



Written by [James Murphy](#) on March 4, 2023

Belgian Farmers Protest Onerous Nitrogen Emissions Standards

Thousands of farm tractors descended upon the Belgian capital of Brussels on Friday as farmers from all over Belgium's Flanders region voiced their displeasure against a new regional plan to limit nitrogen emissions, which some believe contribute to global warming. Local officials report that the city was completely gridlocked during the evening rush hour.

The scene was eerily reminiscent of last summer, when farmers in The Netherlands [clogged](#) the streets of The Hague in similar fashion over the same type of emissions cuts that Brussels is currently debating.



AP Images
Belgian farmers in Brussels

Flemish authorities say emissions cuts are necessary in order to meet European Union climate goals; the farmers claim that the onerous emissions limits will put many of them out of business.

"In the future, I want to have the possibility to continue my dad's farm," said young farmer Brendt Beyens. "But right now I feel like the possibility of that happening is slowly shrinking and it's getting nearly impossible and the is future [sic] looking very tough."

The farmers also claim that the agricultural industry is being unfairly singled out for cuts while other high emissions industries such as transportation aren't being heavily targeted.

"We are all convinced that something has to change nitrogen-wise, but the agricultural sector should not be treated differently to the industrial sector," said protester Leen Engelen.

The new nitrogen emissions plan has yet to be finalized, but farmers fear that it will echo the type of emissions cuts seen in The Netherlands last year. Those cuts called for a 30-percent reduction in livestock as well as doing away with nitrogen-based fertilizers.

"As it currently stands the Nitrogen Plan will create a socio-economic bloodbath," a joint statement from organizing groups Boerenbond, ABS, Groene Kring, Jong ABS, and Ferm for Agro Women said. "We demand a thorough adjustment of the nitrogen agreement and a future perspective where farmers can continue to provide local, sustainable and healthy food at the highest quality standards."

The chairman of one of those organizing groups, Lode Ceyskens of the farming association Boerenbond, said that the Brussels politicians should "stop flexing [their] muscles and holding meetings at night."

The farmers claim that politicians are sacrificing food and agricultural security in order to meet arbitrary climate goals.

"It's an economic and social catastrophe," said Nele Kempeneers of Boerenbond. "A lot of farms will have to limit the amount of animals that they keep, or simply close down."



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Protesters were predominantly peaceful, with some horn honking and signage such as “No farmers, no food,” or “don’t forget who takes care of your food.”

At least one fire was set on Rue de la Loi, in the heart of the European quarter, but protest organizers insist that this was done by another group that seized upon the crowds in order to cause trouble.

Farmers simply wish to be left alone to do their jobs, unfettered by arbitrary EU standards when it comes to emissions.

“Here in Belgium, we have the know-how, we have the cows and the genetics and we have the [land],” said dairy farmer Marjan van den Eynde. “So let us do what we are good at.”

The farmers are well aware of — and probably more concerned about — the environmental effects of nitrogen emissions than EU bureaucrats, who are guided by ideology instead of facts.

“We are the first to feel the effects,” van den Eynde added.

But that obvious truth won’t be good enough for the EU bureaucrats, who are pushing the new changes in order to comply with their arbitrary climate demands. Emissions, they claim, must be cut immediately to address the climate crisis they tell us is already upon us, but which nobody truly feels.



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