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## **Germany: Fighting for Agriculture's Future**

It is known that Germany is an economic and agricultural powerhouse within Europe. Germany ranks third worldwide in agricultural exports, however it only exports 1/3 of its production (Orth). Their land size is comparable to the U.S. state of Montana. They are known for their wheat, barley, potatoes, and milk production. Throughout Germany's 138,067 square miles of land, there are approximately 276,000 farms. Although that may seem like a lot of farms, out of Germany's population of roughly 84 million people, only 1.2 percent are farmers or have jobs related to agriculture (Statista). Even though farmers represent just a small population in Germany they have been very vocal about their views regarding new German policies and regulations. Governmental policies are always controversial and can never satisfy all. Even when a government has good intentions for the majority of the population, it is unattainable to please all. Farmers in Germany and Western Europe such as Poland, France, Belgium, Spain, Ireland, and more are furious with new policies put in place by federal governments and the European Union. Farmers over the last few months and still currently are protesting against rising costs and taxes, new environmental regulations, and competition from cheap food imports from other countries, specifically Ukraine. These aren't all the problems farmers are facing however, individual country's farmers are facing problems personal to their own country. In Germany, farmers are frustrated by the government's plan to withdraw tax breaks, subsidies, unfair food prices, and usage of diesel for agricultural purposes. At one protest in Germany, some signs read, "No Farmer, No Food, No Future" (Kiderlin). It's crucial to realize that farmers aren't the only sector being affected by these new laws. According to AP News, "Other groups facing challenges have sympathized with or joined in some farmer's demonstrations. They have included road transport and hospitality associations..." and everyday citizens (Moulson). While, in Europe the farmers protest is a well known event, here in the United States not many know much about it. Through research of how German families purchase their food, the policies and regulations put on farming practices, and understanding the reasons behind the farmers' protest we can generate ideas of how to solve the food crisis which is impacting Germany, and neighboring European countries.

Germany's agricultural industry is very important to their economy and livelihood. The European Commission Agriculture & Rural Development and Trading Economics, states 19 million Germans live in rural areas, 47.49% of the land is used for agricultural purposes and there are thousands of farms nationwide (Trading Economics). The average farm size is approximately 150 acres. Farming and agriculture have a major role within the country. Although Germany is relatively small when compared to the United States land area, they however have a vast variety of geography and climate. Within the central and southern regions, the area is covered with forest, hills and mountains. Towards the north, there are flat plains that run to the sea coast. The eastern half of the country is farmland perfect for farming and other agricultural uses (National Geographic). Even though the country has many agricultural uses, most families are detached from agriculture as they live in urban areas in flats (apartments) or houses. The average family consists of a father, a mother, and 1-2 children. German families typically buy their groceries from markets or local shops. German families buy fresh produce such as vegetables and meat from the local market. They also visit the local bakery weekly to buy items such as bread. Periodically, they go to grocery stores like Kaufland, Rewe, or Aldi to get food like cereal, cheese, and occasionally meat. One thing to emphasize about Germans and their diet is that most families don't eat out a lot at restaurants or fast food. Most German families find it important to eat fresh food and buy their produce from markets or local shops. Although Germans prioritize supporting local producers, farmers are struggling to produce large quantities of produce and compete with outside imports from other countries which is due to governmental policy and conflict between farmers and the German government.

All across Western Europe, there has been struggle and tension between farmers, the European Union, and governments. One might wonder how farmers protesting has anything to do with food production, as many people assume that their food just comes from the grocery store. However, the protest has had a major impact on food production in Germany and the rest of Europe. Videos are floating around X, formerly known as Twitter, of European grocery stores empty and without food. Many farmers across Europe aren't just protesting, but showing a sign of defiance towards the government and refusing to grow and produce food. Germany's Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock, says that Europe and Germany are currently facing "the worst global food crisis of our generation" (Deutschland.de). This crisis within Germany primarily sparked when the German government made plans to reduce or withdraw tax breaks from the agriculture sector which was announced in late December as part of their 2024 budget plan. The plan included subsidy cuts for fuel usage by farmers and tax breaks for farming vehicles which sparked anger among farmers who said this would endanger their livelihood (Kiderlin). On top of the 2024 budget plan that will greatly impact German farmers is the new strict green policies. A Times article explained how the European Union is hoping to cut and eventually eliminate greenhouse gas emissions produced by farming (Rajvanshi). The E.U. is reevaluating and recreating its Common Agricultural Policy and European Green Deal which will contribute to the goal of becoming climate-neutral by 2050. That would mean by 2050 the amount of greenhouse gasses within the air would be zeroed out by the amount of greenhouse gasses removed from the air. On top of this, farmers are required to put aside 4% of their farmland for non-production, introduce fields to mandatory crop rotations, and reduce fertilizer by 20%. All of these practices will hopefully help the current climate situation. Additionally, in the past few years, European countries have been struggling to compete with cheap exports and have seen many changes in how food is grown, distributed, and consumed. Bloomberg reported, "Governments are no longer asking when a food crisis may arrive, but rather how many they can deal with at once" (de Sousa). Many farmers are fearful of bankruptcy and for the future of agriculture. The Guardian described that, "For some farmers the burden of paying for more of their pollution is a step too far after an energy crisis and pandemic that has left many struggling to make ends meet." On top of that many farmers report that they feel overworked and underappreciated by the urban population (Niranjan). As a result of new regulations and policies from the German government and the European Union, many farmers have turned to protesting. In Berlin, some farmers even dumped manure in the streets. On January 15th, a protest took place at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate which consisted of 3,000 tractors, 2,000 trucks, and 10,000 people (Global News). One German farmer, Werner Schuermann, highlighted many farmers' frustration in an interview with Global News. Schuermann said, "This is about the German farming industry's future. I was born in 1966, my son in 2003, and he is currently undergoing agriculture vocational training. I am here today for him and his buddies to protest, so that in the future, we will still have a German farming industry, and don't have to import everything from neighboring E.U. countries. Farmers want fair prices for their products and we want to be able to make ends meet." Germany, Europe's biggest economy is in shambles, and the German government is questioning how to silence the chaos. According to BBC News, the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, "has insisted his government is taking the farmers' arguments seriously and has offered a "good compromise" after partially watering down their initial subsidy cut proposal" (Parker & Robinson). Even after reducing the severity of previous policies, German farmers are still left displeased and say that they will continue to protest until policies are revoked or meet their demands fully.

Not only is the German government struggling to compromise to German farmers' demands while still keeping climate change and budget goals in mind, but so are many other countries. According to the Times, the E.U. has also been fighting to "balance the need to save agricultural livelihoods while reducing farming's impact on the climate" (Rajvanshi). The European Union and German government have been pressuring farmers to produce less food to meet climate change reduction goals, when in previous years they had encouraged farmers to produce more in order to feed the growing population. The challenge is balance...How do German farmers abide by the new policies that support climate change, while still

producing enough food to support not only Germany and Europe but the rest of the world as well? There are so many proposals and solutions on how to subsidize and reduce the problem of climate change. The German government needs to find an answer of how they should address climate change, budget, unfair competition, subsidies, and the farmers' protest while under a food crisis. There is no doubt that the German government is overwhelmed and perhaps in over their head. As a young adult even I can see the complexity of this situation and acknowledge the severity of it as well. AP News even wrote in a recent article that, "It is [Germany] struggling to juggle multiple crises and reconcile lofty aims, such as transforming Europe's biggest economy to meet climate targets..." (Moulson). Currently, Germany has tried to get farmers back in the fields and stop protesting by reducing the severity of their new policies, the common term being used to describe this is "watering down" their policies. Some ways Germany has strived to do this is by introducing tax exemptions and tax breaks (primarily referring to the tax on diesel) slowly over three years, instead of instantly like the government had originally planned. However, farmers aren't satisfied with those "watered down" changes and are very displeased with Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his government's approach to these problems. Not only has the German government struggled to come up with solutions to these problems, but other governments across Europe have as well. In Poland, the government tried to address the farming protest by facilitating discussions between farmers and the Prime Minister, Donald Tusk. Also, the Polish government promised to reduce the grain surplus imports and have reached out to the E.U. and asked for a ban on imports from Russian agricultural products (including Ukraine), note that neither Russia nor Ukraine are part of the European Union (Strzelecki). Although the Polish government seems to have made large jumps to support their farmers, their farmers will continue to protest until these promises are fully met. There are many ways to attack the food crisis along with the farmer's protest in Germany and here is my recommendation. The Iowa Youth Institute suggests that hunger can be resolved by four different approaches, such as; improving human health, increasing access to education and opportunity, promoting economic growth, and protecting the environment. For the current German food crisis, I believe that the problem must be solved through economic and environmental solutions. Through economic growth and environmental protection we can eliminate the problems that have inflated the food crisis such as the farmers' protest and the unfair competition via imported goods. Creating an economic approach will help benefit the German economy, government, and farmers as all three of those groups have been struggling financially. Additionally, having environmental needs in mind while creating my solution ensures that the German government, European Union, and environmentalists are still satisfied. I believe that by enacting my 3 point plan, we can successfully eliminate the food crisis. The first step is that the German government must eliminate competition from other countries' imports. Reducing imports not only will make the farming protest subside, but it will also make the markets less competitive for German farmers, which means that they are more likely to directly make larger profits. In addition to this, other demands of farmers must be met also like subsidy and tax issues. Supporting farmers through subsidies from the government is proven to increase productivity and will create profits for the agriculture industry. Also, reducing taxes on agricultural necessities such as diesel will allow farmers to produce without as many restraints. Secondly, farmers must increase productivity. In order to get farmers to increase production, specifically in Germany, it is important that the government meets farmers' primary demands, and is successful throughout step 1. Increasing production will allow for more crops to be grown and produced. While increasing production it is important to keep the environment (primarily soil health) in mind. Farmers can do this by rotating crops, companion planting, no till, etc. Using state of the art machinery and technology such as high speed planters, GPS auto-swath, and AFS Harvest Command will also help with an increase of production. These machines and technologies increase production by increasing efficiency due to precise application. The high speed planters aid farmers by an increased planter speed. It is vital to plant during specific weather periods to ensure higher yields of crops. High speed planters allow farmers to plant crops at faster rates, which helps reduce the risk of weather impacting delays (Nove). GPS auto-swath software increases production by applying the perfect amount of seeds, fertilizer, and chemicals (Calderone). This is a great technology that is beneficial to the environment because it automatically limits the over use of products while making sure that an accurate amount is applied

(Calderone). This specific technology is very appropriate for German farmers to use as they are under scrutiny by the government and European Union due to their carbon footprint. Lastly, the AFS Harvest Command software can also increase production as it controls CaseIH combines by making necessary adjustments on the go to efficiently produce the highest quality grain possible (CaseIH). For example, the AFS Harvest Command may change multiple settings (such as sieves and fan speed) if it senses that grain is being lost out of the combine. It is also capable of monitoring grain traveling into the grain tank to track and ensure the highest quality grain is being preserved (CaseIH). It is clear that the high speed planter, GPS auto-swath, and AFS Harvest Command are suitable and appropriate for German farmers to use in their current situation due to the food shortage. Thirdly, since Germany is within a food crisis, it is important that citizens aren't wasting food. Approximately, 1/3 of food produced is thrown away or wasted worldwide. Citizens can reduce food waste by only purchasing necessities. To reiterate, my approach to eliminate the German food crisis is by eliminating competition, supporting farmers through subsidies and tax breaks, increasing productivity, and reducing food waste. This three step approach plan will satisfy economic and environmental needs as an increase of production and less competition will increase the German economy. Also, farmers can still satisfy environmentalists by ensuring that their farming practices are the safest and best approaches to growing and producing food. Now, there are questions to address regarding my 3 point step solution: How would it be funded? What role would culture and citizens have in this solution? One way to generate funds for a new policy to protect German farmer's livelihood is through a political campaign or rally to raise money. Although political campaigns may seem ineffective, if marketed correctly they can accumulate large sums of money. I know first-hand that farmers are hardworking, down-to-earth, and personable people. I believe that their cause would gain a lot of traction and support to fund production and limit imported goods. It may be a concern, whether German farmers can grow enough food to support all of Germany, and I can confidently say that as the 3rd largest exporter of agricultural goods, I believe that German farmers will be able to support all residents living within Germany. German citizens would have a major role in this new policy and way of agriculture within Germany. One way that they can support German farmers is by buying their produce and products instead of buying imported goods. Buying German-grown products doesn't only mean supporting your fellow Germans, but it also instills a sense of patriotism within oneself. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "*We can all get more together than we can apart.*" This quote is applicable to the events taking place in Germany. When German citizens come together to support and protest alongside farmers to challenge German policies, change can be accomplished together.

Currently, a huge topic within agriculture is sustainability. Farmers and agriculture leaders are constantly asking which practices are most sustainable. Arguably Germany and the European Union are facing their current problems with farmers due to their efforts to become a more sustainable country. Although I proposed loosening up climate regulations on farmers and giving them a lot more freedom with their agriculture practices, they must farm in a way that will positively impact the environment. Ways that farmers can improve the environment are by no-till, planting cover crops, controlling water runoff, rotating crops, grazing pasture, etc. Not only do these sustainable practices benefit the environment, but they also help increase and benefit food production by improving soil nutrients, reducing pest cycles, and higher yields. Farmers make up a small population worldwide, and yet they feed 7.8 billion people. Farmers truly are one of a kind. When it comes to farming there are no off days, there are no shortcuts, and there certainly aren't any guarantees. Farmers are the only way to cure and stop any food shortage or crisis. So instead of making their jobs difficult, I urge the German government and politicians that we let farmers farm because without them there is no food and certainly no future.

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