

The Evolving Landscape of Farmland Ownership in Europe

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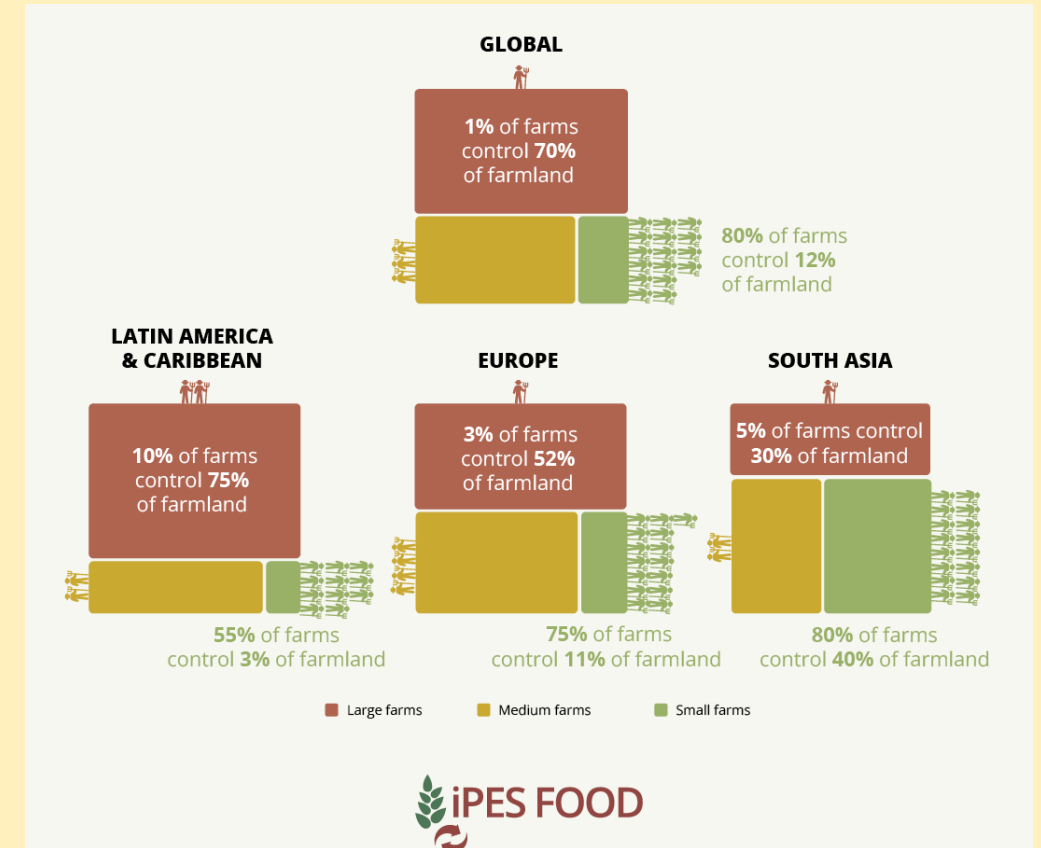
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Agriculture in EU

- Agricultural land made up 39.1 % of the total area in the EU (2018).
- 9.1 million farms in EU (2020).
- The number of farms in the EU declined with 37 % between 2005 and 2020 (5.3 million farms).
- Land concentration: large agricultural corporations increasingly purchase or lease land from smaller agricultural producers.



Why Farmland Ownership Matters

- Ownership influences control over land, and food production.
- Risk with foreign investors: lack of access to food during crises.
- EU lacks unified legislation on land transactions.
 - It is in the hands of each member state

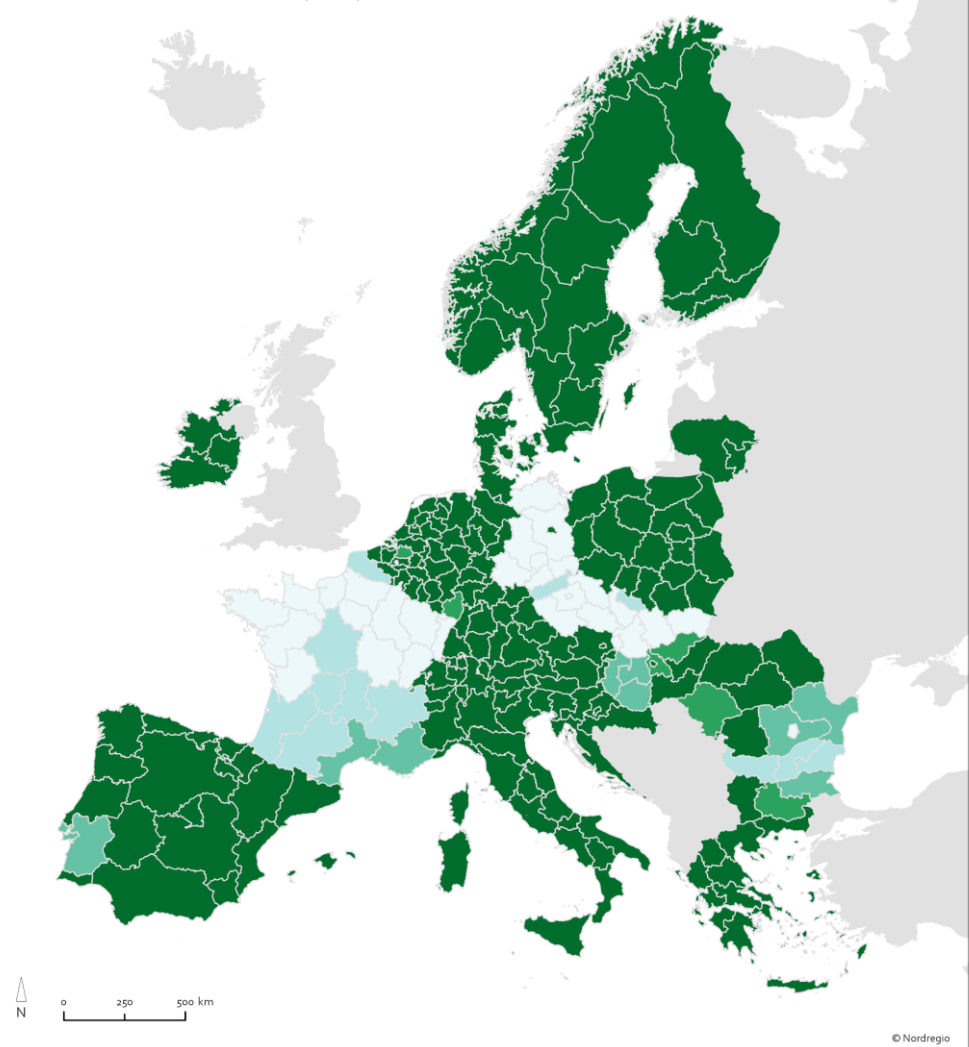
Who owns the farmland in Europe?

- Investigate ownership patterns across Europe
 - Natural Persons (family farms)
 - Legal Persons (companies), and
 - Group Holdings.

Does it matter who owns the land?

- Explore implications for sustainability and resilience
 - Social and environmental sustainability.
 - Economic performance by ownership type.

Farmland Ownership Distribution
Natural Person Classification (2020)



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Land Ownership:
Natural Person

Natural Person land ownership is classified as an individual engaged in economic activity, recognized for legal and taxation purposes, distinct from legal entities.

Share of Natural Person (%)
(out of total farmland area)

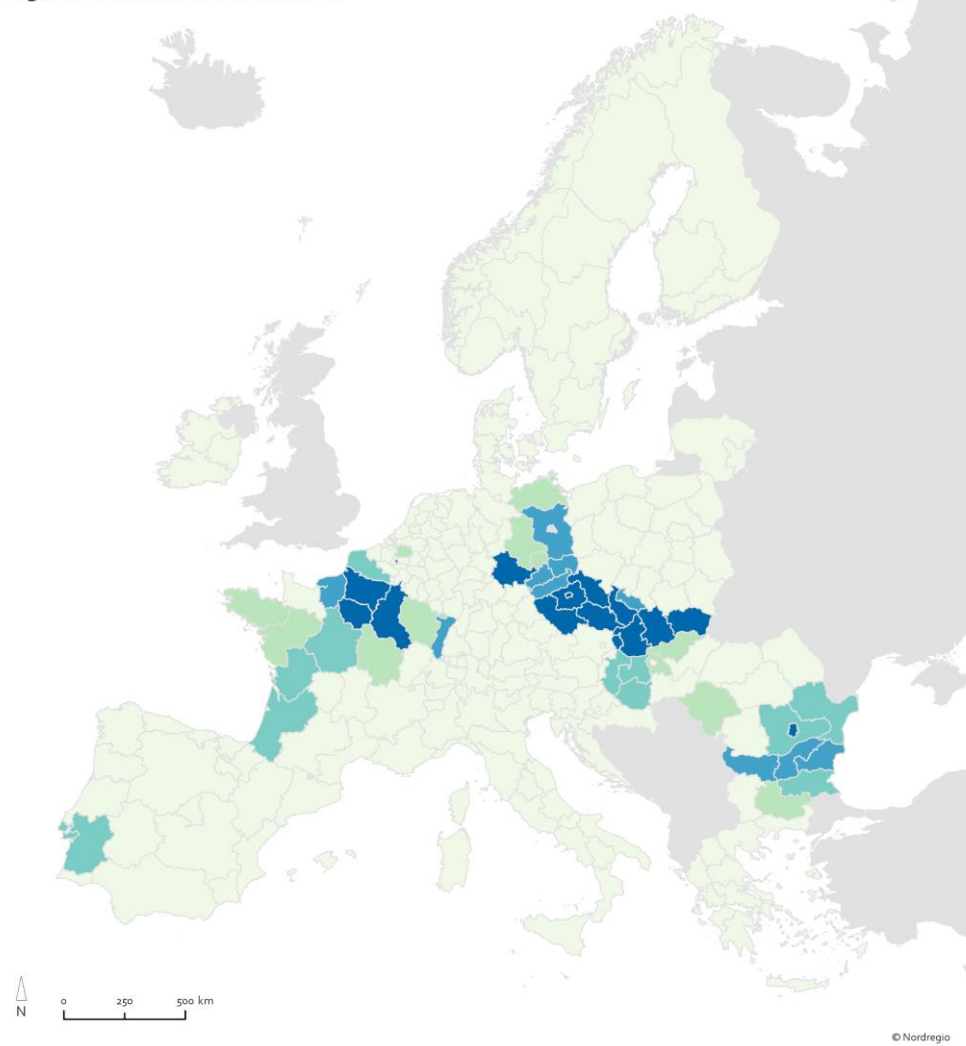
- ≤ 35%
- 35% - 45%
- 45% - 55%
- 55% - 65%
- > 65%
- No data

The Dataset is available at the European level.

NUTS-2 level considered.

Data source: EUROSTAT, Farm indicators by legal status of the holding, utilized agricultural area, type and economic size of the farm and NUTS2 region (2020).

**Farmland Ownership Distribution
Legal Person Classification (2020)**

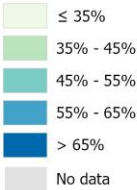


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**Land Ownership:
Legal Person**

Legal Person land ownership is classified as an entity or company (such as a corporation or association) recognized by law as having rights and obligations, involved in economic activities, and can own property, enter contracts, and be liable for taxes or subsidies.

**Share of Legal Person (%)
(out of total farmland area)**

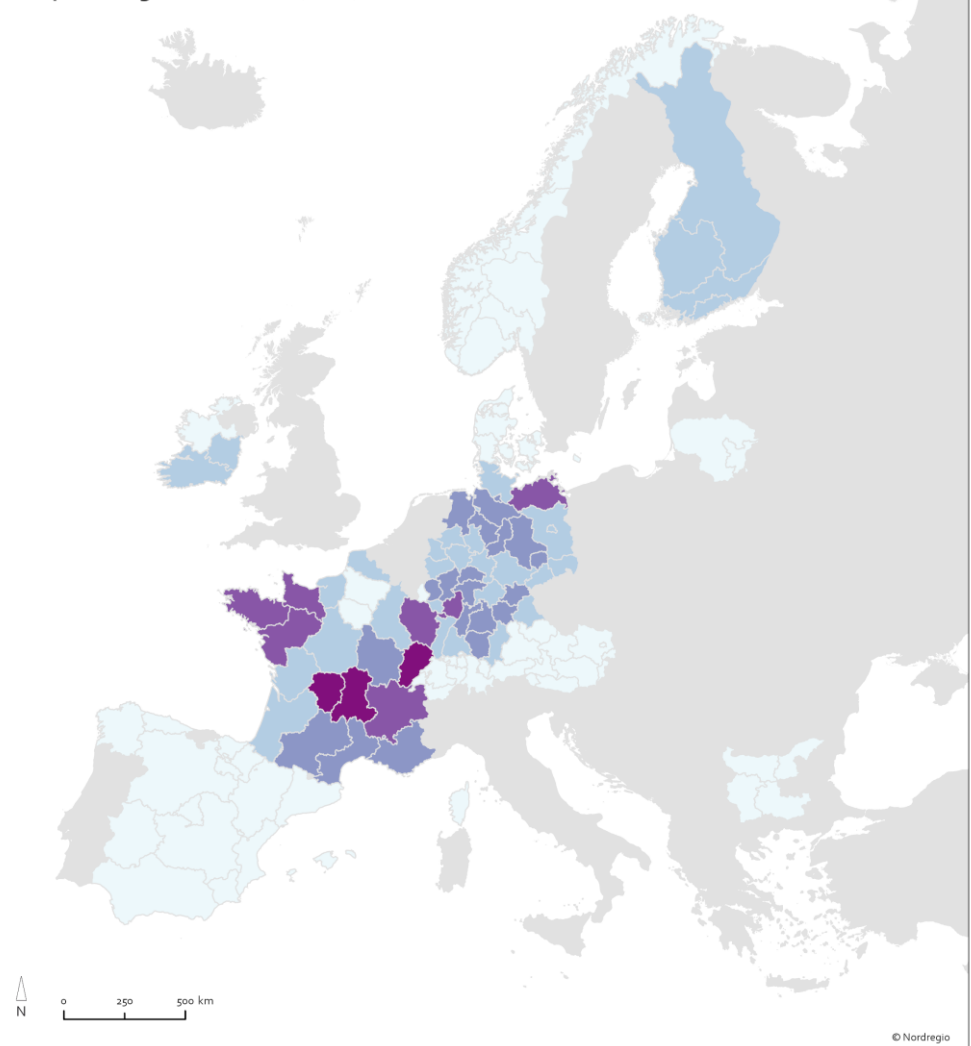


*The Dataset is available at
the European level.*

NUTS-2 level considered.

*Data source: EUROSTAT, Farm
indicators by legal status of the
holding, utilized agricultural area,
type and economic size of the
farm and NUTS2 region (2020).*

**Farmland Ownership Distribution
Group Holding Classification (2020)**

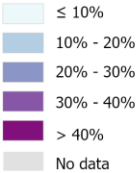


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**Land Ownership:
Group Holding**

Group Holding land ownership is classified as a farm owned or managed by multiple natural or legal persons, sharing ownership and operational responsibilities. It can be formal (in compliance with law) or based on a written agreement. A company owned by more than one natural person and treated as such by the state may also qualify as a group holding.

**Share of Group Holding (%)
(out of total farmland area)**



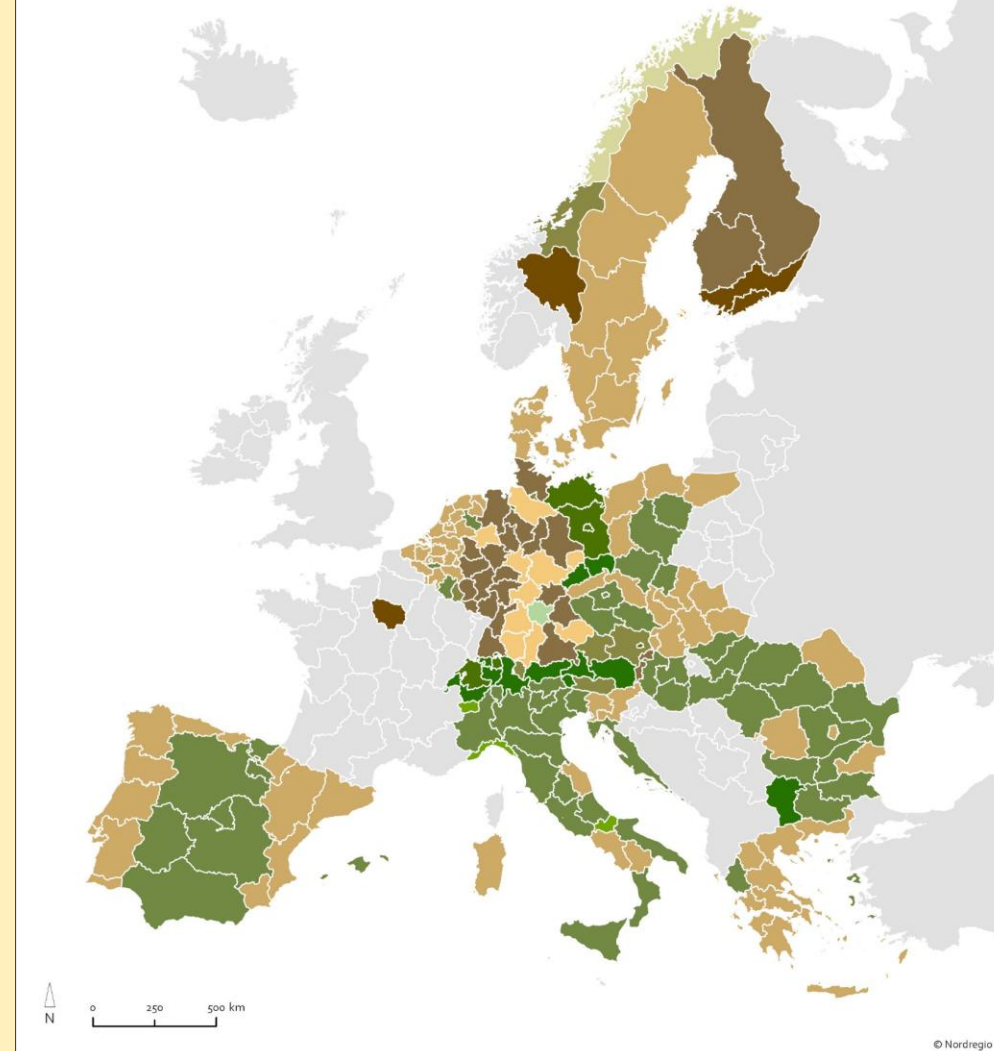
*The Dataset is available at
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NUTS-2 level considered.



*Data source: EUROSTAT, Farm
indicators by legal status of the
holding, utilized agricultural area,
type and economic size of the
farm and NUTS2 region (2020).*

Ownership Shifts (2016–2020)

- Family farms still dominate (67% in 2020)
- **Rise in company-owned farms,** especially in Central and Eastern Europe
- Group holdings increasing in France and Germany



Farmland Ownership Dynamic of Change
(increase or decrease in the size of farmland areas in hectares)

 Decrease in NP, Decrease in LP, Increase in GH	 Decrease in NP, None in LP, Increase in GH
 Decrease in NP, Decrease in LP, None in GH	 Decrease in NP, None in LP, None in GH
 Decrease in NP, Increase in LP, Decrease in GH	 Increase in NP, Decrease in LP, Decrease in GH
 Decrease in NP, Increase in LP, Increase in GH	 Increase in NP, Decrease in LP, Increase in GH
 Decrease in NP, Increase in LP, None in GH	 Increase in NP, Decrease in LP, None in GH
 Decrease in NP, None in LP, Decrease in GH	 Increase in NP, Increase in LP, Decrease in GH
	 No data

The Dataset is available at the European level.

NUTS-2 level considered.

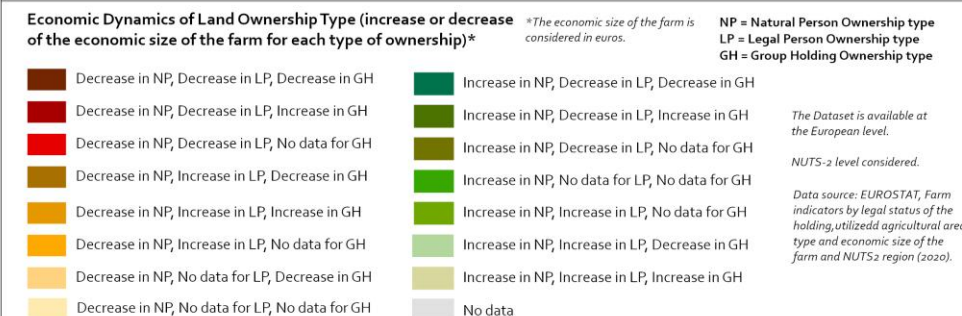
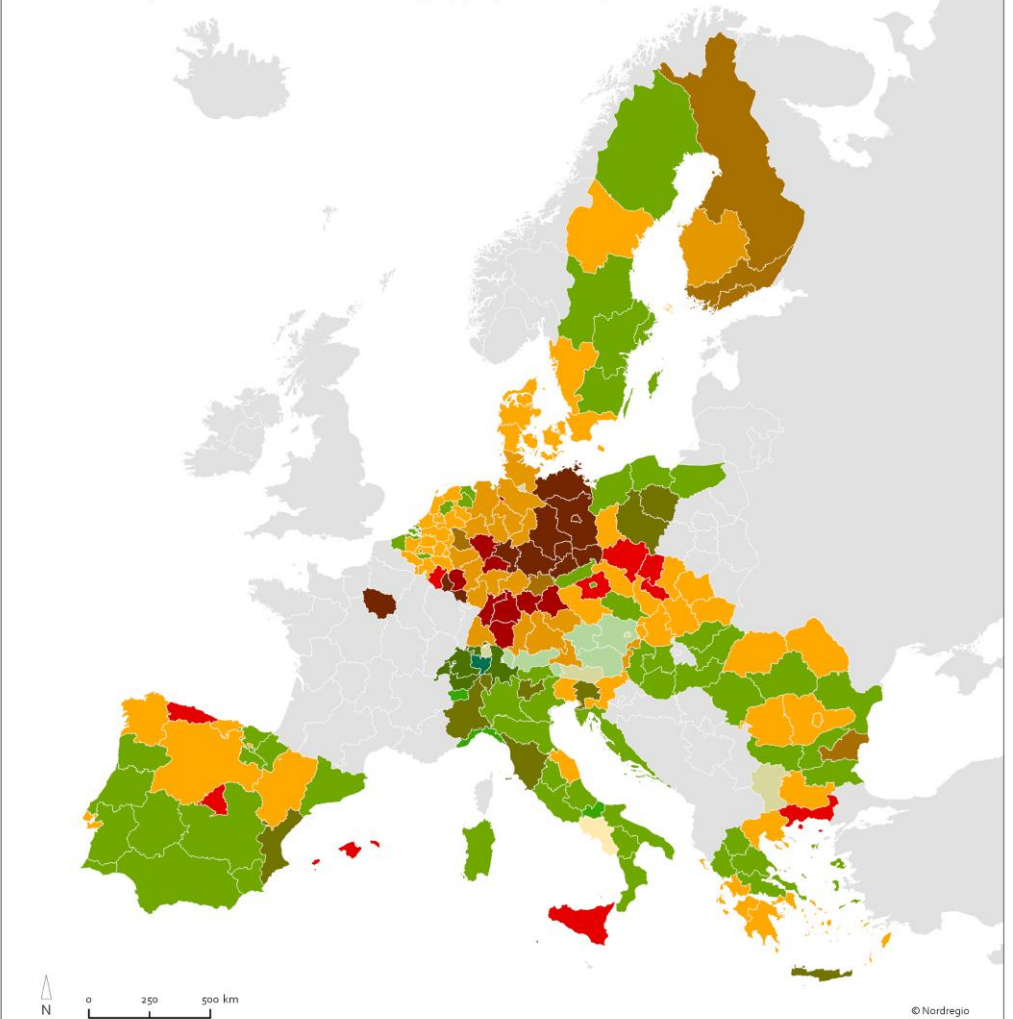
Data source: EUROSTAT, Farm indicators by legal status of the holding, utilized agricultural area, type and economic size of the farm and NUTS2 region (2020).

Why a shift towards company ownership?

Does it matter: what effects do this shift in ownership have?

Ownership and Economic Output of farms

- Company-owned farms often show stronger economic performance.
- 84.7% of regions with increased Legal Person ownership of farms saw economic growth
- Motivates change in ownership.



Increased company owned farmland undermine sustainability

- Company ownership increase 'distant' farming.
 - Separation of ownership and farming.
- Distant ownership comes with reduced possibilities to adapt to local conditions.
- Risk of speculative land grabs.



(Antonelli et al., 2015; Bunkus & Theesfeld, 2018; Burja et al., 2020; Sippel et al. 2017; Teklemariam et al. 2015)

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in European Agriculture

- Company ownership of farmland is linked to FDI.
 - investments made by entities from one economy to acquire lasting management influence (10 % or more of voting power) in enterprises operating in another economy
- Europe is a major recipient (and provider) of global FDI.
- Brings capital but also risks:
 - Reduced soil and water quality
 - Reduced access for young farmers
 - Reduced access to regional food
- Paradox: increase agricultural productivity and threatening local food systems.



(Chiarelli et al., 2022; Davis et al. 2023; FAO, 2023; Müller et al., 2021; Mills et al., 2020; OECD, 2024; Siciliano et al., 2017; Slätmo, 2018; Teklemariam et al. 2015)

EU & Member State Responses

Member States regulate land markets independently

- Heavily regulated land markets (Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Romania)
- Liberal land markets (Czechia, Denmark, Ireland and Finland)



Final reflections

- Patterns in farmland ownership are evolving
- Economic gains must be weighed against social and environmental costs and risks
- Policy must safeguard food sovereignty and access to food:
 - Improve transparency in land transactions
 - Strengthen oversight of FDI



- Include farmland as a strategic asset in local and regional planning.
- Support local farmer in public procurements

Read more

Slätmo, E., Bruno, K. B., & Berchoux, T. (2026). The evolving landscape of farmland ownership in Europe: Implications for food system sustainability. *Land Use Policy*, 160, 107837.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2025.107837>

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