather and utilize this information effectively with implications in land policy development (Mata et al., 2024a). Gender is a mainstream subject in environmental and development activities (Arora-Jonsson and Sijapati, 2018), is one of the goals of the CAP (Pe'er et al., 2019), and has been a priority within the EU (Shortall and Marangudakis, 2024).

The EU agriculture sector faces considerable gender equality gaps, primarily due to women's limited access to land rights and productive resources, employment and decision-making restrictions, and unpaid labour issues (Diamanti and Duncan, 2023). Incorporating a gender perspective into agricultural policies is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of these programs and policies, which influence food supply security, poverty alleviation, and increased resilience to climate change (Streimikis J. and Kyriakopoulos G.L., 2024).

The age of citizens within the EU also affects perceptions of CAP funding. Older individuals are more likely to recognize that agriculture is a sector financed almost entirely by the EU budget rather than at the national or local levels, which may be rooted in a historical perspective, as older generations might have witnessed the evolution of the CAP and its increasing centralization over the years. The older might also have a deeper understanding of the political and economic rationale behind CAP, appreciating its role in unifying agricultural standards and support mechanisms across member states (Sutherland, 2023). This view allows them to see the CAP as a stabilizing force in European agriculture, justifying its substantial budget allocation. Younger individuals, on the other hand, select the reason that financial aid to farmers ensures sustainable farming, reflecting a growing awareness and concern among the younger population regarding sustainability (Serebrennikov et al., 2020). Younger respondents also think that the production of food in the EU is more expensive due to stricter standards, such as animal welfare, which is expressed in a generational shift towards valuing ethical and sustainable production practices (Barska and Wojciechowska-Solis, 2018).

The EU's farming sector is predominantly composed of an older population, posing a threat to the industry's long-term viability and raising concerns about innovation. This issue is even more acute among women farmers, and the solution has been addressed with the entrance of emigrants (Dudek and Rosa, 2023). Agricultural land abandonment in Europe is a pressing issue, reflecting post-war trends of rural depopulation, the ageing of the rural population, and the diminishing competitive advantages in the rural economy (Sutherland, 2023). It is especially problematic in mountainous, remote, and semiarid regions (Dax et al., 2021).

Variations in perceptions are also provided by different educational demographics. Less educated individuals are more likely to believe that financial aid to farmers is essential for guaranteeing the food supply of Europeans, which shows an understanding of the impact of agricultural subsidies on the availability and stability of food within the EU (Penne and Goedemé, 2021). In addition, the same less educated are more inclined to refer to the higher production costs of EU food products due to stricter standards, such as those related to animal welfare, revealing awareness of the economic challenges posed by regulatory compliance (Barska and Wojciechowska-Solis, 2018). On the other hand, more educated individuals are more likely to recognize that agriculture requires significant human and financial investments, reflecting a deeper awareness of the complexities and resource-intensive nature of modern farming (Gabriel and Gandorfer, 2023). More educated respondents are also more likely to identify addressing environmental and climate change issues in rural areas as a key reason for CAP funding (Mata et al., 2024b). Such a perspective aligns with a more strategic view of agricultural policy, emphasizing the long-term benefits of sustainable practices in mitigating the impacts of climate change (Mata et al., 2024c).

Larger communities (cities) are more likely than towns and rural areas to believe that the production of food products in the EU is more expensive due to stricter standards, such as animal welfare. This perception may arise from greater exposure to information about regulatory frameworks and consumer advocacy (Mata et al., 2024c). In contrast, residents of rural areas and towns may focus more on the practical economic challenges of farming, as these communities are closer to the agricultural sector

and might prioritize other aspects, such as the financial support to sustain local farms, ensure food security, and maintain rural livelihoods (Mata and Dos-Santos, 2024; Penne and Goedemé, 2021).

Individuals from higher social classes are more likely to perceive that agriculture is financed almost entirely by the EU budget rather than at national or local levels, which mirrors awareness of the funding mechanisms and the centralized nature of agricultural support within the EU. These higher social classes may have more access to information and resources providing information on EU policies are structured and funded (Mata and Dos-Santos, 2024). Furthermore, higher social classes show a higher probability of recognizing that agriculture requires significant human and financial investments. This may be explained by a higher degree of exposure to the economic and logistical challenges faced by the agricultural sector, revealing a better understanding of the necessity of substantial investments to maintain productivity and innovation. (Mata and Dos-Santos, 2024) On the other hand, individuals from lower social classes have a higher probability of selecting the reason that CAP addresses environmental and climate change issues in rural areas. This perception may highlight substantial concerns for sustainability and the long-term health of rural environments (Mata and Dos-Santos, 2024). Lower social classes may be more directly impacted by environmental changes and thus prioritize policies that mitigate climate change and promote ecological resilience.

6. Conclusions

The differences in perceptions of CAP's funding are diverse considering gender, age, level of education, social status, and location. When considering different gender, women focus on food security, production standards, and the centralized nature of funding, while men focus on investment needs, sustainability, and environmental issues. We can also distinguish different priorities and values within the EU population when considering different age groups. Older individuals focus on the historical and financial aspects and younger individuals on sustainability and ethical standards. In terms of educational levels, the diverse priorities and concerns within the EU population. Less educated individuals prioritize food security and economic challenges, whereas more educated individuals emphasize sustainability and investment needs. The differences depending on the location are also evident, with urban residents being more likely to emphasize the higher costs associated with stricter production standards, in contrast, rural and town residents focus more on the economic realities and direct benefits of CAP funding. Finally, the perceptions of why the EU allocates a significant portion of its budget to the CAP vary also between different social classes. Higher social classes refer to the centralized financing and the heavy investments required in agriculture, while lower social classes prioritize CAP's environmental and climate-related benefits. Recognizing and addressing these differences is crucial for effective policy communication, development, and engagement, ensuring that the CAP meets all European citizens' diverse needs.

Emerging from the present study, we would, therefore, provide the following recommendation to policymakers:

Incorporate gender-sensitive approaches in policies as gender-specific perceptions are relevant. Women's emphasis on food security and sustainable practices highlights their potential role in shaping CAP policies that address regulatory and sustainability goals. Programmes ensuring equal access to land, resources, and decision-making for women should be prioritised.

Address the ageing agricultural workforce by creating incentives for younger generations to engage in farming. This could include financial aid for start-ups, training in sustainable practices, and initiatives that leverage younger populations' focus on environmental sustainability.

Develop targeted communication strategies based on educational levels. Simplify messaging for less-educated individuals to highlight CAP's impact on food security while engaging more educated groups with data on sustainability and economic investments.

Recognise differing perceptions between urban and rural populations. In rural areas, focus on policies that sustain livelihoods and stabilise local economies. In urban centres, emphasise CAP's role in ensuring ethical production and environmental stewardship.

Promote awareness across age groups reinforcing the CAP's historical contributions to agricultural stability for older populations. For younger individuals, highlight the CAP's commitment to sustainability and ethical farming.

Foster resilience in vulnerable areas by mitigating rural depopulation and land abandonment, especially in remote regions, and by supporting small-scale farmers and promoting innovative agricultural practices tailored to local challenges.

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