

From Agri-culture to Agri-nature: New Alliances for Farmland Preservation in Norway

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Introduction

Farmland preservation has gained increased attention in Norwegian politics the past years. In 2015 a National farmland strategy was passed in the Norwegian Parliament (Storting)¹, and in February 2018 the Parliament called the Government to update the strategy with more concrete measures in the 2019 fiscal budget².

Protection of arable land has long been considered an important part of Norwegian agricultural policy. Farmland preservation is even enshrined in the Norwegian constitution from 1814 §110b and in a special law for farmland, the Land Act, stating that “Cultivable land must not be disposed of in such a way as to render it unfit for agricultural production in the future” (Land Act 1965/1995, nr 23 §9). Only three percent of Norway’s total land area is farmland. A political concern is that only 38 percent of the country’s consumed agricultural calories are produced nationally (Eldby and Smedshaug 2015). The current sense of urgency in protecting farmland is however strongly linked to trends in urban development. On the urban fringe, infrastructure and residential development are encroaching on farmland at a steady pace. The significant difference between lands strongly regulated agricultural value and its market price, which in high demand areas is approximately six or seven times higher, is an important causal factor in this trend. Thus, in spite of Norway’s small amount of agricultural land both per inhabitant and in relation to total land area, farmland is being lost to other purposes at a steady pace. The largest cities in the country, most notably Oslo, Stavanger, and Trondheim, are located in the centre of the country’s most important agricultural areas. Arable land in urban-rural fringe areas is therefore under great pressure. Estimates show that if present trends are allowed to continue, almost half of the areas suitable for food production will be lost over the next 50 years (Straume 2013).

¹ See: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/prop.-127-s-20142015/id2413930/#VED4>

² See: <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Saker/Sak/?p=69839>

This chapter investigates the background for the recent attention to farmland preservation in Parliament and explores how the policy field is shaped in preparation for political decision making. Who is developing the farmland policy field in Norway today, and how is farmland made sense of and framed? By exploring these questions we present a story of new actors entering the field of farmland politics and show how these actors engage in farmland politics by making sense of farmland in new ways. Ultimately, the chapter sheds light on strategic alliance formation as a means to influence policy.

The subject to policy regulation: “farmland”

Before we enter the policy domain, we want to enter the material world to establish the resource that are at the center of the policy debate. What *is* farmland? While the term farmland generally refers to land suitable for growing food, the more particular biological term for this resource is *soil*, or *humus*. Humus is the rich organic matter that plants grow in, and that hosts a myriad of insects and bacteria. Scientists have no single answer to what humus consists of: when breaking humus down into its constituent parts, they find wide variations. Some soils are sandy, while others contain more clay. These characteristics are contextual in character, as thousands of years of microclimate in each specific place forms a complex and unique ecosystem. A rule of thumb is that it takes 1000 years to form a one-meter deep layer of productive soil (Juniper 2013).

Soil is a renewable resource when managed sustainably. Yet when put under asphalt, it is gone forever. All over the world, wherever there is urban expansion, municipalities convert farmland into sites for housing and infrastructure. Soil is being lost ten times faster than it is being formed in large parts of the United States, while in India and China the rate is estimated to be forty times faster (Juniper 2013). To a certain extent, this development seems inevitable as more and more people move from rural areas to cities. Much of our most productive soil is found in the vicinity of rapidly growing cities, so it is vulnerable to urban expansion. In a property-developing mindset, this farmland is seemingly vacant and ready for non-agricultural uses. Focusing on farmland as a fundamental natural resource calls this development approach into question. A recognition of the crucial role of soil and the fact that an increasing amount of the world’s farmland is in poor condition has led to growing global awareness of the need to safeguard our prime agricultural resource base (UN Soil Year 2015). How is farmland described and made sense of in the latest efforts to preserve farmland in Norwegian politics? In order to approach how farmland is framed and made sense of in the field, it is useful to consider theories of policy alliance formations and policy discourses.

Theoretical Perspectives on Alliance Formations and Policy Influence

Organizations can influence policymaking in various ways, for instance through lobbying, or by voicing their view in public in order to initiate public engagement and elicit democratic pressure. In any case, alliances are crucial to ensure political strength. Theoretical approaches that seek to understand the role of sense-making processes, and interaction between various actors in a policy field emphasize different aspects of how policy alliances are shaped. In this section, we briefly explain three perspectives on the making of alliances and their potential impact within policy fields: 1) the shared value approach; 2) the pragmatic action approach, and 3) the discursive authority approach. The aim is to enable an analysis that take into account the complexity of sense-making and alliance formation, and help us sort out what is currently going on in the Norwegian policy field surrounding farmland.

Let us start with the *shared value approach*. Shared values constitute a core in several theoretical approaches to the understanding of policy alliances and changes in policies over time. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), proposed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith (1993), is based on an assumption that, over time, the actors engaged with any given policy field will join in groups based on shared core values, constituting a value system. Changes in group formations and alliances imply a changed value system within the policy field. Therefore, the values policy actors represent are crucial to understanding policy change. The ACF presumes intended and strategic actions based on core values. Other perspectives on the role of shared values in policymaking have focused more on their articulations. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) address articulations as a process whereby various progressive social movements forge connections and alliances with each other. In doing so, they constantly modify their own political identity and their horizon of intelligibility. This approach can add to the understanding of how values are negotiated and become shared, rather than assuming that shared or identical values pre-exist among organizations engaged in a policy field. In this perspective, the potential for policy change lies in establishing “chains of equivalence”, similar articulations voiced by neighboring social movements. The weakness of alliances is expressed in opposing articulations or disarticulations of shared values.

A second approach to the understanding of alliance formation and policy, which we call *the pragmatic action approach*, shifts focus from values to actual undertakings that establish associations within the policy field. Actor Network Theory (ANT) sees the making

of policy alliances as concrete actions taken by engaged actors to establish connections (Latour 2005). Rather than assuming that alliances and policy change result from shared values and how actors act upon and articulate these values, alliance formation and influence are understood as resulting from a series of independent actions, decisions, and initiatives. These actions can of course express certain values, but the theory suggests that only the actual actions taken by the actors are relevant for the making of alliances and their influence. Hence, the research interest lies in exploring how seemingly arbitrary actions and pragmatic considerations can accumulate connections and associations between actors in ways that result in what we recognize as an alliance, rather than in exploring intentions and values.

While both the values and action approaches focus directly on the *actors* engaged in policy controversies, the third approach we bring into the analysis takes the particular discursive context of policy making into account. What we call the *discursive authority approach* draws on the work of Maarten Hajer (2005, 2009). In addition to examining actions and articulations of values, it takes a broader contextual view of alliances and their potential influence. According to Hajer, numerous, similar articulations, sometimes called chains of equivalence (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985), do not guarantee change. In this perspective, discourse, defined as “language use conceived as social practice” (Fairclough 1992: 138), is central. Hajer takes up the “mediatization” of politics, as the logics of news media with their dramaturgy influence the way in which power to define policy is produced and reproduced. In order to establish authority and influence in a policy field, one needs to craft storylines that establish an understanding of the situation, the policy problem, and its solution within the span of a sentence.

Following a shared value approach to the understanding of new alliances in the policy field of farmland management, we should expect to find that narratives represent the preservation of farmland as a common core value and, furthermore, that the alliance finds its strength in several similar articulations or utterances voiced by a number of organizations. A strong and potentially influential alliance can be recognized by a unanimous expression of a shared value. Based on the pragmatic action approach, however, we should pay attention to the actions taken by the various organizations involved and assume that shared values do not automatically draw actors together. Third, following the discursive authority approach, we would expect that farmland preservation is constituted as a storyline with specific metaphors that appeal to certain collective fears and define victims and villains.

Summing up, we approach the empirical investigation with three key interests: 1) to see how values are articulated, disarticulated, and embedded in the alliance; 2) to look into

the concrete actions taken by the involved organizations; and 3) to analyze and discuss how an alliance can potentially influence policy making by the means of public communication.

Methodology

The methodological set-up of the research conducted followed a Situational Analysis approach as it is developed by Adele Clarke (2005). Situational Analysis is designed for encountering the full complexity of any given situation through multi-site investigation. A situation is defined by centering on a particular research object. In our case: farmland preservation as a policy issue. Clarke (2005) provides several concrete mapping tools to get an overview over actors, standpoints and materiality related to the research object. By using different types of analytical maps, the analysis presented in this chapter was first informed by media texts, booklets and flyers produced by organizations with the theme farmland preservation, including texts published on organizational web sites and opinion pieces published in the Norwegian printed press. The mapping of this material provided important information for the selection of actors for in-depth inquiry. Through the process of mapping we identified a joint opinion piece published in *Stavanger Aftenblad* on 27 February 2014 as a central site of inquiry (Sørum et al. 2014). The piece represent a remarkably broad and diverse range of signatories, organizations that in different ways are engaged in the contemporary controversy over farmland preservation.

This chapter is mainly based on the analysis of qualitative interviews with ten persons representing eight different organizations who signed the opinion piece in *Stavanger Aftenblad*. The interviews were conducted by the authors, as semi-structured conversations covering topics such as land use, agriculture, policy, and strategies for advocacy. We also asked explicitly about policy concerns. Most of the interviews lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, and then subjected to thorough thematic analyses.

In the following section the interviewees are referred to by the name of the organization they represent. If nothing else is mentioned explicitly, all quotations are taken from the interviews.

Organization	Type of organization
Norwegian Rural Youth	Rural development—youth

Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature	Environment
Norwegian Farmers Union	Farmers' interests
The Norwegian Society of Rural Women	Rural women's interests
The Norwegian Cooperative of Grain Producers	Farmers' business interests
Spire, The Development Fund Youth Organization	Development—youth
Nature and Youth	Environment—youth
The Federation of Norwegian Agricultural Co-operatives	Farmers business' interests

Table 1: Organizations

Articulations of an Agri-environmental Policy Field

“Our scarce land resources must be preserved for future generations. We join forces to strengthen farmland preservation.”

This declaration was put forward in the opinion piece published in the regional newspaper *Stavanger Aftenblad* on 27 February 2014 (Sørum et al. 2014). What is special about this piece is not its focus on farmland preservation per se, but the diversity of the signatories. The piece was signed by leaders of a range of civil society organizations, including those concerned with the environment, agrarian interests, rural development, and global solidarity, as well as a number of youth organizations. At first sight, this might seem like an easy assemblage of actors. Looking more closely at the actors enrolled in the alliance, however, complicates this picture. These actors can be categorized as either agricultural or environmental organizations. The signatories have stronger or weaker ties to the farmers' movement. The Farmers Union is an interest organization for farmers who together with other actors each year negotiates with the government on farmers' behalf on prices and other central terms for the agricultural sector. Norwegian Rural Youth aims to contribute to viable rural communities and activate and engage rural young people. Strongly tied to the Farmers Union, it focuses on agricultural and policy matters. The Norwegian Society of Rural Women, as its name indicates, is concerned with rural women's issues. Two of the signatories are agricultural industry actors: the Federation of Norwegian Agricultural Cooperatives is an umbrella organization with 16 member cooperatives, including the Norwegian Cooperative of Grain Producers. The environmental organizations include the

Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature and Nature and Youth, the youth organization of Friends of the Earth. Spire is an environment and development oriented youth organization with increasing engagement in agriculture.

Two specific cases, located in different parts of Norway, seem to have sparked broader engagement with farmland preservation from youth and environmental activists. In Trondheim (the third largest city in Norway), politicians pressed for housing development on a large area of the highest-quality farmland in 2013 (Vinge in progress). The other incident took place in Vestby in 2015, a small municipality strategically placed at a crossroad in the densely populated and fertile eastern part of the country. In Vestby, the furniture chain IKEA will establish a new warehouse on prime farmland.

When several of our informants talked about how broader public engagement with the preservation of farmland began, they used a rather diffuse concept of a “certain line” that was crossed to explain why “new forces” entered the field. The secretary of the Norwegian Society for Rural Women said: “It is my experience that agriculture has been alone in this, but that may be changing now. (...) When you see cases like this [referring to Trondheim and Vestby] that cross certain lines, like the Minister of Agriculture is doing now, new forces are mobilized”. Here “crossing a line” refers to a break with established Norwegian policy, which has long aimed to protect farmland from irreversible change. As a spokesperson for Norwegian Rural Youth said “They have understood that it is a non-renewable resource we are talking about here”.

Pragmatism and Considerations of Legitimacy

The farmers’ organizations have long seen farmland preservation as a core area of engagement, varying with different political initiatives and development cases (Vinge 2015). The recent loosening of the general ban against building on agricultural land led to a new mobilization. For agriculturally oriented organizations, the broad media coverage of the proposed IKEA development on high quality farmland as well as the coverage of the farmland-devouring Trondheim area plan were long awaited opportunities for gaining influence and affecting public opinion. The farmers’ organizations take it as a given that they should engage in this matter. We can see pragmatic reasoning in how they talk about their motivation for allying with environmental organizations: an alliance lends greater legitimacy to their cause than standing alone.

Following the actor-network approach, we should also pay attention to the actions and events constituting the alliance. In this case the actions taken by the president of Norwegian

Rural Youth are worth following. A central arena for her actions was a hearing for a national strategy for farmland preservation. A proposal for a National farmland strategy was first issued by four members of Parliament, representing the Liberal party (Venstre)³ in December 2013⁴. The proposal was discussed in the Committee for Trade and Industry (March 2014) and the committee recommended that the Government should develop a national strategy for protection of farmland to present for decision in the Parliament (Storting)⁵. Prior to the committee statement, the proposal was subject to an open, public hearing on February 11, 2014, in which these organizations all attended. This arena gave opportunity for new connections among actors. Leading up to this hearing, several organizations had given statements on how best to safeguard farmland. Seeking to have a greater impact with a broader alliance, The President for the Norwegian Rural Youth contacted the different organizations at the hearing. Her goal was to undertake a concerted campaign. Noteworthy here is the fact that there was no clearly articulated strategy or plan, but rather a sense of potential. Thus, writing a letter to the regional newspaper seemed the first doable action.

In addition to using an opinion piece as a means to influence the public, pragmatic considerations about which arguments are most effective in promoting the cause of farmland preservation in the current political climate prevailed. Positioning farmland as a *common good* rather than as something that is mostly of interest to individual farmers is one such consideration. In Norway, almost all farmland is still owned by family farmers. Farmers' organizations have traditionally been strong advocates of the principle of private ownership of land (Almås 2004). In the case of farmland preservation, however, farmers' organizations have come to the realization that it is in their interest to frame farmland as a necessity for the wider society, not just as something that concerns the agricultural sector or individual farmers. This was a pragmatic consideration: as long as farmland is looked upon as solely the private property of farmers and not a common good that matters to the whole society, it will lose out when it comes into competition with other societal functions such as infrastructure or housing. In trying to voice this view, however, agricultural organizations have discovered that they lack credibility when talking about farmland preservation as a societal issue. No matter their actual arguments, they are taken as trying to benefit their own members' interests. Forming an alliance with other actors is thus an important strategy. As a leader of

³ André N. Skjelstad, Pål Farstad, Ola Elvestuen og Abid Q. Raja

⁴ <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Saker/Sak/?p=58613>

⁵ See: <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Publikasjoner/Innstillinger/Stortinget/2013-2014/inns-201314-149/2/>

the Farmers' Union put it, "We try to get others to talk about it instead of us, because we see that when we use it, it is taken as coming from the farmers again, trying to get their hands on a few billion kroner".

Recreational woodlands enjoy a strong normative protection among the general public, whereas farmland is both in real terms and in the minds of urban inhabitants something that belongs to individuals. The farmers Union want to position farmland as a common good in line with the recreational woodlands. "I think the key to achieving better protection is to give people this sense of ownership", said their deputy leader. "Maybe not bringing people into the field, but we as property owners must get better at providing paths that can bring people out to the recreation areas".

The Norwegian Society of Rural Women voices the same pragmatism. To increase their impact, they have repositioned themselves as a modern consumer organization, which is a rather large step away from the previous myth about farmwomen who weave and do fundraising. Their goal is to characterize farmland as the best possible product and to appeal to people's feelings:

To find creative ways to sell this, to find a way to affect people. (...) Our normal line of reasoning does not hit its target. So how to crack that code? (...) We are marketed as a consumer organization; we try to make sure that people don't think we are the Farmers Union, because we are not. We try to gain a certain trust.

In addition to participating in public debate, all the organizations try to influence politicians more directly. When the conservative-right government took office in 2013, the politicians in power increasingly kept agricultural interests at an arm's length. Our material shows that environmental organizations find it *easy* to get meetings with politicians, while the agriculturally oriented describe this as *difficult*. The Minister of Agriculture, for instance, declined to meet with the grain producers' organization. According to the spokesperson for the Norwegian Cooperative for Grain Producers, "This was the first time I experienced a minister saying no thanks to a meeting, she is not interested. This is pretty phenomenal, in my opinion. Because then only ideology will be in control, not professional knowledge".

This situation created a need for new arenas to influence policy for the agriculturally oriented organizations and contributed to a push for new alliances based on a realization that action had to be taken in order to make common values visible to other actors in the policy field (Latour 2005).

Discourse: “Global Future” Rather Than “National Economy and Security”

The proposed IKEA store on Norway’s best farmland and the magnitude of the Trondheim area plan attracted wide media coverage. This attention offered an opportunity for different actors to gain influence in farmland politics. All the organizations interviewed, albeit in various ways, referred to these particular incidents when they explained their engagement. Even though they are only two among many other instances of farmland being transformed to serve urban purposes all over the country, the way they have been framed in the media has made them into something larger; they have become important discursive events (Fairclough 1992).

In past debates over farmland preservation, one main rationale has been the importance of safeguarding the national resource base in order to maintain self-sufficiency in agricultural products at a highest possible level (Eldby and Smedshaug 2015). Farmland preservation has been based on an egocentric and economic rationale that is limited by the borders of the nation state. The goal has been communicated as securing Norway’s food supply by growing as much grain as possible ourselves and avoiding the importation of agricultural products that Norway has the climatic conditions to grow.

With the new actors entering the policy field, a completely different set of values has been positioned at the core of the argumentation. Even though the cases that sparked engagement with farmland preservation are local, a whole range of *global* concerns are part of the storyline for why soil preservation is important. The national economic and security oriented self-sufficiency storyline is replaced by a more ecological and global rationale. Farmers’ organizations, for instance, frame it as their duty as stewards of the land to enlighten the public about the importance of farmland, its quality and scarcity. The Society of Rural Women articulated this strong moral commitment to preserving farmland for future generations: “Urban development of farmland is an act of robbery from the future, and the issue must be prioritized in politics.”

The thread in the storyline is that food production globally is taking an undesirable direction. The development of mega-farms and the industrialization of food production have become a threat to food production by removing it from its natural resource base. Hence, farmland preservation is inserted into a larger discourse regarding the direction for food production on a global scale. According to Nature and Youth, “Our fear is that the more you industrialize agriculture, you get more climate emissions, machines, pesticides, everything”.

This realization includes a notion that Norway's rather small scale and family based agricultural sector is more environmentally sound than its North American counterpart. This line of reasoning proceeds from an environmental point of view: it becomes important to keep agriculture the "Norwegian way", rather than outsource it to the "rest of the world". This storyline implies that an environmental focus does not interfere with farming, but rather strengthens it. The focus then moves toward food production as resource dependent, which sets it apart from the manufacture of other goods. Nature and Youth emphasized, "This is first and foremost a strong agreement about preserving farmland because of its ecology".

A central presumption in this understanding is that farmland is understood as part of nature, rather than opposing nature in being cultivated. The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature put it this way:

It is about taking care of one of the most important services that nature offers, and that is food. Nature gives this to us, it is one of the so-called ecosystem services, and safeguarding them is extremely important. And to do that, you depend on diversity in species, right. Why do we have a campaign to save the bumblebee? Because it is incredibly important for our food production.

In the rationale for farmland preservation offered by environmentalist organizations, farmland is framed as a natural resource. The shift of focus from agricultural practices to the resource itself facilitates a perspective that farmers and environmentalists have common interests. This stance represents a significant change, as in the past Norwegian agriculture was a target of environmentalist activism because of the pollution caused by, for instance, chemical fertilizers and imported soy feed concentrates.

Thus, a new opening for an alliance to safeguard the agricultural resource base facilitated the formation of this coalition. Furthermore, it seemed evident from the environmental organizations' point of view that their voice was needed in the policy debate, not only to support farmers, but also to advance the natural resource perspective on farmland preservation. As we shall see, this perspective is increasingly crucial in strengthening the new alliance.

The global perspective follows a narrative starting from the observation that farmland is a scarce resource. It continues: With the acceleration of population growth, climate change, and soil degradation globally, there will be even more need for farmland in the future. Farmland is disappearing at a rapid pace, and even though Norway has a small amount of

farmland in proportion to its total land area, we have a responsibility to protect it. Knowledge claims about soil health, food scarcity, climate change, and population growth are important prerequisites for these arguments. According to the Federation of Norwegian Agricultural Cooperatives, “There is a development now where both politicians and the agricultural organizations in a way turn back to basics towards what really matters—we see dark clouds in the horizon”.

Responsibility towards *future generations* is also a key aspect of the storyline. Youth organizations are particularly strong in making this argument. The development-oriented youth group, Spire, has a tradition of caring about issues concerning the global south. They do not have a strong tradition of engagement in domestic issues, but in the case of farmland preservation they have found it important to raise their voice. Spire has launched a proposal for a National Ombudsman for Future Generations, and they see farmland preservation in light of this campaign. This ombudsman would counter what they see as a bias in the political system towards favoring short-term gains at the expense of long-term consequences. The group sees this consideration as especially important in the management of natural resources: “If we can get someone to lift the generational perspective that much too seldom is lifted in the Norwegian debate, this person can show us the faces of our grandchildren”.

Most of these organizations assume that people are unaware of the challenge farmland scarcity represents to the world. Therefore, the organizations jointly perceive a need to spread knowledge about the scarcity of farmland. “The market” and “the politicians” are the villains in the story; if the market gains too much power, farmland will be lost, and politicians allow this to happen.

Possible Disarticulations: “Marka” and Policy Measures as Showstoppers

We have shown that this alliance is based on shared values, pragmatic considerations, and a common discursive framework. At the same time, it is important to highlight the fact that the alliance has certain weak areas; in Laclau and Mouffe’s terms (1985), it is fragile and has points of disarticulation. One important point of disarticulation is whether or not housing development should be allowed in the recreational woodlands, called “marka”, that surround many of the largest cities in Norway. Another point is whether farmland should be better protected by law, which would entail a general ban against housing development on farmland.

The Norwegian outfields cut across the traditional divide between nature and agriculture, which is a point of conflict between agriculturally and environmentally oriented

organizations. This issue is taken off the table because of its disruptive potential. In addition to being a more costly alternative for housing development than flat and drained farmland, the outfields have a strong cultural image and both legislative and normative protection⁶. Farmers' organizations see this law as too rigid and want to soften the total ban against converting recreational natural areas to urban functions, whereas the environmental organizations do not see this as a viable solution to the farmland preservation problem. The deputy leader of the Farmers Union said:

This is what the nature protectors are so scared about. If you give way even a slight bit with regards to the marka, it all goes. I agree that the marka is important, but building a few houses would still leave plenty of recreational area left. But this has become a symbol; it is like with the carnivores [typically wolves, which kill livestock], they have become more a symbol than a matter of practical policies. And then it is incredibly difficult to do anything about it. This is why the farmland has to pay the price.

Another major disagreement concerns *how* farmland should be protected. There is strong agreement in the new alliance about the importance of farmland preservation, and it is rather easy to agree on *why* farmland is important. The opinion piece describes stronger legal protection of farmland as the solution to the threat of urban development. Environmental organizations see the Pollution Control Act as a model for such a law⁷. In the process of recruiting organizations to sign the letter, several actors were positive at first, but later they decided not to join because certain policy proposals were too clearly formulated. According to a spokesperson from the Norwegian Society of Rural Women:

They unfortunately did not do a good enough job in making it general enough to get everyone aboard. We didn't do a good enough job, because we could have included the Norwegian Labour Union, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, and the Norwegian Association of Natural Scientists. We should have been more professional

⁶ "Lov om naturområder i Oslo og nærliggende kommuner (markaloven)
<https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2009-06-05-35>

⁷ «Forurensningsloven» <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/pollution-control-act/id171893/>

and refrained from saying anything about stronger juridical protection. I think that was where it collapsed.

The alliance signing the joint statement could have been broader, but disagreements about strengthening the juridical protection of farmland got in the way. Farmland preservation as a principle is easy to agree upon, but which political measures to apply is not. This alliance will be fragile if it moves beyond the point of raising awareness and spreading knowledge and towards actual policy making.

Concluding Discussion: from Agricultural Policy to Environmental Policy

In this chapter, we have explored two contemporary trends in Norwegian politics: farmland preservation rising on the political agenda; and new pro-preservation alliances taking shape. We have seen that environmental and youth organizations are now increasingly involved in controversies over the use of arable land. In the Norwegian context, this engagement is novel. Looking to other countries, such as the United States, we see that environmental interest have been at the forefront of the farmland preservation movement since farmland came on the agenda as part of the environmental awakening in the 1970s (Berg and Zitzmann 1984, Lehman 1995). Farmland preservation was positioned as a means to counter the deleterious effects of urban sprawl, most prominently transportation challenges, costly public infrastructure, and the depletion of nature (Alterman 1997). Agriculture has been described as the ecological nexus connecting humans and nature (Wittman 2009), but the sector has also been targeted by environmental organizations for emissions, pesticide use and poor animal welfare (Horrihan et.al 2002). Michael Bunce labeled the North American farmland discourse *environmentalism*. Resource scarcity was the core discursive theme, communicated in simplistic and crisis-loaded language. Farmers' voices were inaudible (Bunce 1998). More recent studies, however, show that the farmland preservation movement in the United States unites discourses that hold different views of agriculture (Brent 2013). Although the actors here all agreed on the general importance of preserving land, they steered clear of explaining *why* preserving farmland is important in order to secure the broadest possible support.

In Norway, farmers and environmentalists have a history of both conflict and cooperation. Discursive and practical conflicts have most often been over the preservation versus the cultivation of nature, including forests (Reitan and Holm 2012), and wildlife (Blekesaune and Rønningen 2011). Furthermore, environmental organizations have

increasingly focused on the environmental damage associated with large-scale, industrialized agriculture. Alliances have emerged, however, in controversies concerning such issues as genetically modified food (Magnus 2012). Historically in Norway, farmland has been the responsibility of a sectoral system administered through county agricultural boards. The law describing the preservation of farmland, The Land Act, is centrally focused on agriculture. Farmers' organizations have long been the loudest and often the only voice in protests against urban development on farmland in Norway. They have conducted public campaigns to spread knowledge of the importance of farmland, with titles such as "One square meter of soil equals one bread forever"⁸. Until recently, the main rationale has been farmland's crucial role in maintaining the target of fifty percent national self-sufficiency in agricultural products. We can thus label the ideology of the Norwegian farmland preservation movement *agrarianism* (Bunce 1998).

Now, farmers' and environmental organizations are joining forces. We see a challenge to and alteration of the previous dominant farmland preservation discourse of national self-sufficiency. Our analysis of the Norwegian civil society debate on farmland preservation shows a shift from a storyline that framed farmland preservation mainly as a challenge for agriculture to a storyline that frames it as a crucial challenge for society as a whole. At the same time, we see a shift from an *economic* storyline dealing with the shrinkage of the national agricultural resource base, making farmland development mainly a problem for Norway's self-sufficiency in agricultural products, to an *altruistic* storyline with a crisis-loaded discourse positioned on a global scale. This storyline centers on the moral responsibility of the global north, both towards the poor and towards future generations.

In addition to the IKEA and Trondheim municipal plan, which were important *discursive events* that served as reference point and brought forth greater engagement, these concrete incidents are interlinked with other, seemingly more profound societal dynamics and discourses. These discourses are important to highlight, not only because they contribute to the new alliance analyzed here, but also because they affect how important societal issues such as farmland preservation are presented, discussed, and assessed. Storylines can create communicative networks among actors who otherwise differ in their views on a subject such as agriculture. Global networks of social and symbolic relations influence how farmland and

⁸ Norges Bondelag (2013) Kvadratmeterbrød gikk som varmt hvetebrød
<http://www.bondelaget.no/nyhetsarkiv/kvadratmeterbrod-gikk-som-varmt-hvetebrod-article72647-3805.html>

local planning processes are articulated. Seeing farmland as nature, not merely as “cultivated”, can change how farmland is treated in political processes.

Norwegian farmland has recently gained new advocates. This trend represents a shift from the agrarian discourse that has long prevailed. New values and new arguments are central to this shift. To put it bluntly, we see a shift from agri-culture to agri-nature. Presenting farmland as a non-renewable resource contributes to placing agriculture high on the agenda of environmentalist circles. With farmland as nature, the concept of farmland preservation becomes broader, which also expands its possible support. This shift might pave the way for the integration of farmland preservation in urban development strategies, rather than their existing in separate policy spheres, which largely has been the case historically. Can this be a new pivot point for the integration of agricultural and environmental politics in Norway? The policy proposal quoted in the introduction aims to introduce a national plan for protection of farmland. Today, decisions about changes in use of land are made in the local municipality. A national strategy with concrete measures to guide the local decisions in directions taking the overall situation into concern thus represents an attempt to protect farmland without interrupting the local democracy to a too great extent. The new alliance of actors contributed to establish farmland conversion as a problem high on the national political agenda. However, there is a long way to go to solve the problem of farmland loss to urban development. According to the discursive authority approach, to outline a solution is just as important as establishing the problem when trying to gain influence in a policy context (Hajer, 2005). Our data show that both environmental and agricultural actors deliberately steer clear of mentioning policy tools in their communication due to the strong difference of opinion on this question. This may hinder further influence both when push comes to show in actual area questions, and for the development a more committed farmland policy at the national level. This study add insight to the understanding of how policy alliances can become influential; shared values, assemblages of actors and effective storylines are not enough to ensure political action. In addition to make a policy issue shared, one needs to agree on the tool for protection. Thus we argue that further elaborations on farm land preservation should face the discussion on policy measures.

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