

Pays: Belgique

Conseil des ministres de l'Agriculture et de la Souveraineté alimentaire : "Quelle stratégie européenne pour renforcer la souveraineté agricole de l'UE tout en stimulant des modes de production durables ?"

Belgium has been a member of the EU since 1958; it is also one of the 6 founding countries, member of NATO, the Euro zone and the Schengen area. It has a total surface area of 30,688 km² and is made up of 3 regions: the Walloon region, the Bruges region and the Flemish region, and three communities: the French, the German and the Flemish. The three official languages of Belgium are French, Dutch and German. Its capital is Brussels, also a European capital, seat of the European institutions since 1997. It has also been a federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy since 1993, whose king is Philip of Belgium and whose prime minister is Alexander de Croo. It's a generally Catholic country, with 57.1% of its inhabitants being Catholic Christians. It's located in the center of the European megalopolis, neighboring Holland, Germany, Luxembourg and France. It has a low relief, made up of three zones: low Belgium, a coastal zone with an altitude of less than 100 meters, middle Belgium, plains with an altitude of between 100 and 200 meters, and finally high Belgium, with hills from 200 to more than 500 meters. The country's climate is temperate oceanic, with an average of 200 days of rain per year, very regular during the 365 days of the year. What European strategy to strengthen the EU's agricultural sovereignty while stimulating sustainable production methods? It is thanks to its notable agricultural productions, each time more "organic" that Belgium, despite being a small country, succeeds in integrating itself in the European scene and thus also collaborates to its agricultural and economic independence.

"The rural areas represent 80% of the territory of the European Union and 30% of its population, that is 137 million people". This third of the territory is therefore responsible for the agricultural production of the EU. More specifically, Belgium has received more than 500 million euros from the Common Agricultural Policy fund in 2019, in order to expand its production, amplify its useful agricultural areas and increase its income. "For every euro spent, the agricultural sector generates an additional €0.76 for the EU economy." The agricultural sector is therefore responsible for an important part of the European Union's economy, however, what the European Union wants is to achieve independence and sovereignty in the food sector compared to the rest of the world, while maintaining its label of "environmentally neutral" following the European Green Pact: to end net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and to decouple economic growth from the exploitation of non-renewable resources.

Within Belgium, agricultural sovereignty is particularly noticeable in the area of grain production. "Belgium's utilized agricultural area (UAA) being 1,385,582 ha, the share of cereal land reaches 23.3%. These are cereals for grain. If we add corn feed, which has developed very strongly in Belgium [in 2006], we need to add another 163,825 ha, bringing the total for cereals to 486,056 ha or 35.1% of the UAA." Cereal production is therefore a very important economic source in Belgium, and consequently in the European Union. Belgium is the ninth most profitable producer of cereals in the world, and the second in Europe after the Netherlands. However, its production is much higher, with a

total of 2,483,008 tons produced, almost double that of the Netherlands. This production has increased due to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, both countries also being important cereal producers. Russia is classed as the 5th largest producer in the world, and Ukraine as the 8th. Currently, Belgium's cereal production has increased sharply as the invasion of Ukraine has caused strong expenses on the supply and demand of agricultural products at a global level, hence the rise in food prices and the lack of supply, hence the increase in its production and export, making the European Union a global supplier of cereals and a powerhouse with the food weapon.

"Between 1990 and 2019, the number of farms converted or in the process of being converted to "organic" increased from 47 farms to 1,816, or 14.3% of the total number of farms in Wallonia" (one of three regions in Belgium). This shows how Belgium is trying to collaborate with the EU in order to be able to realize the European green pact and transform the European continent into the first "ecologically neutral" continent. This neutrality seeks to compensate all non-ecological choices whose suppression is not economically viable, such as certain types of agricultural production, the partnership with certain companies, the use of certain machinery, by ecological actions, like planting trees, rewarding organic farmers, etc. Moreover, organic agriculture is further rewarded and promoted by the government: for example, 1000 bar codes have been distributed to Walloon organic producers in order to facilitate the propagation of its products in the market and its economic prosperity. The government also facilitates the development of organic agriculture by introducing its eco-regime project, where any farmer who keeps a register of his environmentally friendly productions (not using insecticides, among other restrictions), will receive 380€ per hectare of field. The government has also taken care of providing information for the general public about these new measures, leaflets, signs, about pesticides, in order to raise awareness and to promote, once again, organic products. The Belgian government, by communicating the detriments of pesticides, promoting organic agriculture and helping the ecological farmers economically, contributes to the European green project.

All in all, Belgium, a small country surrounded by stronger powerhouses, finds its dominance in the agri-food field, thanks to the grain industry that is currently at its peak. In the same way, the promotion of "organic" means through numerous measures against pesticides and insecticides, allows the country to clean its cultivable lands and also helps the environment, bringing Europe, slowly but surely, to its ideal of "ecological neutrality".