

Food Prices Keep Rising, Farmers Protest, Nature is Deteriorating: What's going wrong?

European Election 2024



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Introduction

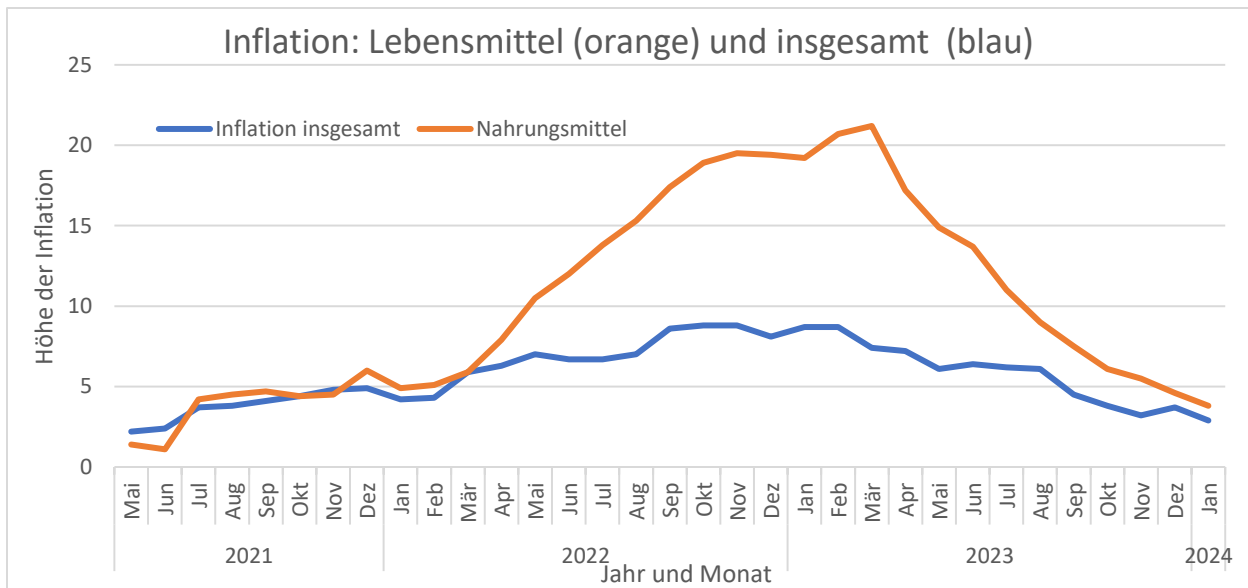
What would be a left-wing demand? Nonsense from the AfD

The farmers are on the streets, bringing tractors and trailers with them, blocking highways and neighborhoods. They seem to want to pose a question of power. Against the ruling parties in Europe, yes, against Europe as a whole. By, for example, preventing assemblies of certain parties.

Yet, agriculture receives the largest share of the money distributed by the EU: over 35% of total expenditures from 2014 to 2020. On average, every EU citizen pays 32 cents a

day for EU agricultural policy. The absurdity is: Despite this, farmers do not earn well (approximately €44,000 per year). And a significant portion of the money distributed by the EU does not even end up with them: insurance, energy, or real estate companies, essentially all landowners, pocket these area premiums if they own and allow farmland to be cultivated. Estimates suggest that these entities collect up to 50% of EU subsidies.

Food prices: And despite these high contributions, food prices continue to rise, even though this trend has somewhat stabilized. The German price level (see figure) is not even the most affected: In Hungary and the Baltic states, the increase is even higher. Those of us whose money was already insufficient barely have enough at the end of the month to buy decent food. And quite a few rely on standing in line at food banks to get a warm meal. For good quality food that isn't fast-food-like, it's simply not affordable anymore. It's down to the cheapest Gouda and cheap sausage because other sandwich fillings are out of reach.



And that doesn't improve the situation. Cheap meat, cheap cheese mean poor quality food, which in turn means animal industry, factory farming, low wages for agricultural workers, significant environmental damage from manure, worldwide deforestation, and medication (for animals in intensive farming) in groundwater.

Fuel emissions: In Germany, animal husbandry accounts for around two-thirds of emissions from agriculture. The main contributors are the eleven million cattle - including dairy cows - and the manure, dung, and slurry they produce, along with 24 million pigs. Moreover, agriculture producing feed for meat production receives the highest share of subsidies from the EU (66.2% of income), with meat producers themselves still receiving about 28%. In horticulture, it's 2% on average, and 38% overall.



Manipulation of nature: Intensive animal farming entails endless suffering for the animals. The natural lifespan of a pig is 20 years. Yet, in intensive farming, a sow's lifespan is under 3 years, while a fattening pig's lifespan is 6-7 months. Similarly, for chickens, their natural lifespan is 8-15 years. However, in intensive farming, a laying hen's lifespan is 20 months, and a fattening chicken's lifespan is a mere 40 days.

Agriculture has become a symbol of how we have detached ourselves from all respect and regard for nature. Nature, whether animals or plants, has become mere objects of our domination, which we can arbitrarily assemble and modify. The first generation of genetically optimized pigs is about to be approved in the USA: immune to typical barn and minimal space diseases, thus more profitable because fewer antibiotics need to be used. These livestock animals are no longer subjects with their own lives but rather money per kilogram quantities. They are somewhat akin to genetically modified grains that can be safely sprayed with glyphosate. The consequence of the latter: no more insects.

Forty years ago, driving 200 km would invariably result in having to clean insects off the windshield; today, you can drive 2000 km and it stays clean. This is due to pesticides, but also other factors such as increasingly built-up areas, highly maintained gardens, lawn mowers, and the eradication of all areas where nature can develop undisturbed.

The absence of the technological superiority that is standard today forced millennia-long cooperation with nature, contributing to the diversity of plants and animals. However, this cooperation has turned into the destruction of nature - in the context of corresponding profit demands and induced consumer will.

We cannot continue living with rising food costs, but neither can we continue with this approach to food production.

What would be a leftist response to these problems?

The first response is relatively simple: move away from industrial mass production of meat, which consumes over 50 percent of agricultural land. Thirty percent of current meat production would be sufficient, possibly even less in the long run. Instead, transition to vegetable and grain cultivation, producing food that tastes as good as meat. This would free up more land, require less labor, generate less waste and transportation, and ultimately make food cheaper again.

Additionally, move away from purely market-driven agriculture with small farms that have no power against cooperatives and discounters, not even against large farming operations. Food production is a commons - a foundation that we all must rely on. Therefore, it should also be operated as a commons, with fair incomes and good living and working conditions, similar to the standards we aspire to in healthcare, allowing for extensive cooperation and care for recipients (e.g., through a massive expansion of organic farming).

A more far-reaching response is more challenging: move away from viewing nature as a controllable, arbitrarily divisible object, a mere means of profit extraction, an endless wellspring of resource appropriation. Instead, recognize nature as an autonomous subject with its own unfolding, rights, ample space in this world, and minimal control.

And what do the alternative losers propose for Germany and elsewhere in Europe? Actually, very little, although it is about the fundamental basis of our existence, food. Their demands include:

e.g. preserving agriculturally usable land: **very useful** for further maize deserts for feed production for meat, with corresponding pesticide use and continued destruction of biodiversity.

e.g. humane and locally-based livestock farming, but only with a "practical" implementation of animal welfare guidelines. **How nice for the animals**, who continue to be confined to barns for a few short months before heading to industrial slaughterhouses.

e.g. structural conditions for the successful operation of small and medium-sized farms. **How promising is this**, when agricultural production becomes increasingly industrialized and large corporations crush small ones, similar to the fate of seamstresses and tailors.

And what are they not demanding? Food as public commons of appropriate quality and quantity, affordable for everyone, and produced without catastrophic effects on the rest of nature. A societal relationship with nature that grants it inherent rights and development possibilities, thus ending nature as a purely dominatable object that anyone can exploit if they have enough money.

The AfD - just another party of the affluent and socially established.