

HAFL Master's Thesis Abstract

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English Title: **Resilience of the Swiss Agricultural Sector: An analysis of the agricultural policy with regard to the COVID-19 crisis**

English Summary:

In the face of recurring crises (climate change, socio-political, economic, sanitary, food, etc.), the concept of agricultural resilience has gained significance. Resilience has become crucial for the agricultural sector, representing its ability to withstand, adapt, and transform while ensuring set objectives and long-term sustainability. Swiss agricultural policy plays a central role in enhancing this resilience through its measures and development strategy. To assess the capacity of agricultural policy in improving the sector's resilience, this thesis focuses on the covid-19 case study. The pandemic, occurring in Switzerland from February 2020 to November 2021, challenged the entire economy, leading to worldwide disruptions in supply chains, access to markets, purchasing habits, labor shortages, and agricultural production. The aim of this thesis is to evaluate the effectiveness of agricultural policy in improving the sector's resilience during the covid-19 crisis. Additionally, it seeks to determine whether agricultural policy establishes the necessary foundations for long-term resilience in the face of other crises and challenges.

To address the research questions, this thesis employed various methods. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to gain insights into the subject. The primary research involved 10 qualitative interviews with 11 experts from the Swiss agricultural sector, forming the basis of the main findings. To ensure objectivity, an online survey was conducted with 33 farmers, providing a different perspective. Additionally, a brief economic analysis of the sectoral income during the crisis complemented the findings. These methods collectively offer a detailed understanding of the role of Swiss agricultural policy in enhancing the resilience of the agricultural sector during the pandemic.

The study reveals that the impact of covid-19 on Swiss agriculture showed mixed results, with both positive and negative aspects. Some farmers benefited from new distribution channels and increased domestic demand, while others faced difficulties due to the loss of distribution channels. However, the overall impact on the sector was not severely negative, as it did not lead to a food crisis. Emergency measures implemented during the covid-19 crisis were deemed less effective for enhancing agricultural resilience, but certain targeted interventions played a crucial role in preventing severe impacts and aiding quick recovery. While the agricultural sector demonstrated adaptability during the pandemic through measures like direct sales and improved policies, the resilience achieved was only partial and not fully sustained over time. Gains made during the crisis, such as increased direct sales, were lost by the end of it, resulting in lower income compared to pre-crisis levels. Experts identified key factors for enhancing resilience, including resilient farmers, supportive framework conditions, effective policies,



expertise, robust training and education, and strong international relations for imports. Varied findings emerged concerning the effectiveness of agricultural policy in bolstering the sector's resilience during the covid-19 crisis, with farmers and experts having differing views. Some measures were beneficial, while others lacked long-term impact or even had negative effects. Nevertheless, the crisis provided valuable lessons that can guide improvements in agricultural policy, making it a crucial determinant of the sector's resilience.

The thesis examined two research questions: whether Swiss agricultural policy promoted the sector's resilience during the covid-19 crisis and whether the policy enables the sector to be resilient in future crises. Agricultural policy showed varied effectiveness, with some measures being beneficial but others having no long-term impact or even being negative. Then, agricultural policy currently lacks the necessary conditions to ensure the sector's resilience. However, the thesis helped identify the factors necessary for the resilience of the sector, allowing the policy-maker to apply them.

Keywords: swiss agricultural policy, covid-19, resilience, agricultural resilience

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