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OP. 157 THE NEED FOR INNOVATIONS IN AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS IN EUROPE: PATHWAYS AND CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract: Agriculture plays a pivotal role in ensuring food security and environmental sustainability. As the primary source of food production, it holds the key to providing safe, nutritious, and ample sustenance necessary for healthy living. However, it also contributes significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 26% of the total. In light of this dual role, experts, notably the EAT-Lancet Commission (2019), advocate for prioritizing healthy diets and sustainable food production as fundamental planetary goals. Addressing these imperatives demands a multifaceted approach encompassing social and technological innovations in agricultural practices. Concurrently, recent agricultural protests in Europe against specific environmental sustainability policies underscore the urgency of understanding the underlying causes of discontent within the farming community. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of hierarchical regional innovation systems (Tartaruga et al., 2024), this study endeavours to elucidate these complexities through the lens of economic geography and innovation studies. Our findings reveal a deepening rift characterized by economic and technological exclusion, particularly among European family farmers. This exclusionary trend exacerbates rural discontent and engenders broader societal ramifications, including the proliferation of anti-environmental populism in urban centres (Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci, 2023). In conclusion, we posit that addressing these challenges necessitates the implementation of robust innovation policies that prioritize both the sustainability of food production and social inclusivity.

Keywords: agri-food systems, inclusive innovation, sustainability, hierarchical regional innovation systems, European Union