

SDC FACE-2-FACE Event of the Agriculture & Food Security Network

Agriculture, the state and the farming
population in Switzerland.

A view from a historical perspective

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- Overview: From a pre-industrial to a «post industrial» age

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- The state and the farming population in the 20th century: Empowerments and restrictions

Pre-industrial society

- strong regulation of the production side (collective regime)
- the state defines itself as the responsible institution for the food security of the people (grain storage; sale restrictions on the markets etc.)

Industrial society in the second half of the 19th century

- plant and animal improvements and a reorganization of farming methods lead to an individualization of food production (break up of commons in the midlands)
- farming is transformed from a village affair to a family business
- the purchasing power becomes the decisive force on the markets
- family-farms re-orientate the agricultural production towards the production of goods which can be sold on the world markets (i.e. milk for cheese instead of grain for bread)

World War I

- from 1916/17 on the vulnerability of a highly specialized food production regime becomes obvious (only 15% of the bread-wheat is still produced in Switzerland)
- a new consensus emerges: food is too important for the population of an industrial society to leave its regulation to the market forces alone
- agricultural production (and to some extent food processing) is organized along the lines of a service public (farmers get a price security for those products the society is interested in)
- agriculture is organized along the lines of a service public in order to create a certain food security

Post World War II adaptations (1950-1970's)

- the motorization and the input of chemical auxiliary supplies lead to an unprecedented increase in food production
- the challenge now is to administer a surplus of food without creating structures that lead to a new shortage
- in order to prevent the falling behind of the incomes of those engaged in agriculture the state begins to financially support those farmers who modernize their farms along the lines of the “green revolution”

The agrarian reforms since the 1990's

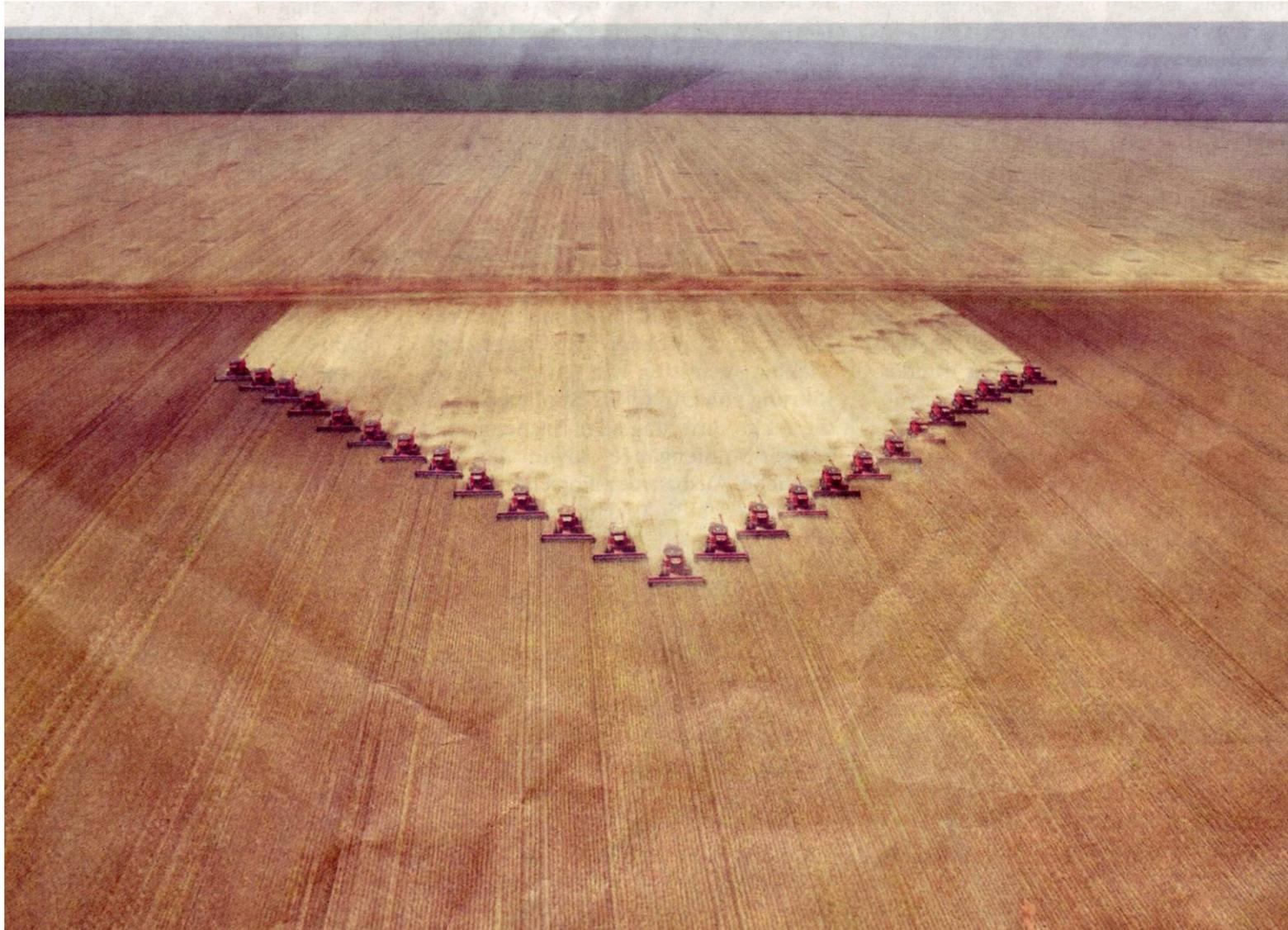
- the input of fossil resources into the agricultural production since the 1950/60's creates ecological degradations similar to those production in industry has created since the 19th century
 - > state regulations (prohibitions & incentives) to prevent those ecological degradations (buzzword: more ecology)

The agrarian reforms since the 1990's

- the GATT/WTO regulations demand an open access to the food markets
 - > market regulations have to be reorganized in order to favor trade over production (buzzword: “more market”)

One aim of the new agricultural policy is: a competitive agricultural production.....

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...another aim is: a sustainable agriculture i.e. bio and social diversity



The results of the agrarian reforms since the 1990's

- Success and failure at the same time – it depends on the perspective the commentator speaks from at a certain time

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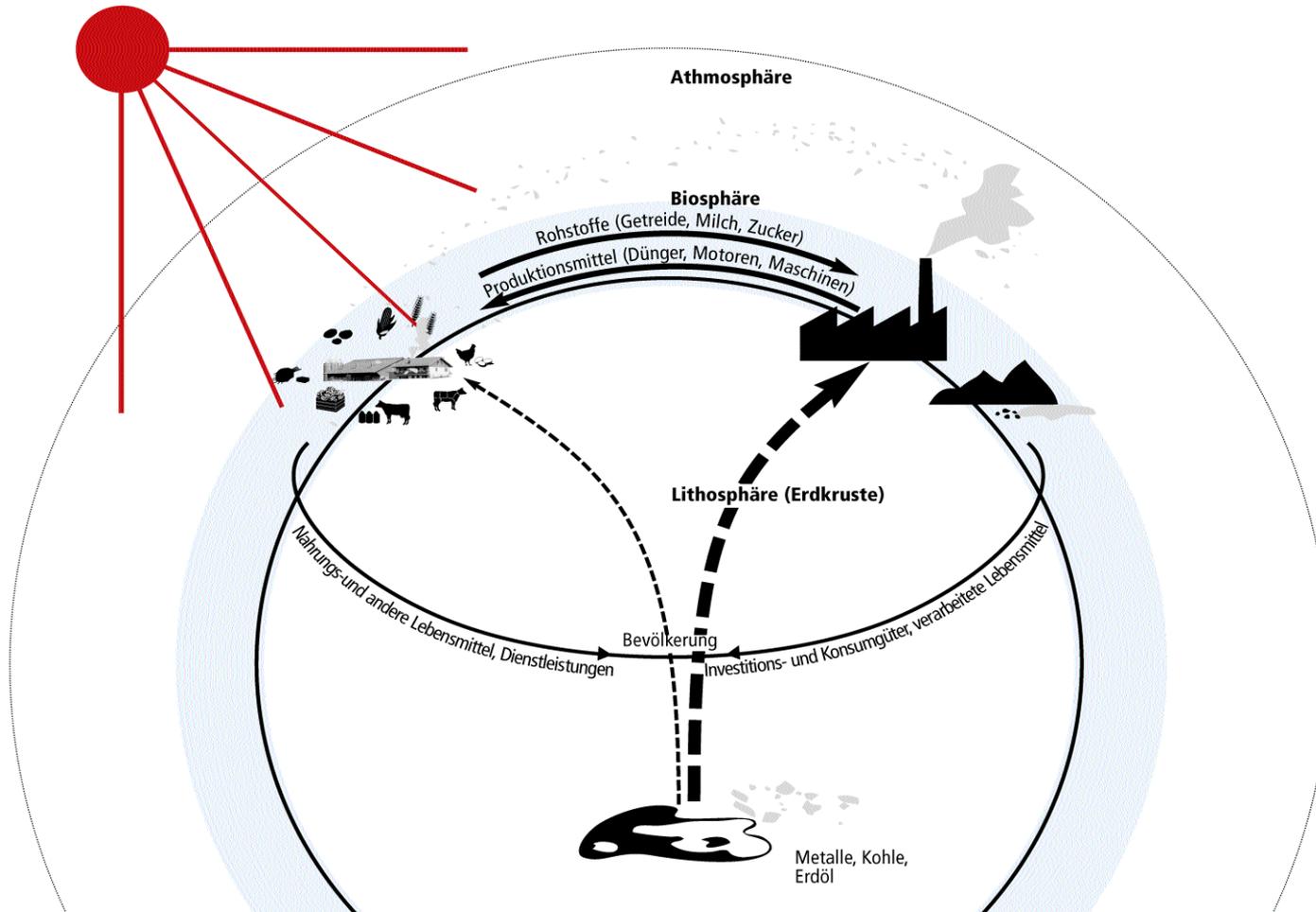


Part II

- The state and the farming population from World War I to the 1990's: empowerments and restrictions

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Why is agriculture treated differently from industry by industrial states in the 20th century?

- Agriculture is based on different resources than industrial production (using living resources like plants and animals in agriculture includes part of the reproduction process and can only be organised along cyclical lines)
- Agricultural modernisation in the 19th century creates other results than modernisation in the industrial sector (decrease versus increase of wage labour etc.)
- Food is consumed along a cyclical temporality whereas industrial societies try to organise themselves along a linear temporality

The state and the markets in the 20th century I

- All markets are regulated by states and other institutions
- Markets can satisfy purchasing power, but not needs of consumers who do not have sufficient purchasing power

The state and the markets in the 20th century II

- Aim: avoidance of the risks the Pre-WWI specialisation created
- Agriculture is imagined as a federal farm worked by individual families
- Farmers are paid for and obliged to deliver the goods they are producing
- Competition within agriculture leads to the disappearance of most farms (from ca. 250'000 to less than 60'000 today)

Access to land in the 20th century I

- A crucial distinction to be made: property and possession of land
- Possession refers to use rights (owner occupiers and tenants)
- Property includes (beyond these use rights) the notion of collateral, i.e. the possibility of burdening or encumbering; it serves as a security in credit relations (owner occupier only)

Access to land in the 20th century II

- Agricultural land law incorporated into the inheritance law from 1912-1990's
- Theoretically: Gender equality (preference of owner occupier over non-agricultural investor who installs a tenant)
- In practice: father-son inheritance which lead to a non-owner status of the farm woman, i.e. the woman of the owner-occupier