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**THE FARM INTEREST GROUP SYSTEM IN
SPAIN**

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INTRODUCTION

In Spain, the interests of farmers are represented by an enormous range of associative forms, making farming the sector with the largest number of organizations within the economy. Cooperatives, chambers of agriculture, farmers' unions, organizations of producers of a specific commodity, irrigation communities, federations of cooperatives, local organizations for farmers of mountainous regions, and farmers' assurance mutuals are but some examples of this diversity. Many of these organizations, such as the cooperatives, the chambers of agriculture or the irrigation communities, have their origins in the past, dating back to the old institutions created in the late 19th and early 20th century which have continued to function uninterrupted despite the political changes taking place in Spain in the last century. Others, such as the agricultural cooperatives or the organizations of producers were founded in response to the policies of agricultural modernization developed in the last middle of the 20th century, especially following Spain's entry into the European Union in 1986. Finally, farmers' unions have their origins in the early 20th century too, but contrary cooperatives they were suppressed during the Francoist regime (1939-1977).

This great diversity of associations can be classified into three broad categories: 1) *farmers' unions*, which are claim-oriented associations aimed at defending and representing general interests of specific groups of farmers (small or big farmers) in the political sphere; 2) *producers' associations*, which are economic-oriented associations aimed to organize (according to a cooperative model or not) interests of specific commodities or sectors (for example, sugar wheat, tobacco, rize, beaf or pork) in the economic sphere, and 3) *corporatist associations*, which are compulsory ones aimed at representing general interests of farming sector as a whole. All those associations are currently attempting to adapt to the new context of change and CAP reforms by modifying their strategies and organizational models in order to improve efficiency within their specific field of action. Of these three categories of associations, the farmers' unions are the cornerstone upon which the Spanish farm interest group system is founded, acting a s the backbone of the agricultural policy community.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the Spanish farmers' unions. This will be done examining how they perceive the changes occurring in Spanish agriculture (in other words, their ideological discourses) and the way in which they respond to these

changes through various forms of collective action (that is their strategies and organizational models). The other two categories of agricultural associations (such as the commodity producer organizations whose interests are linked to a determined branch of production, or the chambers of agricultures, today in extinction) will not be analysed here, although they will be referred to in so far as they are closely bound to the farmers' unions.

The study is divided into five sections. The first section provides a brief introduction to the history of the farm interest group system in Spain and will examine the most significant features that characterize it today. In the second section, each of the three organizations that represent the general interests of Spanish farmers, ASAJA, COAG and UPA, will be analysed. The third section examines the current context of change occurring in Spanish agriculture that serves as a framework of reference for farmers. In the fourth section the impact that this process of change is having on the discourses, strategies and organizational models of Spanish farmers' unions analysed. Finally, we will assess the role that these organizations play in the decision-making processes when defining and implementing agricultural and rural policy at the European, national, regional and local levels.

A BRIEF APPROACH TO THE SPANISH FARM GROUP SYSTEM

The processes by which interests have been organized in Spanish agriculture differ greatly from those occurring in the founding countries of the European Union. Unlike these countries, agriculture in Spain has not experienced a historical continuity in the process of interest representation. The great diversity and wealth of farming associations existing in Spain in the early 20th century, which gave rise to numerous unions and cooperatives, was brought to a halt when a corporative system of compulsory representation was introduced in 1939 by Francoist regime following the Civil War. Until that time, Spanish farmers' unions and cooperatives were no different from those of neighboring European countries. However, if the political climate had been more favourable, the Spanish farm group system would likely have undergone a process of development similar to that occurring in the rest of European democratic countries after World War II.

The long hiatus of Franco's dictatorship (1939-1977) and the lasting presence of the corporative structures linked to it (mainly, chambers of agriculture), prevented the

creation of a farm group system on a par with other European countries; a phenomenon that was closely associated in those countries to the processes of modernization occurring in the fifties and sixties. In these countries close relations were forged between the departments of agriculture and the farmers' unions in order to facilitate the implementation of policies for agricultural modernization. With this aim, farmers' unions were granted institutional recognition and provided with the necessary resources for their real and effective participation in the decision-making process (Hervieu and Lagrave, 1992; Moyano, 1993a).

In the case of Spain, however, the agricultural modernization of the sixties was not the result of a domestic process of social consensus between state authorities and organized interest groups, but the despotic implementation of top-down policies by Francoist political elite without a real participation of organized civil society¹. Consequently, Spanish agriculture was unable to achieve similar levels of social articulation nor experience the neocorporatist decision-making procedures that were so successful in other European countries. With the establishment of the democratic regime and the right to free association in 1977, the Spanish farm interest group system began a new era, which, following Spain's entry in the European Union in 1986, allowed the country to consolidate structures of representation equivalent to those already existing in other countries of the European Union (EU).

Today, the farm interest group system in Spain is no different from that of other European countries. There are now a variety of farmers' unions available to farmers such as the ASAJA, COAG and UPA. Similar to what occurs in other European countries and in the EU institutions (where two representative bodies are recognised as intermediate players: the COPA and the CPE), these three options reflect a diversity of ideological discourses: some which are oriented towards the market and production, others which are concerned with issues related to family farm, labor and the territory, and yet others that stress the professional aspects of farming. The organizational models are also disparate: there is a mixed federation of territorial (regional) unions and commodity associations (ASAJA), a confederation of territorial (regional) unions (COAG) and a national association with non-autonomous regional offices (UPA); models which have their equivalent in other EU countries. Representation is measured several different ways as well. In some regions, such as in Catalonia, Aragon, Castile

¹ Under Francoist regime, farmers' unions were suppressed and interest of farmers were represented compulsory in the chambers of agriculture.

and Leon, Murcia, Extremadura and Asturias, it is measured by the election results while others apply a combined criteria including membership rate, amount of services provided or number of territorial offices (as in Andalusia). Similar systems of measurement can also be found in other neighboring countries of Europe. In France and some German Länders, for example, representation is measured by election results to the chambers of agriculture, while other countries, like the Netherlands or Portugal, use diverse criteria.

Furthermore, the Spanish farm interest group system is socially and politically legitimated to actively participate in decision-making processes regarding agricultural policy, albeit with certain limitations at each of the levels where these dynamics take place, as will be discussed below. According to the study by Gómez Benito et al., 2001, the majority of Spanish farmers attribute representation and defense of their interests to the three farmers' unions mentioned above. Likewise, more than a third of the farmers highly or somewhat highly trust in the farmers' unions, a percentage of confidence that is only surpassed by the trust placed on cooperatives. To put it another way, farmers' unions are the institutions that, alongside cooperatives, are least mistrusted by farmers. This is especially significant if we take into account the fact that public opinion polls in Spain state that unions, together with political parties, tend to be viewed quite unfavorably on the whole. Thus this would seem to suggest that farmers identify more closely with their unions than does the general public. This fact is further reflected in membership rates. According to the data of the above study, one out of every three farmers surveyed stated that they are affiliated or have been affiliated at some time to a farmers' union, a percentage that is relatively high in regions such as Valencia (around 60%) or Andalusia (almost 50%). That farmers closely identify with their unions is further corroborated by data regarding levels of participation in elections to the chambers of agriculture. In the majority of Spanish regions, participation was greater than 50%, with over 60% participation in regions such as Navarra, Rioja or Extremadura.

Clearly, in the last ten years Spanish agriculture has consolidated a sound, well-structured union panorama around three farmers' unions (ASAJA, COAG and UPA), in addition to a unitary federation of cooperatives (CCAE). In contrast to what occurred during the democratic transition and before Spain entered the EU in 1986, the farmers' unions system is relatively independent from the political system, giving it greater stability and preventing interference by political parties. The three organizations that

comprise the farm interest system are viewed by the farming sector as valid mediators at different territorial levels (i.e. the European, national and regional levels); a fact that is not questioned from within or outside the sector. No longer does recognition hinge upon political events or circumstances, or the political leanings of the government in turn. Instead, it is the result of an autonomy gained through the high levels of participation in elections to the chambers of agriculture and to the votes won by ASAJA, COAG and UPA, whose regional unions account for practically all of the votes cast. The efforts, conviction and pragmatism of the union leaders in the last ten years have, without a doubt, made an enormous contribution to this end at both the national and the intermediate level; leaders who, without renouncing their demands, have pledged their commitment to collaborating with public authorities and adapted their discourses to the reality of the changes taking place in agriculture and agricultural policy.

INDIVIDUAL NATIONAL FARM INTEREST GROUPS

a) ASAJA (Asociación Agraria-Jóvenes Agricultores)

The ASAJA (Agricultural Association-Young Farmers) was created in the early eighties through the fusion of three pre-existing organizations: CNAG, UFADE and CNJA. On the one hand, ASAJA brings together the elite of large arable lands in Andalusia, Extremadura and Castile originating from the social bases of the former CNAG and UFADE and, on the other hand, the modernizing reformism of the CNJA, a young farmers' movement founded upon moderate Catholicism and backed, in its beginnings, by groups linked to the technocratic elite of the Franco regime. Today, ASAJA represents the interests of a heterogeneous group of farmers and is led by the owners of large and medium-sized modernized farms or farms which are likely to become modernized, although it also includes a wide range of family-type farm holders. From an organizational viewpoint, ASAJA is mainly organized in 17 regional associations, and each one of them is composed of county farmer organizations. Besides, some commodity and national industry specific organizations are members too (for example, sugar wheat, tobacco, rice, beef and pork). In fact, ASAJA is a federation of very strong regional and commodity organizations. That is why their member organizations are autonomous from an economical and policy point of view. Each regional and commodity organization is autonomous to fund its administrative and professional staff, and to define their policy strategies. Consequently, ASAJA is an umbrella structure specialized in the

intermediation relationship with the national government, and it is a member of COPA in Brussels. In terms of its relationship with other business sectors in Spain, the ASAJA maintains special ties with the CEOE (*Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales*) (Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations), including some of its regional organizations. This relationship has allowed ASAJA to benefit from the large service infrastructure this business confederation offers and participate through it in forums that are normally off-limits to farm organizations such as social security, labour law or tax issues.

With respect to the affiliation level, there is not an official control on the membership of farmer's unions in Spain. That is why it is difficult to give dates about it. To estimate the number of farmers who support ASAJA, the best is to use some other sources (for example, the results of elections to chambers of agriculture, or some specific surveys). However, it is necessary to consider that ASAJA is a federation of regional and commodity organizations, and consequently individual farmers are not members. According to some specific surveys, we can estimate in 100.000 the total number of farmer members of regional organizations ASAJA. In the last elections for agricultural chambers in 2001, ASAJA was the first national farmer organization, with the 45% of votes. According to this information, it can be said that the potential members of ASAJA is around 200.000 farmers.

Regarding the issue portfolios that it claims to address, ASAJA is mainly interested in the following issues: trade, commodity production and EU market policy. The agri-environmental issue has not been important for ASAJA, although the topic of relations between agriculture and environment is recently being introduced in its agenda. In this sense, ASAJA has even established a specific department on this topic, perceiving environment as productive resource (green capitalism), and emphasizing the economic dimension of sustainability. ASAJA perceives organic farming as an interesting market to grow the farmer's incomes. Other issues, such as the food safety, has not been introduced in the ASAJA agenda yet, since this problem is not still important in Spain.

b) COAG (Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos del Estado español)

The COAG (Coordinating Committee for Organizations of Spanish Farmers and Livestock Producers) was created in 1978 as a committee that coordinated regional and

provincial organizations emerging during the democratic transition from the movements opposed to the Francoist compulsory corporativism. Their principal leaders originate from the ranks of left-wing politics, Catalan nationalism and progressive Catholicism. The most important organizations under the umbrella of COAG, namely the unions of Catalonia, Rioja or Aragon, arose from the conflicts with the agri-food industries that took place in the mid-sixties in areas of irrigation family farming. These conflicts, which were known as the “peasant wars”, encouraged small family farmers to take on an increasingly militant role and exert their influence through massive public demonstrations in which thousands of farmers drove their tractors through the streets of Madrid.

Today, however, the COAG is a somewhat decentralized organization, being, in fact, a coordinating committee in which the regional farmers’ unions enjoy full autonomy. In fact, COAG is a federation of 17 regional farmers’ unions, each one of them composed of county farmer organizations. Contrary to ASAJA, commodity or industry specific organizations are not members of COAG. Each regional organisation is autonomous to fund its administrative and professional staff, and to define their policy strategies at the regional level. In this sense, COAG is also an umbrella structure specialized in the intermediation relationship with the national government, and it is a member of COPA in Brussels. However, because of the fact that some of their regional unions are very weak from an economical and political point of view, the national administrative and professional staff placed in Madrid gives important services to them.

With respect to membership, it is necessary to take into account that, such as was mentioned above for ASAJA, the COAG is a federation of regional organizations, and consequently individual farmers are not members. According to some specific surveys, we can estimate in 80.000 the total number of farmer members of regional associations ASAJA. In the last elections for chambers of agriculture (2001), COAG was the second national farmer organization, with the 40% of votes, which allows to estimate that its potential membership is about 100.000 farmers. Although the family farm is considered a distinctive feature of the COAG, its social base is fairly heterogeneous as it brings together family farmers with modern farms as well as small farmers with little chance of making their farms viable. However, the very heterogeneity that characterizes COAG makes it difficult at times to adopt a common program face to agricultural policy reforms and constitutes an inevitable source of internal conflict.

Regarding the issue portfolios that it claims to address, COAG is interested in the following ones: trade, and EU rural development policy. The environmental issue is being strongly introduced in the COAG, which has promoted the establishment of specific department on this topic in each one of its regional organization. In this sense, COAG perceives environment as important element of dynamisation of countryside, and, contrary ASAJA, it emphasizes the social and ecological dimension of sustainability. Particularly, the EU agri-environmental program is perceived by COAG as a new source of social legitimacy for farming activity, and the organic farming as a way to avoid the social exclusion of small farmers. The food safety is starting to be introduced in the COAG agenda, linking this topic to family farming and quality.

c) UPA (*Unión de Pequeños Agricultores*)

UPA was established in 1986, promoted by the old socialist worker union UGT (*Unión General de Trabajadores*) in order to allow the small farmer interests to be articulated in autonomous structures independently of workers. Historically, UGT had joined agricultural workers and small farmers in the same organizational structure. From 1986, UPA is an small farmer organization which however maintains strong links with the UGT and takes advantage of this good relationship to use the services from the UGT's administrative staff. From the time that it gained autonomy as organization, the UPA has expanded beyond the traditional boundaries of UGT influence, incorporating a variety of small farmers' organizations which were opposed to a lesser or greater degree to the ASAJA and the COAG organizations mentioned above, mainly in the regions of the Duero River or Asturias. Given its centralized structure, and the support it receives from the UGT union, the UPA has increased its influence in many areas despite the precariousness of its social bases. According to some specific surveys, we can estimate in 50.000 the total number of farmer members of UPA. The number of members is increased in UPA, because of the fact that it takes advantage of the crisis of some regional organizations members of COAG. In the last elections of chambers of agriculture (2001), UPA was the third national farmer organization, with the 15% of votes. According to this information, it can be said that the potential members of UPA is around 75.000 farmers.

From the organizational point of view, UPA is a very centralized farmers' union, whose members are individual farmers. That is why in each Spanish region, UPA has got an organizational structure based on offices, which are not autonomous,

but they depend on the national staff of Madrid to define policy strategies and to give services to farmers.

UPA is interested in the following issues: trade, and EU rural development policy. At the same as COAG, the environmental issue is strongly being introduced in the UPA, which has established a specific department on this topic in its national staff. The UPA perceives environment as important element of dynamisation of countryside, and emphasizes the social and ecological dimension of sustainability. The EU agrienvironmental policy is perceived as a new source of social legitimacy for farming activity and as a way to avoid the social exclusion of small farmers. Other issues, such as the food safety, is being introduced in the UPA agenda yet, which promotes to establish relations to consumer movement and ecologist association to encourage together debates on the role of agriculture and the new demands of population in Spain.

THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE IN SPANISH AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SOCIETY

Today, Western societies are witnessing an important process of change marked not only by globalization and the liberalization of trade and currency markets, but also by the deep transformation of cultural and political values. In the case of agriculture and rural society in Spain, this current context of change is characterized by a series of interrelated factors whose effects can be felt in economic, social, political and cultural spheres. For the purpose of our analysis, each of these factors will be discussed separately below (see Table 1)

Table 1
Context of Change

<i>Sphere</i>	<i>Features of the context of change</i>
<i>Socio-economic changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture diminishes in importance as a productive activity • Importance of agricultural activity to revitalize the social fabric • Multifunctional nature and externalization of agriculture • Development of telecommunications and improved infrastructures in rural areas. • Development of new service-oriented activities. • Emergence of a new business elite opposed to the welfare rationale • Emergence of local actors linked to social policy (health care, education, social services, etc.)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery of the “local identity”

<i>Cultural Changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalization • Emergence of post-materialistic values • Paradigm of sustainable development • New structures for opportunities (symbolic and cultural) in rural areas
<i>Political Changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WTO agreements on the liberalization of international trade • Process of constructing Europe (enlargement to the East, Agenda 2000) • Incorporation of new policies in the EU agenda (weakening of agricultural interests) • Agreements for association with southern bank Mediterranean countries (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) • New principles to regulate public aid (equity, modulation, and efficiency)

Economic changes

Although Spanish agriculture has declined in economic terms - as demonstrated by the gradual decrease in the number of people employed in agriculture (from 13.2% in 1988 to 7.4% in 2000) and by the diminishing importance of livestock production to the country's GNP (from 6% in 1985 to 4% in 2000) - farming remains key to the vitalization of many rural areas. Many jobs in the manufacturing and service industries depend on the sector, namely in machinery factories and workshops, fertilizer and pesticide producers, insurance companies, and agri-food industries. For our purposes, it is important to highlight that the people engaged in these activities **come from an urban and industrial background imbued with a business rationale that eschews public subsidies, giving them a much different view of the value of the countryside than that traditionally held by farmers.** Thus, while farmers and non-farmers may share a business relationship, they do not necessarily take part in a common system of values when it comes to deciding the fate of the countryside in their local communities.

At the same time, advances in telecommunications and improved roadways in Spain have brought rural areas out of their isolation and encouraged non-agriculture oriented industries and services to set up business. This has allowed a new and increasingly large sector of businessmen and independent professionals to emerge; people with a free market background whose values differ from those of farmers. Other jobs, linked directly to the welfare society, are also giving rise to an unprecedented vitalization of the countryside. These new events are occurring most notably in the spheres of health care, education and social services provided by the government and in areas dedicated to offering leisure and entertainment to the population at large, namely in tourism, the purchasing of second homes, retirement, sport and recreation. The rural population is

increasingly engaged in these new forms of employment, offering new and non-traditional ways of integrating society and work (Navarro-Yáñez, 1999).

Rural society in Spain has thus become more complex in both economic and social terms, bringing about a greater internal differentiation and job diversity. All of this is having a significant effect on local lifestyles by reducing the power traditionally held by landowners and encouraging the rise of a new elite. A new dynamism is being witnessed at the local level and new opportunities are opening up for political activity; an activity which is marked by either co-operation with or confrontation between the old and the new protagonists depending upon their perception of the changes confronting rural society.

Cultural changes

In the cultural sphere, two important changes have come about. On the one hand, so-called ‘post-materialist’ values (Inglehart, 1977) are on the rise as increasingly larger sections of the population are no longer concerned solely with satisfying their material needs, but with their quality of life, that is, the deterioration of natural resources, the loss of biodiversity, the degradation of the countryside, the contamination of rivers, and, more recently, food quality and safety. An important cultural change has also occurred in qualified sectors of the public opinion as a result of the concept of sustainability put forth in the late seventies in the now famous Bruntland Report. While lending legitimacy to the demands of new social groups, these new changes have also meant that substantial constraints have been placed on farmers regarding how they use their land for agricultural production.

Another significant change which has occurred over the last two decades in Spain in cultural terms is that of the reaffirmation of a “local identity”; a change that has paralleled the spread of globalization. Although apparently contradictory, when examined more closely these processes are clearly coherent with one another. The rediscovery of rural heritage is a process of recovering identity, a searching for roots and tangible references, of closeness and proximity in a world that is increasingly global and whose physical and social coordinates become weakened as they stretch across the planet. It is within this context that the Spanish are reaffirming their local identity, reviving the values of their neighborhoods (*pueblos*) and seeking to remain in them. It is a clear attempt to equip them with the necessary resources and to exploit the comparative advantages to be had from the advances in technology and

telecommunications that this process of globalization offers. Local development projects are taking place at what some authors have called the *interstices of globalization* (Renard, 1999); projects which attempt to give new meaning to the true value of endogenous resources, while at the same time making different forms of development viable so that rural populations may sustain themselves in dynamic communities. Needless to say, this phenomenon has far-reaching economic and political repercussions and is considered key to revitalizing democracy at the local level (Pérez-Yruela, et al., 2001).

In short, a new cultural context is emerging in Spanish rural society which is characterized, on the one hand, by a reevaluation of the countryside based on quality of life rather than production, and, on the other hand, by the reaffirmation of local identity (*el pueblo*) as a central framework of reference for the whole population. Consequently, a new opportunity structure has also been created; a structure that is being exploited by the various economic and social actors according to their particular interpretation of the changes taking place.

Political changes

Certain events occurring in the last decade have undeniably affected the perspective from which the problems of European rural society in general, and of Mediterranean countries in particular, are addressed.

The first of these events were the agreements on the liberalization of agricultural markets that were reached at the GATT meetings held in Spring 1996 in Marrakech, Morocco and later, those signed at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conferences in Fall 2001 in Doha, Qatar. Clearly, these agreements have political implications in that they limit the freedom of national governments to uphold their traditional protectionist policies, particularly those affecting agriculture. Some of these implications were already evident in the Common Market Organization (CMO) reforms on cereals carried out in the EU in 1992. Today they are evident in the gradual tendency to cut **guaranteed agricultural prices in order to ensure participation in the world market as established in the Agenda 2000 and reaffirmed in the last CAP reform of June 2003**. Repercussions have also been felt with the elimination of all subsidies for production in order to reduce agricultural surplus and prevent negative effects on the international market and with the establishment of direct payments to farmers.

These political decisions have important economic and cultural consequences for the farm sector. From an economic point of view, they introduce a new element of competitiveness that was previously confined to sectors that were not provided shelter under the umbrella of protectionist policies (mainly horticulture and fruit production). Thus, Spanish farmers, cooperatives and agri-food companies in general must now be competitive if they wish to benefit from the opportunities that larger markets offer. Culturally speaking, these political decisions have made it necessary to undertake important changes in the sphere of education and training as well as in the attitude of Spanish farmers regarding their marketing and business strategies.

Secondly, the process of constructing Europe has important political implications for two main reasons. On the one hand, the enlargement of the EU towards former communist countries means that EU budget expenditure will be higher, necessitating the introduction of important restrictions under the CAP, particularly if enlargement is to take place without increased contributions by the Member States. On the other hand, the process of constructing Europe also implies the implementation of new policies regarding the environment, education, research and development, and infrastructures; measures which will require EU funding. Thus, what some have called the "agricultural policy community" (Frouws and van Tatenhove, 1993; Daugbjerg, 1997) is now faced with the predicament of having to compete for available resources with other emerging interest groups in a context where the role of agriculture has changed in the European political and social agendas as enough basic foodstuffs are produced and free agricultural markets are established.

Thirdly, the strategic and geopolitical position of the EU regarding its North-South international relations introduces an issue of great concern to Spain. The growing influx of immigrants from northern Africa is forcing the EU Member States to modify their traditional immigration policies and call for a policy of restricted entry in the short term (the Schengen agreement) and increased cooperative funding aimed at development in the countries of origin in the long term. This cooperation implies the adoption of measures which would open the European market to agricultural and livestock products from non-EU countries, particularly those of the Maghreb. Undoubtedly, these measures will have a significant impact on the Spanish farm sector.

Fourthly, an important element of political change and, perhaps, the most far-reaching in its implications in the medium to long term, stems from the welfare state crisis affecting western countries. The current crisis has forced countries to reassess

many of the principles upon which their government policies are founded, including those related to agriculture and rural development. The national budget deficit and, particularly, unemployment and issues related to environmental protection and food safety, must now be taken into account in the much-needed policy reforms, including the CAP reform. As the paper titled **"For a necessary change in European agriculture"** (The Bruges Group, 1998) stresses, if future agricultural policy is to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of the general public, it must take full account of these elements. As it points out, once enough food is produced, an agricultural policy which requires government resources to guarantee farmer's incomes must derive its legitimacy from its contribution to the creation, or at least not the destruction, of employment, equity in the distribution of the CAP direct payments, environmental protection and land management. These principles, which have inspired agricultural policy since the fifties, imply a fundamental change **in the way farmers view their activity** and should be the basis upon which future policies are made.

In sum, the debate on the future of rural society and the role that agriculture plays in its development must take place within the multifaceted context of change described above. It should include the waning importance of agriculture in the economy, the decline of the farming population in rural areas, the diminishing influence of a landed elite in decision-making processes, the diversification and greater structural complexity of employment in the countryside and market liberalization. It must not overlook the recuperation of a local identity and the promotion of local development initiatives nor concerns about food quality, environmental conservancy, the achievement of self-sufficiency in food production, the restrictions imposed by the process of European enlargement or new government policies to overcome the welfare state crisis. This context has given rise to new opportunities for both individual and collective action by the different social and economic actors in the rural areas of Spain. Their actions, however, can be explained not by any structural determinism, but according to our understanding of how they perceive and interpret these opportunities.

THE IMPACT ON FARMERS' UNIONS

In this section we will analyze the effects that this process of change has had on farmers' unions in Spain and examine the wide range of discourses and the diversity of their strategies and organizational models.

A diversity of ideological discourses

At present, there exist two ideal types of discourses (see Table 2). The first is the ‘business-discourse’ (oriented to the agri-food industry and the market) which is espoused by the organizations that on the whole represent the interests of medium- and large-scale farms, namely ASAJA. These organizations endorse a closer integration of the agri-food industry through the creation of inter-professional structures, and a single sector-oriented model for the organization of agricultural interests in each branch of production. Farmers are encouraged by the ASAJA to adopt new management methods and to continue modernizing production on their farms. However, a detailed analysis of the positions adopted by ASAJA at their meetings and conferences reveals a growing concern for the risks involved in farmers relying exclusively on subsidies; subsidies which are increasingly coming under fire in the EU and are likely to be abolished under the current CAP reform.

The ASAJA organization holds that agricultural policy should be independent of rural development policy and demands that programs be implemented to provide incentives for farmers to modernize their farms and become integrated into larger commercial networks. Future agricultural policy must, therefore, continue to promote modernization in order to improve competitiveness, particularly in the Mediterranean countries, which are in a less-favorable position than other regions of central Europe. It is for this reason that ASAJA opposes proposals to integrate agricultural and rural development policy, since this would subordinate agriculture to a social rationale based on the creation of jobs; an impossible objective for modern farming given that it is characterized by increased productivity and a reduced labor force.

Finally, although the business discourse does not oppose environmental policies, they are of secondary concern. The problems involved in the relationship between agriculture and the environment are expressed by ASAJA solely in terms of economic sustainability as environmental deterioration represents a threat to natural resources; resources which are key to agricultural production (in other words, ‘green’ capitalism as mentioned above).

The second ideal type of discourse could be described as a ‘neo-peasant’ or countryside-oriented discourse in that it stresses the values of a rural society that has undergone a social and cultural renewal and in which the role of the family farm (a renewed and modern concept of peasantry) is central to the revitalization of the

countryside. In contrast to the first, this discourse is espoused by organizations representing the interests of small farmers, namely the UPA and the COAG. These organizations back policies that are not only concerned with farm production, but also with the diversification of employment and the countryside. Thus they support a horizontal, rather than a vertical, model of representation of farm interests and encourage collaboration with other groups in rural society, namely environmentalists and consumer movements. Furthermore, they support a high level of state interventionism to regulate market imbalances and encourage associations that represent small farmers.

There is unanimity between the UPA and the COAG not only on the convenience, but also the need to apply differential criteria in the distribution of CAP subsidies. As a result of the growing restrictions placed on the resources available to regulate the different CMOs, aid must be directed at the least competitive farms if small farmers are not to abandon the farming sector. These reforms are also seen as a positive step towards restoring legitimacy to agriculture in the eyes of the general population, which views with surprise, if not indignation, how certain groups of farmers amass large fortunes from the CAP subsidies; subsidies which are financed by taxpayers' contributions and handed out for nothing in return and with no clear justification.

The neo-peasant discourse holds that future agricultural policy should be an integral part of rural development and encourage family farms. According to the UPA and the COAG, criteria should be based not on competitiveness but on preventing the exclusion of small farmers who they view as fundamental to rural life. Environmental policies are also considered key to creating new opportunities to enhance farmers' incomes, integrating farmers and countryside into society and granting a new legitimacy to agricultural policy.

In short, the Spanish farm sector has become increasingly diversified as reflected in the different responses, both individual and collective, of farmers and their organizations to the new problems facing them. While it is true that the present process of change is perceived as a crisis by the farming sector on the whole, the responses to this crisis are diverse, as is to be expected in a social structure that has become ever more complex and differentiated.

Table n. 2.

Ideal discourses of the Spanish farmers' unions

<div>Discourses</div> <div>Dimensions</div>	<i>Business discourse</i> (ASAJA)	<i>Neo-peasant discourse</i> (COAG and UPA)
<i>Concept of farming activity</i>	Market-oriented productive activity	Labor and countryside-oriented activity
<i>Farmer's status</i>	Entrepreneur (professional status)	Farmers with a multifunctional status
<i>Role of the State</i>	Low level of state interventionism (to guarantee market stability)	High level of state interventionism (to guarantee farmers' incomes and correct social and economic inequalities)
<i>Function of agricultural policy</i>	Agricultural policy guided by a production-oriented rationale Direct payments to farmers to compensate for free market competition	Agricultural policy guided by a non-productive rationale and integrated into integral rural development policies Direct payments to farmers based on equity
<i>Relationship between agriculture and environment</i>	Environment is perceived as a productive resource (green capitalism) Emphasis on the economic dimension of sustainability Agri-environmental policy is perceived as a way to supplement farmers' incomes and an incentive to use productive resources more soundly Organic farming is perceived as a viable market to increase farmers' incomes	Environment is perceived as key to revitalizing the countryside Emphasis on the social and ecological dimension of sustainability Agri-environmental policy is perceived as a new source of social legitimacy for farming activities Organic farming is perceived as a way of preventing the social exclusion of small farmers

Source: Moyano et al. 2001.

Effects on the strategies and organizational models

The adoption by an agricultural organization of an ideological discourse that is coherent with its social base, involves defining the collective action to be taken and choosing a determined organizational model. However, it is also a fact that changes in the role of agriculture and the limitations set down by agricultural policy are beginning to have an effect on the strategies of the three farmers' unions in Spain, regardless of their ideological discourse. In order to understand these effects, we must first begin by acknowledging that agricultural policy has lost, at least in the process of formulation, a great deal of the autonomy it had as a sectoral policy. Instead, the current trend is towards its subordination to the rationale of world economic policy; a policy which is increasingly determined by decisions adopted at supranational forums removed from the specific sphere of agriculture. The emphasis that farmers' unions have traditionally placed on public institutions-that is, to exert their influence in different areas of the public administration- is no longer sufficient as many of the factors that determine the content of agricultural policy increasingly have their origin in decision-making processes that are beyond their sphere of influence. Thus, on the whole, farmers' unions are becoming more and more aware that while this sphere of action should not be abandoned, neither should it continue to be the sole area upon which their efforts at collective action are focused.

Hence, organizations such as the ASAJA, which is guided by a business-oriented discourse, increasingly stress the importance of taking action in the sphere of civil institutions. With this aim in mind they have undertaken to improve the services they provide, develop training programs to facilitate the introduction of new farm production techniques and promote the use of new business management technologies in order to move forward in the process of farm modernization, albeit for different reasons than in the sixties. From an organizational viewpoint, the organization proposes greater integration into the agri-food industry through inter-professional structures within each *filiale* and advocates a sectoral model of interest representation to replace conventional models of a territorial nature (see Table 2).

The organizations that subscribe to the "neo-peasant" discourse, such as the COAG and the UPA, continue to mark public institutions as an important area of action that should not be abandoned, given that they believe that the State must continue to play a balancing role to compensate for market inequalities. In their opinion, participation in this sphere must take place through general and not sectoral models of representation, as these models are the only ones that provide a global view of the problems confronting agriculture and the rural world. They do advocate, however, a

greater emphasis on actions in the sphere of civil society, albeit with a difference from the business-oriented organizations, that is, through dialogue and collaboration with other social groups that share in the rural space (ecologists, consumers, rural youth, etc.) so that rural development policy can be cooperatively designed. In terms of training, these organizations stress the multifunctional nature of the farmer and based on this principle, propose a multifaceted profile that combines the productive dimension with others that are in keeping with society's new demands. Hence they demand that the current vocational training programs be widely reformed to include more diversified modalities which better adapt to the issues of prime concern to farmers (see Table 2).

Nonetheless, there is a common feature shared by all of the farmers' unions without exception: the importance that they place upon civil society, bringing them to adopt positions that go beyond a simple matter of strategy. In effect, by changing the priority of their actions they are forced to come up with new organizational structures which are less centralized and more rooted at the local and county levels in tandem with the new setting in which their collective action must be carried out.

Thus, ASAJA, COAG and UPA have created specific departments dedicated to rural development in order to channel their participation in the LEADER program or have set up specialized sections devoted to young people, women and even retired farmers in response to demands by these groups. It has also become common to incorporate agri-environmental issues in their organizational structures, although the three Spanish organizations differ on this question according to their ideological discourses. Some, such as the UPA or the COAG opt for a strategy of assimilation by creating their own specific departments-in particular organic farming-while others, such as the ASAJA promote collateral organizations which are external to their own union structure (Garrido Fernández, 1999; Garrido and Moyano, 2000).

FARMERS' UNIONS AND THE AGRICULTURAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In the general sphere of representation, agricultural decision-making processes take place at four levels: the European Union, nationally, regionally and locally. Each of these settings will be examined below.

a) The European Union

At the European Union level, the national governments, through their ministers of agriculture, take part in formulating the common agricultural policy (CAP). In both the Council of Ministers of Agriculture and the Management Committees, representatives of each Member State of the EU defend the position of their respective governments in more or less intense negotiations on various issues related to the CAP. These negotiations usually conclude with an adverse or favorable opinion on the proposed regulations or directives presented by the Commission. For our purposes here, it is important to note that in these institutions (Council of Ministers and Management Committees), the position taken by each national government is presented without the need for a previous mediation phase with the interest groups concerned (i.e. farmers, cooperatives, industries, consumers, farm workers, etc.). In fact, the management committees (one per sector and another horizontal one) comprise intermediate-level civil servants appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture of each Member State (or an equivalent ministry that is competent in the area of agriculture). Whether or not consensus has been reached with representatives of the farm sector regarding the positions defended by these committees is of no concern to the EU institutions but to the national decision-making procedures of each country. While it is true that at the EU level there exist farm advisory committees where these interest groups are represented, their role in the EU decision-making process is merely consultative and the Commission is not bound by the opinion of the committees. Of the members that make up these advisory committees (currently 24, one for each sector plus the horizontal committees such as the Star committee for agricultural structures), 50% belong to national farmers' unions (under the COPA and the CPE) and the national federations of farming cooperatives (under the COGECA), while the other half is appointed by national consumer associations (under the BEUC), the agri-food industry federations of each Member State of the EU (under the FEIAB) and the national **farm workers unions** (under the CES). Thus, at the EU level, it can be said that agricultural policy is *agreed* by the ministries of agriculture from the different States, but that representatives of the sector are merely *consulted*. The negotiations to define the common interests of European agriculture occur in the heart of the COPA and the COGECA, a task that is becoming ever more difficult due to the growing number of organizations that comprise these immense structures of representation. In fact, the reports that come out of the COPA and the COGECA are increasingly more generic and less specific in nature as consensus among such a wide range of organizations must be limited to general aspects

due to the difficulties involved in reaching agreement. In short, at the European level, intense negotiations occur between the Commission and representatives of the farm sector belonging to the COPA, the CPE and the COGECA, but consensus is not reached on the common agricultural policy, which is, as stated above, the result of negotiations between representatives from the national governments. However, the work of farm organizations should not be underestimated, which with their numerous reports and protests have greatly contributed to legitimizing (or delegitimizing) the CAP process. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that policy-making decisions are not taken in agreement with representatives of the sector, but that they are consulted, meaning that Brussels cannot be held jointly responsible for the implementation of the CAP in each country.

b) *The national level*

In Spain, there is greater freedom for genuine consensus to occur regarding agricultural policy. In general, and in the current circumstances, where a large part of agricultural policy is decided by the EU institutions (see above), the decision-making process may occur *ex ante* or *ex post* the passing of European regulations or directives. In effect, prior to the meetings held by the Management Committees or the Councils of Ministers of Agriculture of the EU, the national governments may reach agreement with representatives of the agriculture sector in order to put forward a common position that these, through the COPA and COGECA, will defend in the farm advisory committees, thus backing national interests in the European institutions. In practice, however, the opportunity for agreement *ex ante* depends on the political goodwill of the governments, as they are not obliged to reach a consensual position with representatives of the farm sector. In Spain, the great diversity of agricultural practices (practically all of the OCMs can be found in our territory, from continental to Mediterranean including intermediate ones), the existence of a disperse union panorama (three large national organizations, one large co-federation of cooperatives and several important sectoral organizations) and the State's quasi-federal organizational structure make it extremely difficult to reach consensus *ex ante* the negotiations in Brussels. For this reason, the steps prior to reaching consensus, such as the sectoral conferences between the minister and the council of agriculture, or the advisory councils with the farmers' unions, end up being ineffective forums of discussion.

Ex post consensus is more common, especially with regard to socio-structural policy (included under the so-called second pillar of the CAP). In contrast to first-pillar policies, which leave little room to decide how these policies should be implemented in each State, the second pillar policies make it more possible for consensus to be reached at the national level between the ministers of agriculture (or their equivalent) and organized interest groups (not only farm organizations and cooperatives, but also ecological organizations or rural development networks as it includes aspects related to production as well as the territory and the environment). However, problems arise when limitations are placed upon participation by interest groups. For example, in Spain, the Ministry of Agriculture and its regional departments decide how European regulations should be applied, leaving little opportunity for participation by farmers' unions in the decision-making process at the national level. The same thing occurs when different governmental departments (i.e Agriculture and the Environment) must reach agreement regarding the content of certain policies that have a bearing upon the competence of both (as in the case of certain measures under the agri-environmental program), thereby cutting off any possibility for participation by organizations which represent the interest groups concerned. In these cases, the organizations are invited to participate in a process where policy content has already been set down by the public authorities and which is restricted solely to informing them and perhaps consulting them about procedural aspects or implementation. Thus, while it can be said that discussion usually takes place and consensus may occur at this level, it is hindered by the interference of other actors and greatly depends on the good will of the national governments.

c) *The regional level*

At this level, the application of the principle of subsidies converts some policies (such as those of the second pillar, but also some important aspects of market policy, namely the fixing of regional production quotes) into a favorable setting for consensus with agricultural organizations. To this we must add the possibility (a reality in some regions such as Catalonia or Andalusia) for regional governments to take initiatives regarding the drafting of laws on issues related to agriculture and rural development, thus paving the way for farm organizations to participate in the **decision-making process**. In reality, there are fewer limitations at the regional level than at the national or European level for agreement on aspects of agricultural policy that fall within their area of

competence. While higher political bodies do not usually interfere at this level, concurrence does occur between departments of the same regional administration (convergence between the departments of agriculture and the environment on agri-environmental issues at the national level as explained above also occurs at the territorial level). Clearly, as the second pillar of the CAP becomes increasingly consolidated, and the principles of modulation and cross-compliance are applied through the first-pillar measures, there will be ever greater possibilities for consensus between regional governments and the organizations representing the farm sector on issues related to agricultural policy and rural development. However, it is also true that as these policies have an increasingly less **agrarian (agraristas)** focus and are based more on a multifunctional approach, it is likely that a larger number of actors, such as ecologists or advocates of rural development, will participate.. In short, although opportunities for discussion and consensus exist at the regional level, they depend on each organization's capacity of influence and the political and social recognition that each has to make their voices heard.

d) *The local level*

Below the regional level (local level is a general term to refer to the municipal, county or community level), it is becoming more common to apply development policy based not on a rural or **agrarian** approach, but a territorial one. These policies pave the way for interesting scenarios for social consensus between public authorities and the organizations representing the different groups that comprise the local communities. However, although farm interest groups in this setting are given the opportunity to participate, the problem arises from the fact that farmers' interests are poorly represented at the local level. In Spain, farm interest groups have directed their organizational resources mainly at the regional and national levels (and with a fair amount of difficulty at the European level as well) as this is where discussion and consensus with public authorities becomes most visible. Thus their participation in the decision-making processes at the local level will depend on whether or not they have a genuine desire and will to do so by strengthening their organizational structures at those levels. If they are to achieve this aim, the farm interest groups must modify the discourse and sectoral strategies that have characterized them until now (a discourse based on the concept of the farmer as producer) in order to gain access to a wider field of representation (based on the concept of the farmer as a citizen integrated into a rural

community). However, this is not a challenge that all organizations are prepared to face, as it would mean creating more decentralized horizontal structures to the detriment of their current vertical models of organization. In short, great opportunities exist for participation in decision-making processes at the local level, but in order to take advantage of them, the farm organizations must make a greater effort to undertake both ideological and organizational changes.

CONCLUSIONS