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Opinion Piece

What Greenpeace's latest report won't tell you about the EU Promotion Policy

Italian friends, stop promoting your salamis and other parmesan. French colleagues, take no pride in being the country with 365 different cheeses. Austrian pals, hide your schnitzel. Spanish fellows, put away those dry-cured hams that made your reputation. This was my first reaction reading the new Greenpeace self-proclaimed 'study' on the promotion of European agricultural products by the European Union. In essence, this document of 25 pages (pictures included) aims to demonstrate that "The European Union, despite its political ambitions with the Green Deal or the Farm to Fork Strategy, spent from 2016-2020 more than 250 million euros on the exclusive promotion of meat and dairy products, which would represent 32% of the global budget allocated to the promotion of agricultural products going to industrial farming"¹.

The quoted figure is meant to shock, to make a forceful impression in a tweet, but shocking statistics aside, what does this 'report' really tell us, or rather what doesn't it tell us?

What this report does not say, first of all, is that its release is taking place in a specific context in which the European Union is currently discussing the evolution of its promotion policy, and in particular, how to promote even further the sustainability of farming practices to encourage EU farmers in their efforts for a more virtuous production. Farmers, cooperatives, agronomists and the scientific community have been multiplying their efforts to build an agriculture that is more respectful of the environment and animal welfare. Not to support this work would simply mean turning one's back on those who invest themselves daily in their farms. Greenpeace won't tell you that agriculture is one of the few sectors that has managed to reduce its CO2 emissions over the last 20 years, or that Europe has the highest standards of animal welfare in the world. What this report won't consider is that if we decide to stop promoting European food production, others won't hesitate to continue doing so, and it will certainly be at the expense of farm animals and the environment in regions that do not even get close to the standards our farmers in Europe have to comply with. If we truly want an EU agriculture that is more sustainable than it already is, ostracising more than one third of its workers in favour of third country productions with a disregard for environmental concerns, will certainly not help.

Let's talk about their figures and methodology. This '250 million euros over four years', it only took an email from the European Commission to the editors of Politico to call it into question. In his answer, the European Commission official rightly says that it is difficult to make such an

¹ <https://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/issues/nature-food/45548/report-eu-spent-e252-million-advertising-meat-and-dairy/>

estimate since promotional policies are often not related to a specific product but to a basket of different products. Even if we look beyond this oversimplification, what the Greenpeace report has left out is that these 250 million euros, representing 32% of the budget dedicated to meat and dairy, is in line with the 38.6% value of the EU's agricultural animal production in 2019. The same goes for fruit and vegetables. Greenpeace is saying that only 19% of the budget is dedicated to fruit and vegetables, but it is in line with the value share of fruit and vegetables representing 20% of the value of the EU's agricultural production. Moreover, it also has to be taken into account that in addition to the Promotion Policy, between 2017 and 2023, 150 extra million euros are dedicated to the promotion of fruits and vegetables in EU school's through the Commission School Scheme programme². Greenpeace also says that only 9% of the budget envelope goes to organic. Once again, this is completely in line with the 8% share of organic. The conclusion that we can draw from this is that the EU promotion is entirely adapted to the realities of production in Europe. The reason for this is simple. It is up to the economic actors to request funds and set up a promotional campaign. If the funds are redistributed based on Greenpeace's reasoning, then would all the funds be used? Will we see the budget envelope dedicated to the promotion of our valuable regional culinary heritage be reallocated to the promotion of vegan "nuggets" or "lab-meat"?

The Greenpeace report attacks 'industrial farming' as the main recipient of the EU promotion policy funds. What Greenpeace will not say is that most of the budget for the internal market is dedicated to either geographical indications products, organic products or products sustainably produced³. For example, in 2019 the entire budget of the multi and simple programs for the internal market was dedicated to these three categories of products⁴. What Greenpeace also won't tell you is that the average size of livestock farms in Europe is only 47 livestock units⁵, and that the promotional policy has been designed at EU level to support these small operators to ensure that their products have an equal chance of being promoted alongside multinationals that have the resources to deploy huge marketing campaigns.

If we look at the whole of Greenpeace's communication, this report is ultimately just part of a much larger agenda, being the 'veganisation' of our food. To do so, Greenpeace is promoting a very misleading idea that science is univocal in matters of the environment or health when it comes to livestock. What Greenpeace won't mention is that many researchers are taking up the cause to challenge those claims⁶ ⁷. As chance would have it, on the same day that the Greenpeace report went out, two new studies were published that show no increased risk of heart disease, cancer, or early death from red meat⁸.

Finally, and perhaps the most important to me, Greenpeace has a vision of what a more vegan diet could look like, but what the report does not say is that the food giant lobby and stakeholders who are lining up behind the Greenpeace communication in Brussels also have a vision: promoting ultra-processed, standardized and engineered vegan products, which are less

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme/school-scheme-explained_en

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/chafea/agri/funding-opportunities/previous-proposals>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/promotion-eu-farm-products_en

⁵ http://animaltaskforce.eu/Portals/0/ATF/Downloads/Facts%20and%20figures%20sustainable%20and%20competitive%20livestock%20sector%20in%20EU_FINAL.pdf

⁶ <https://aleph-2020.blogspot.com/>

⁷ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b10852e8-0c33-11eb-bc07-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁸ <https://www.karger.com/Article/FullText/515058>

<https://academic.oup.com/ajcn/advance-article/doi/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa448/6195530?login=true>

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