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Meat or mitigation? That's the question: Storylines in the Norwegian agricultural policy discourse on meat reduction[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Ruminant meat (beef and lamb) is recognised as the food with the largest environmental impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet reducing meat consumption and production is controversial. Resistance to change has been linked to policy lock-ins and asymmetries in power favouring the agri-food industry. At the same time, agricultural policy has been described as moving towards a post-exceptional, less compartmentalized field where food production is balanced against issues like climate and animal welfare. In this article, we explore how the discourse on meat reduction and greenhouse gas emissions are related to various other agricultural policy issues, using Norway as a case. Investigating the stakeholder submissions to the Norwegian government's ambitious proposal to reduce meat consumption and production in Climate Cure 2030, we identify three storylines in the discursive landscape. The first storyline is '*It is time to increase production – not reduce it*' which we see as an exceptionalist storyline where arguments for the unique position of the sector contributing to national goals of food security and value creation should prevail. Another dominant storyline is '*In our country, animal farming is sustainable*', which has typical post-exceptionalist features where nonproducer concerns, such as biodiversity and cultural landscapes, are seen as a net positive result of the grazing animals in Norway. The third storyline '*The voices of consumers, animals and nature need to be included in policy networks*' also has strong post-exceptionalist viewpoints, but it calls for a radical restructuring of the sector, therefore, we see this as a radical post-exceptionalism. Our findings find little support for radical change, and for now, meat beats mitigation.

1. Introduction

Agriculture and climate change are intimately intertwined. An estimate suggests that 14.5 percent of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are generated from livestock (Gerber et al., 2013). Globally, ruminant meat (beef and lamb) is recognised as the food with the largest environmental impact in terms of GHG emissions and/or land use. A reduction in animal-based products in diets is, therefore, seen to have the potential for significantly reducing GHG emissions (IPCC et al., 2019). Reducing meat in diets has not only been promoted as a climate change mitigation opportunity but also as a prospect of decreasing global chronic diseases. WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) recently categorized processed meat as a carcinogen and red meat as probably a carcinogen (IARC, 2018). Meat production is also increasingly associated with substantial animal welfare concerns (Clark et al., 2017). On the other hand, agriculture is needed for feeding a growing global population (Godfray et al., 2010; Tomlinson, 2013) and

the global demand for meat is rising (IPCC et al., 2019). Furthermore, agriculture in general is increasingly associated with more than food production, e.g., energy supplies, environmental protection, biodiversity, and cultural landscape values (Daugbjerg and Swinbank, 2012).

While various international authoritative bodies encourage reducing meat production and consumption, several studies indicate high levels of conflict in the interpretation of the associated environmental and health impacts, and what policy initiatives should be considered (Garnett, 2013; Sievert et al., 2020). The literature on the resistance towards climate mitigation policies in agriculture is partly emphasizing path-dependency and lock-in (Conti et al., 2021; Farstad et al., 2021; Rønningen et al., 2021; Sutherland et al., 2012), and partly power (Geels, 2014; Markard et al., 2012; Sievert et al., 2020). The two explanatory approaches converge around the concept of discursive power.

In this article, we explore what may explain the strong resistance to climate mitigation by meat reduction, studying the Norwegian

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discourse. In 2020 the Norwegian government released the report *Climate Cure 2030 – Measures and Instruments Towards 2030* (Miljødirektoratet, 2020a) to a hearing. In the report, the Norwegian government's most ambitious goal to date for GHG reduction in agriculture – through reducing red meat production and consumption – was presented. In this study, we analyse the discourse of agricultural climate mitigation policies and meat reduction through the hearing responses to *Climate Cure 2030*. Theoretically though, our question is whether (or to which degree) policy lock-in and resistance to change – in the form of meat reduction as a climate mitigation measure – can be understood in light of an exceptionalist approach to agricultural policy.

We proceed with this article by presenting our study's theoretical framework and reviewing current research on resistance to reducing meat production (and more generally a transition towards low-emission agricultural production). Next, we describe the Norwegian agriculture policy context. Thereafter, we describe the methods and materials used, and then continuing with the results and analysis before we end with a concluding discussion.

2. Literature and theoretical framework

There is growing scholarly research showing a strong resistance to reducing meat production, or more generally, transitioning towards low-emission agricultural production. Two dominant trends in the academic literature offer explanations for this resistance. First, theoretical concepts such as path-dependency and lock-in are increasingly being used to explain agricultural sustainability transitions (Conti et al., 2021; Sutherland et al., 2012). The concept of path-dependency implies that “initial moves in one direction elicit further moves in that same direction” (Kay, 2003, p. 406) and thereby limiting the perception of which choices provide realistic alternatives of what is “likely” or “possible” to be accomplished (Wilson, 2008). In agri-food systems, lock-ins such as technology choices, infrastructure, institutions and policies (Farstad et al., 2021; Rønningen et al., 2021; Stål, 2015), attitudes and cultures (Brobakk, 2018; Rønningen et al., 2021), power and politics (Farstad et al., 2021; Kay, 2003; Rønningen et al., 2021), research and innovation priorities (Glover et al., 2021), practices and narratives (Brobakk, 2018; Sievert et al., 2020; Stål and Bonnedahl, 2015) have been identified as “maintaining” (Wilson, 2008) current path-dependent systems (Conti et al., 2021). For example, Farstad et al. (2021) identifies a “mandate lock-in” where actors within the Norwegian agri-food sector refuse to consider lowering meat production since it is perceived to be directly in conflict with their organisation's mandate – to secure a sound economic basis for individual farms as well as the sector itself. Similarly, Stål and Bonnedahl (2015) found, in the Swedish agri-food sector, that climate issues were adapted and reduced to fit into the prevailing economic narratives among farmers.

Secondly, research on power and food has spawned numerous studies in recent years (Ansell and Vogel, 2006; Lang, 2003). While the framework of path-dependency and lock-in plays an important part in explaining transition processes, there is also a call for more emphasis on power. “Key questions pertain to issues such as, where (with whom) does power reside in transition processes? How are power and agencies performed in transition processes? Whose voices and narratives remain unheard?” (Markard et al., 2012, p. 962). Drawing on insights from political economy, Geels (2014) argues that “regime stability” (i.e., keeping existing systems and procedures) could be a result of active resistance by central actors wielding their instrumental, discursive, material, and institutional forms of power rather than lock-in(s) are inevitably formed.

The framework of Clapp and Fuchs (2009) unpacks corporate power in the agri-food segment in three dimensions: instrumental, structural and discursive. In a narrative literature review, Sievert et al. (2020) used Clapp and Fuchs's power framework to analyse the agri-food segment's resistance to meat reduction. Their analysis showed that discursive power was evident in framing the interpretation of the problem (or

nonexistent problem) where carnism and productivism were the dominant ideologies. The authors also stress that discursive power was used to “produce, shape, disseminate and contest ideas and narratives” (Sievert et al., 2020, p. 9) of the health concerns linked to the consumption of meat. Previous research emphasises private sector corporations as powerful actors in discourses (both in the media and policymaking) on meat reduction. Here, downplaying environmental risks is a common finding (Bateman et al., 2019; Bristow, 2011; Fontoura et al., 2016; Lahsen, 2017; Rust et al., 2021; Tourangeau, 2018). Another prominent theme in the discourse is the framing of a lack of consensus on the sustainability of meat production/consumption, which often coincides with scepticism against research and/or subject experts (Almiron and Zoppeddu, 2015; Austgulen, 2014; Bonde, 2021; Bruteig, 2019; Lahsen, 2017; Olausson, 2018; Sanford et al., 2021; Simmonds and Vallgård, 2021).

In the literature on agricultural policy, exceptionalism and post-exceptionalism have become key concepts. The term *agriculture exceptionalism* is grounded on the idea that agriculture “is a unique economic sector with special market and production conditions which deserves special treatment because it contributes to national goals” (Daugbjerg and Swinbank, 2009a, p. 6) see also (Coleman et al., 1996; Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017; Grant, 1995; Skogstad, 1998). Since the early 1990s, there has been substantial political pressure to change these exceptionalist policy arrangements where

[...] producer interests are given precedence over those of consumers [...] transfer of substantial public subsidies from taxpayers at large to a relatively small segment of the population, or the persistence of extensive protectionist arrangements in agricultural trade [...] legal exemptions and privileged institutional arrangements. (Grant, 1995, p. 156).

Daugbjerg and Feindt (2017) suggest that ideas such as neoliberalism, social and environmental sustainability, animal welfare and consumer concerns have led to *post-exceptionalism* as

[...] a partial departure from compartmentalized, exclusive and exceptionalist policies [...] and] an incomplete transformation of ideas, institutions, interest constellations and policies with a significant legacy from past policy. The partial departure from exceptionalism and the interlinking of agricultural policy with policy fields such as food policy, rural development, energy policy, environmental policy, and so on, may have reduced the compartmentalized nature of the policy field, but certainly not the complexity. (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017, p. 1567).

The concept of post-exceptionalism is not uncontested in the literature, nor is there a consensus if European agriculture has truly made a transition to post-exceptionalism (Attorp and McAreavey, 2020). When Greer (2017) analysed the 2013 Common Agricultural Policy reform he concluded that while the reform had opened up to some new actors and incorporated a few changes, the ideational framework of exceptionalist and productivist policies was mainly intact, an incomplete transition he terms as “shallow” post-exceptionalism. In response to the above-described pressure from new actors and policy domains, existing and new discourses are often combined to build new exceptionalist arguments (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017). This development has partly been driven by the limited access to the core of agricultural policy networks. To fit new interests, post-exceptionalist terminology has been instrumental in gaining access to these networks. While these discursive strategies open up to post-exceptionalism, they may also stabilize the exceptionalist framework (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017). Such strategies have also likely created pro-exceptionalist alliances (between, for example, landowners and environmental groups) that oppose neoliberal development (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017; Laestadius et al., 2014; Lang and Heasman, 2015). However, in general, agricultural exceptionalism favours agriculture producers “but also benefits other groups, such as landowners, suppliers of agricultural inputs, financial institutions, food

processors and retailers. These beneficiaries are likely to develop a strong interest in upholding compartmentalized institutions which gives them a privileged position to defend exceptionalist policy” (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017, p. 1569).

In the literature, there are a number of concepts interlinked with exceptionalism and post-exceptionalism. Since the mid-1990s, the term *multifunctional agriculture* emphasises that agriculture has “many functions in addition to producing food and fibre, e.g. environmental protection, landscape preservation, rural employment” (OECD, 2003, 2001). While the concept is contested (for an overview, see Marsden and Sonnino, 2008; Renting et al., 2009; Wilson, 2007) “strong multifunctionality” has been linked to nonproductivist pathways (Wilson and Burton, 2015) and the concept has become embedded in agricultural policy and research discourses in Europe.

However, the relation between multifunctionalism and post-exceptionalism is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, multifunctionalism was used as a discursive device in the EU’s CAP negotiations to strengthen the agriculture exceptionalist state-paradigm towards the WTO agenda (Daugbjerg and Swinbank, 2009b). Arguably, the multifunctional feature of agriculture has become the main rationale for exceptionalist policies. On the other hand, the very decompartmentalization and opening of the agricultural sector to new issues, ideas and networks that are embedded in the term “multifunctional” implies a potential shift towards post-exceptionalism – or, to use the words of (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017), a “partial departure from exceptionalism” (p. 1567), and a potential move towards a normalization of the agricultural policy arena.

Another more decisive challenge for the exceptionalist paradigm may be the “participate turn” in Western public policies (Benoit and Patsias, 2017) that have opened agricultural decision-making processes to new actors such as environmental groups and local political entities (Attorp and McAreavey, 2020; Benoit and Patsias, 2017; Taylor and van Grieken, 2015) and decentralizing governance arrangements (Benoit and Patsias, 2017). In sum, the agricultural policy sector has become more decompartmentalized (Daugbjerg and Swinbank, 2012).

Norwegian agriculture is predominantly regarded as multifunctional (Rønningen et al., 2004). This is anchored in both the long tradition of pluriactivity and diversification in agriculture (e.g. (Vik and McElwee, 2011) and in the political support of a multifunctional discourse (Björkhaug and Richards, 2008). Agricultural production is highly subsidised and oriented towards the domestic market. An important background for this is the small-scale, scattered and mostly subarctic nature of Norwegian agriculture (Forbord and Vik, 2017). Exceptionalist ideas have been described as having “remarkable support” (Farsund, 2021, p. 589) due to the importance of the sector to rural communities and as being “well-institutionalised” (Farsund and Daugbjerg, 2017, p. 363) in the Norwegian agricultural sector. The institutional basis for agricultural exceptionalism is grounded in the yearly negotiations (*Jordbruksforhandlingene*) between the two farmers unions – the Norwegian Farmers Association and the Norwegian Farmer and Smallholder Association – and the state (Farsund, 2013) that sets the financial framework and sector regulations for the industry in the coming year (Rommetvedt, 2002; Vik, 2020). The negotiations

[...] are a forum for the Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers’ associations to develop policy instruments and frame what is to be seen as appropriate agricultural policy. Consumers are not represented in the negotiations and, consequently, agricultural policy emphasizes producer interests before consumer concerns. (Farsund, 2013, p. 154, p. 154)

At the same time, the sector seeks to balance their ambitions of efficient food production with a series of other goals. The tricky balancing act between increasing productivity, keeping up production across the country, and avoiding overproduction is described by (Vik, 2020) as a policy trilemma. In response to challenges in the agricultural policy of Norway, and in particular the decreasing self-sufficiency of

food production, two trends have emerged in the agri-food policy discourse. First is the argument for expanded usage of pasturage and outfields as a means of increasing production while sustaining open cultural landscapes, and second is the argument for increased productivity – e.g., increased production per animal and/or area unit (Gronlund and Harstad, 2014; Vik, 2020). In addition, there is a call for reduced GHG emissions from agriculture. Adding the aim of reducing meat production as a means of climate mitigation to the agricultural goal structure is seen as demanding, especially considering the importance of the value chain for meat production for many rural communities (Almås and Gjerdåker, 2004). Discursively though, Vittersø and Kjærnes (2015) argue that the importance of meat production for the Norwegian agricultural economy has come to dominate the political debate over the environmental and climate effects of meat production.

Based on the literature, we expect to find, in the Norwegian case, that strong resistance to climate mitigation by meat reduction is discursively associated with storylines favouring exceptionalist policy ideas and producer interests. On the other hand, we expect to find that storylines in favour of meat reduction as a climate change mitigation measure are associated with post-exceptional policy ideas and interests outside the compartmentalized agricultural policy field. However, due to the strong historical support of exceptionalist and multifunctional agriculture in Norway, we do not expect strong storylines in support of a fully normalized or neoliberal agricultural sector, irrespective of positions toward meat reduction.

3. Methodology and data

In this article we employ an argumentative discourse analysis (ADA), as proposed by Hajer (1995). ADA is based on the idea that conflict (e.g. in environmental politics) is not primarily a conflict over which actions should/should not be taken, but rather a conflict over the meaning of physical and social phenomena. On the understanding of discourse, we follow Hajer (1995), who defines discourse as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (p. 44). The “argumentative interaction” between actors is a “key moment in discourse formation” where actors seek to legitimize the knowledge on which their claims are based (Hajer, 1995, p. 54). The positioning of actors is then grounded on linguistic similarities and historical references (Hajer, 1995). The advantages of discourse analysis are that it reveals that actors may use the same language yet mean different things and visualises how some definitions of a problem become dominant, while others do not (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). To understand the language in use, ADA sets the concept of *storyline* as central.

Storylines can consist of metaphors, analogies, and historical references and are condensed statements summarizing complex narratives that “provide actors with a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding” (Hajer, 1995, p. 62). Then, the political power of a text or storyline is not a result of its consistency, but of what Hajer calls “multi-interpretability” (p. 62). The assumption of a common understanding is often false, where various actors, with sometimes widely different interests and concerns, may adopt the same storyline(s) (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). Storylines can be described as “short hand”, offering in discussions a problem definition and possibilities for solutions (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005; Hajer, 1995) and thereby narrowing what can be thought and accomplished. This repositioning of problem definitions is identified by Geels (2014) as a possible *diagnostic framing* used as a discursive strategy of regime actors to resist change in low-carbon transitions. This implies that dominant discourses aid in understanding lock-ins and explain the status quo of technology institutions, and behaviours (Buschmann and Oels, 2019). As storylines become more accepted, they not only position arguments and understanding surrounding a problem but also provide a narrative for actors to fit their contributions. When different actors are drawn to a (set of) storyline(s)

and start “adding weight” and reproducing them, discourse coalitions are formed. A strong enough discourse coalition may become not only a hegemonic (dominant) discourse but also routinized in institutional practices of policymaking (Hajer, 1995). Analysing storylines is therefore a particularly fruitful approach to the study of interests and power at play.

To identify the dominant storylines within the discourse of reducing red meat as a climate mitigation approach in the Norwegian context, we analysed the submitted stakeholder comments to Climate Cure 2030 – Measures and Instruments Towards 2030, which was circulated for feedback in March–April 2020. The report was prepared for the joint fulfilment of the EU’s climate goal for 2030 as Norway have become part of the EU’s climate framework. “The purpose of Climate Cure 2030 has been to shed light on possible measures to reduce emissions subject to quotas by at least 50 per cent by 2030, and to describe measures to reduce emissions and increase uptake in the forest and land-use sector” (Miljødirektoratet, 2020a, p. iii; our translation).

The agricultural sector was covered by these five updated proposals in the report: transition from red meat to a plant-based diet and fish (J01); reduced food waste (J02); livestock manure used for biogas (J03); various fertilizer measures (J04); and stop of new cultivation of peatland (J05). In the following analysis, we focus on the first proposal, J01 “transition from red meat to a plant-based diet and fish,” which is described briefly below:

This measure means that those parts of the population that eat more red meat and processed meat than the Norwegian Directorate of Health recommends in their dietary advice (500 g/person/week) should reduce consumption to no more than the maximum recommended amount and replace the reduced amount of meat with a plant-based diet and fish. The calculated emission effects come from changes in the composition and extent of Norwegian agricultural production because of changes in consumption. (Miljødirektoratet, 2020a, p. 222; our translation)

There are two prominent caveats to the understanding of Climate Cure 2030. For one, while the government has defined overall goals for emission reduction, as of now, it is a sectoral responsibility to realise the policy goals. “The report has no recommendations as to which measures and instruments should be implemented beyond presenting a knowledge base” (Miljødirektoratet, 2020a). Secondly, in June 2019, the government established a voluntary agreement (Norges Bondelag, Norges Bonde-og Småbrukarlag, The Government, 2019) with the farmers union to reduce five million tonnes of GHG CO₂ equivalents within 2021–2030 (same levels as in the Climate Cure 2030), but here there was no explicit mention of reducing meat production. However, Part B of the agreement states that food consumption in the Norwegian population should be aligned as much as possible with the national dietary guidelines which could indirectly be consequential to agricultural production.

In our study, we use the submitted stakeholder responses to the report as data. The responses were all created on the same momentous event and in response to the same document by a diverse group of actors. And even though many of them have produced research and other statements over a long period, the submissions capture the most essential arguments that these stakeholders believed they needed to make at the time. Thus, these kinds of data are fruitful for analysis of ongoing policy discourses (Bailey and Eggereide, 2020).

The response to Climate Cure 2030 was substantial, with over 1730 texts being submitted. Of these, 53 were from municipalities and county municipalities, 190 from organisations, companies, and public enterprises and 1489 were from private individuals. It is worth noting that no political parties on the national level submitted statements. This is as expected because the submitted stakeholder responses and the original document were to be debated in Parliament by the political parties at a later stage. However, in some municipalities discussions and statements between regional level politicians were included in the submitted response by the municipality. All submissions are available on the

website of the Norwegian Environment Agency (Miljødirektoratet, 2020b).¹ After an initial screening of submissions to extract those that included any comments related to JO1, *Transition from red meat to a plant-based diet and fish*, 108 stakeholder submissions were included (see Appendix 1). Submissions from private individuals were excluded from this study.

Already within the initial screening of the submissions we became “familiarised with the data” which is step 1 as described by Clarke and Braun (2013) by noting initial observations and sentiments, followed by a rereading. “coding” (step 2) was performed in NVivo. The type of author and overall sentiment of the submission were recorded, and open coding was conducted to identify a multitude of central arguments (Hajer, 1995). Step 3, defined as “searching for themes” was where we focused our attention on aggregate codes joining into main storylines (Clarke and Braun, 2013).

As analysts, we participated both in the research design and the discourse with our interpretations (Rogers et al., 2005). In our case, we had a particular focus on arguments and statements related to the exceptionalist – post-exceptionalist continuum. As a result, exceptionalist ideas naturally came to the forefront of our attention and interest, as opposed to, say, technical lock-in or climate mitigation attitudes. Yet we adhered to the processes of qualitative studies, with the objective being to identify a variety of storylines. In summarizing the research findings (in the next section), we provide quotes (our translation from Norwegian) from the coding to visualise our interpretations and conclusions.

4. Results

Almost half of the submissions (53 of 108) came from local governmental bodies, from all parts of the country. The second half consisted of stakeholders, from the agri-food industry, farmers’ associations, NGOs, research organisations and health organisations.

An overview is presented in Table 1, and a complete list of organisations is presented in Appendix 1.

The initial analysis of the submissions showed a dominantly negative response to the government’s proposal to reduce meat consumption and production. Of the 108 submissions, 64 (59.3%) were negative, 18 (16.6%) were positive, and 26 (24.1%) were neutral to varying degrees. Looking only at the different municipality actors, 40 out of 53 were negative (75%). We also saw that a negative attitude towards the JO1 proposal in Climate Cure 2030 often coincided with a reference to the

Table 1
Overview of submitted comments relating to the first proposal in the agricultural sector of Climate Cure 2030), namely “Transition from red meat to a plant-based diet and fish” (J01).

Category	Number of submissions
Municipalities	29
Associations of municipalities	7
County Councils (Fylkeskommune)	10
County governors (Statsforvalter)	7
Agri-food industry organisations	8
Farmers associations	4
Environmental NGOs	10
Animal welfare NGOs	2
Other NGOs	2
Research organisations	9
Health organisations	6
Political parties and organisations	6
Other organisations	8
Total	108

¹ <https://www.miljodirektoratet.no/hoeringer/2020/februar-2020/klimakur-2030/>.

voluntary agreement on climate policies in agriculture, between the government and the farmer's unions (Norges Bondelag, Norges Bonde-og Småbrukarlag, The Government, 2019):

[...] measures in the agricultural sector should be based on the climate agreement the government entered with Bondelaget and Bonde og Småbrukarlaget in June 2019. This agreement has a high level of acceptance in the agricultural industry and shows that it is possible to implement significant emissions cuts without reducing Norwegian livestock. (Indre Fosen municipality)

Forty-two out of 53 (79%) of the different municipal actors referred to the 2019 agreement along with 13 of the 55 other stakeholders. The 2019 agreement is generally referred to as having no impact on Norwegian livestock, and, furthermore, potential dietary changes were not mentioned when referring to the agreement. Proponents of the 2019 agreement also argued that this agreement to a large extent took Norwegian agricultural goals like food security and increased self-sufficiency into consideration, while at the same time addressing greenhouse gas emissions. The language and arguments used in the submissions were similar for many of the municipalities. The clarity from the municipal actors on how the submitted response had been developed varied. Some of them included discussions from local politicians where respondents could refer to texts produced by Senterpartiet (a centrist party with strong ties to the agricultural interests) or stated that local groups from the two unions (Norges Bondelag and Norges Bonde-og Småbrukarlag) had taken part in meetings or sent in their texts during the process, while others did not include such information.

4.1. Storylines

We have identified and named three main storylines in the material. The two dominant ones are (with a few exceptions) hegemonic in the material and we have categorized them as exceptionalist and post-exceptionalist, respectively. The third storyline we have characterized as "radical post-exceptionalist" and is a clear case of post-exceptionalism but with some features that set it apart from the more "traditional" post-exceptionalist storyline. This is the only one that strongly support the meat reduction proposal. The following sections describe the main features of each storyline.

4.1.1. It is time to increase production – not reduce it: an exceptionalist storyline

This storyline underlines the importance of the sectoral responsibility of increased food production and self-sufficiency and deems meat reduction as incompatible with these and other governmental goals for the agricultural sector. The storyline illustrates that Norway has, since the White Paper from 2012, namely Meld. St. 9 (2011–2012), put more emphasis on increased production (Vik, 2020). A progress identified in earlier research as driven by e.g., arguments of global population increase and climate change (Bjørkhaug et al., 2012; Forbord and Vik, 2017). This connects exceptionalism and productionist agriculture (Fouilleux et al., 2017). While acknowledging the sector's responsibility to reduce GHG emissions, the storyline emphasises food production as the main objective and re-positioning the proposal of meat reduction to a policy context where the sector's contribution to national interests (in particular food security) prevails, in line with a classical exceptionalist position (Skogstad, 1998). An example:

There are four main goals for agricultural policy: food security and preparedness; agriculture throughout the country; increased value creation; and sustainable agriculture with lower emissions of greenhouse gases. During Parliament's processing of Meld. St. 11 (2016–2017), it was established that food production is agriculture's main task. Among other things, the committee stressed that "the work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from Norwegian agriculture must be prioritized at the same time that the goal of increased

food production, with the intention of increased self-sufficiency, remains firm." (Norges Bondelag/Norwegian Farmers Association).

The idea that reducing meat production is incompatible with other governmental goals for the agricultural sector is dominant in the submissions. This idea is generally supported by the notion of limited cropland in Norway:

In large parts of Norway, there are no or few alternatives to livestock production. We, therefore, believe that a large-scale change from animal husbandry will weaken Norwegian food security and conflict with agricultural policy goals for agriculture throughout the country. (The County Governor of Troms and Finnmark)

This storyline instead argues that the solution to reducing GHG emissions in the agricultural sector is through technological improvements secured by new research and institutions. Drawing on past measures, an argument for efficient and environmentally friendly meat production takes form:

Targeted work with breeding, feed development and animal health has resulted in higher milk yield per animal, higher slaughter weight, faster feeding time to reach slaughter weight and little disease. This has resulted in efficient cattle farming with reduced greenhouse gas emissions per unit produced (kg of meat, litre of milk etc.). (Norsk Bonde-og Småbrukarlag/The Norwegian Farmer and Smallholder Association).

Another main argument against meat reduction in this storyline is related to the value creation of the agri-food sector and its position as an employer. These arguments did, to various degrees, appeal to collective fears of economic collapse:

In other words, the report's recommended reduction in the consumption of red meat will have twice as large effect in the loss of local jobs and three times as great reduction in local value creation. In some parts of the country, this will mean the relocation and closure of local communities. (TYR, national breeding- and interest organization for Norwegian beef producers)

This report proposes measures that could lead to the eradication of agriculture in large parts of the country. (Tynset municipality).

In general, actors adopting this storyline regarded the reduction of meat as unnecessary for climate mitigation and a threat to farming communities. The reference to the voluntary agreement with the farmers union from 2019 was also dominant as a proclamation that the agri-food sector should have self-ownership of the sector's climate mitigation measurements. Self-regulation lies at the core of exceptionalist policies (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017) in general, as well as in Norway in particular (Farsund, 2021). The storyline may be viewed as having a classic exceptionalist perspective where arguments for the interests and needs of farmers have combined with the sector's proclaimed indispensable contribution to food security and employment which together require special treatment in regard to climate mitigation.

4.1.2. In our country, animal farming is sustainable: a post-exceptionalist storyline

This storyline emphasises the linkage between grazing animals and Norwegian cultural landscapes and other multifunctional values of the common good in line with the post-exceptionalist ideas of an evolving policy agenda (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017). Earlier research has identified Norway as being on the "strong" continuum of multifunctional agriculture, articulated in policy, practice and discourse (Bjørkhaug and Richards, 2008). A shift in environmental circles towards seeing agricultural land as "nature" has also gained new advocates for protecting farmland (Vinge and Sørensen, 2020).

In general, the storyline opposes the meat reduction proposal with the argument that if lands get abandoned, they risk overgrowing the

cultural landscape and reducing biodiversity:

A further reduction of the grazing animal population, as proposed in Climate Cure 2030, with a 70% reduction of suckler cows and a 40% reduction of sheep, will probably affect biodiversity in a further negative direction, without the overall impact picture being known. (Department of Biosciences, at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences)

The dietary measure proposes reduced farming with grazing livestock. This will have major negative consequences, such as the loss of cultural biodiversity, the decay of buildings and other cultural monuments and lost experience values in open and living landscapes. (The Directorate for Cultural Heritage).

A somewhat conditional critique came from the environmental NGO, Friends of the Earth – Norway, who supported the main goal of the proposal but did not support the proposed approach that presupposes a reduced number of grazing animals, due to the consequences for biological diversity.

The storyline also highlights the limited access to farmland in Norway and argues that meat is the most suitable product due to climatic and environmental constraints. This is often invoked together with the argument that Norwegian animal farming is sustainable compared to other countries, an argument that has been identified in earlier research of meat reduction discourses (Mosca and Morell, 2020; Olausson, 2018; Simmonds and Vallgård, 2021):

We are one of the countries in the world with the least area of cultivated land per person, with only 1% of Norway's area being suitable for growing human food. But half of the country is good grazing land, and Norwegian cattle have far smaller climate footprints per kilogram of meat produced than imported meat. (The Center Party in Trondheim)

The argument that Norwegian agriculture is multifunctional and largely environmentally friendly is referred to by most of the actors in the material, but there are marked differences in their attitudes towards improvements and solutions. Typically, this storyline is used to argue for continued or increased meat production utilising Norway's natural resources putting emphasis on decreasing imported fodder and increasing trade protection to ensure the production of high-quality food but also lively rural communities. These protectionist arguments can be viewed as exceptionalistic. At the same time, post-exceptionalism maintains that the sector needs special treatment at its core reflecting a partial transformation where old and new ideas coexist (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017). Others propose more extensive grazing practices emphasizing the use of open fields and unfertilized inland areas to ensure the protection of cultural landscapes and biodiversity. Still others argue both:

A sustainable agricultural policy stops the import of meat beyond Norway's committed import quotas and produces meat in ways that enable us to make use of our own feed base and maximizes all the benefits of production. An increase in the use of open fields and unfertilized inland fields for grazing and harvesting feed resources will make us more self-sufficient and help preserve the cultural landscape. If it is possible to run a more extensive meat and milk production with the current grazing resources as a more important input factor and lower production per area, then the policy and priorities must support a shift in that direction so that profitability for the farmer does not deteriorate. (SABIMA – Environmental NGO)

The storyline also strongly emphasises the lack of scientific evidence that Norwegian animal farming is climate negative and that more research is needed, especially linked to carbon in the soil, the methane cycle and albedo effects. The storyline may be seen as typical post-exceptionalist where nonproducer concerns such as biodiversity and cultural landscapes are vocalised and at the same time embedded in the historic core claim that the sector is special (Daugbjerg and Feindt,

2017).

4.1.3. *The voices of consumers, animals and nature need to be included in policy networks: a radical post-exceptionalist storyline*

In our material, very few actors fully support the meat reduction proposal. Most of those who do are animal rights advocates or health organisations. Even most NGOs were careful about appearing to promote eating less/no meat, which is consistent with earlier research (Laestadius et al., 2014; Lahsen, 2017). This storyline views meat reduction as an important step to achieving optimal health for humans, animals, and the environment, which is also in line with a post-exceptionalist evolving policy agenda (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017). While challenged by other storylines in the material, here the human and animal health perspective are central:

A diet with less meat and more fish and plant foods can both prevent and be part of the treatment of cardiovascular disease, diabetes II and obesity, as well as preventing some types of cancer. These are the biggest public health challenges of our time. (*Helsepersonell for plantebasert kosthold/Health personnel for plant-based diets*)

Intensive animal husbandry means many animals in a small area. [...] Norwegian livestock, therefore, lives in environments that do little to meet the animals' social needs, their needs for movement and the typical needs of other species. Since natural needs are not being satisfied, the animals may well develop behavioural disorders and apathy. (Dyrevernalliansen/The Norwegian Animal Protection Alliance).

This storyline is also positioned in what has been called an emerging "ecological paradigm" that focuses on "working *with* nature, rather than *on* it" (Lang and Heasman, 2015, p. 30), where diets need to be based on environmental principles (Lang, 2009). There is therefore a strong advocacy of organic farming and locally produced food, as well as a focus on biogeochemical cycles.

Instead of intensive meat, egg and milk production, each animal can produce less and more slowly with more ecological methods that result in healthier animals and lower emissions. The imported concentrate must be replaced with Norwegian feed and grazing resources. [...] The production support for agriculture must be reorganized to be built up under local production with local raw materials so that we get a much larger share of Norwegian unrefined and short-distance food. (Citizen Climate Norway)

Actors adhering to this storyline also struggle with what they perceive as a need for a total system change that includes everything from stopping the promotion of meat in society; raising taxes on meat products; policy incentives for farmers; and subsidies for vegetables, food grains, fruits, and beans, to increase research funding for how to utilise more land for food crops:

A comprehensive commitment with several political instruments is needed to implement the dietary measure. One cannot just increase VAT on meat or just stimulate increased production of fruits and vegetables. Many of the structures that are needed do not yet exist. There is, for example, limited production of Norwegian protein crops and vegetarian products, a lack of innovation in the use of Norwegian raw materials in such products, and a lack of support for farmers who want to restructure. (NOAH – Organization for animal rights)

Climate cure shows, for example, that changing eating habits from meat to plants and fish is a very effective measure, but it will not be possible without a clear and distinct sectoral agreement between the various actors in the food sector with clear incentives from the authorities. (UN Global Compact Norge – UN's sustainability network)

In line with this argument, actors of this storyline also argue that, for the proposal to be successfully implemented, new representation and

structure are required in Norwegian agri-food policy networks:

Create one joint information office; amend the Sales Act; merge the information offices and give them a joint mission with both agricultural policy, health policy and environmental policy goals. Contribute to a Norwegian diet that meets both dietary advice and sustainability goals. (Framtiden i våre hender/Future in our hands, Environmental NGO)

Furthermore, the state's role as "consumer protector" should be strengthened, and consumers and consumer representatives should be given a more established role in the public decision-making process. Strengthening the representation of consumer interests in the Trade Council is a good first step, but it is also important to involve the Parliament more broadly. (NOAH – Organization for animal rights)

This storyline represents the post-exceptionalist paradigm by voicing nonproducer concerns about human health, animal welfare and the environment. Post-exceptional ideas may lead to a variety of new policies, many of which are suggested here, such as meat taxation or subsidies/direct payments for conservation practices or vegetable production. In general, however, "Though reformed, the instruments remain sector-specific but are increasingly linked to public interest concerns" (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017, p. 1575). However, here the storyline's argument for a successful implementation of the proposal lies in an emphasis on new representation and structure in Norwegian agri-food policy networks in a way that would strongly challenge many sector-specific exemptions. Several of the voices in this storyline advocate a shift in power in the agriculture sector from producers. But they still argue for the need for special treatment of the sector, especially towards state involvement. We found no support for a normalization of the agricultural sector. We therefore suggest that this storyline implies a *radical post-exceptionalism*.

In the next section, we will discuss what the empirical findings may tell us about the position of meat reduction as a climate mitigation policy in the Norwegian agricultural discourse.

5. Concluding discussion

We have, in this article, set out to explore what may explain the strong resistance to climate mitigation by meat reduction, by studying the Norwegian discourse. Our discourse analysis indicates that the concepts of exceptionalism and post-exceptionalism may help to understand this resistance to change, which is dominant in the Norwegian discourse. Analysing the Norwegian government's proposal of meat reduction, presented in Climate Cure 2030, we have identified three main storylines that can be linked to an exceptionalist – post-exceptionalism continuum. The first storyline, that we named '*It is time to increase production - not reduce it*' may be dubbed a classical exceptionalist example where arguments for the unique position of the sector contributing to national goals of food security and value creation in rural areas should prevail over sector-specific measurements of climate mitigation, such as meat reduction. The other dominant storyline, that we named '*In our country, animal farming is sustainable*' has typical post-exceptionalist features where nonproducer concerns such as biodiversity and cultural landscapes are seen as a net positive result of the grazing animals in Norway, effectively arguing for a multifunctional agriculture sector that should be treated with special exemptions. The third storyline '*The voices of consumers, animals and nature need to be included in policy networks*' has a strong post-exceptionalist viewpoint where not only are nonproducer concerns about human health, animal welfare and the environment raised, but so is a specific emphasis on the need for new representation and structures in Norwegian agri-food policy networks, thereby challenging farmers' agri-food systems commercial interests. It implies a call for radical restructuring of the sector. We see this as a radical post-exceptionalism.

The discursive landscape of meat reduction in Norwegian agriculture clearly positions a strong resistance to change. As observed by Farstad et al. (2021) and Rønningen et al. (2021), a locked-in pathway of increased production, along with limited measures of climate mitigation, motivated primarily by economic justifications is also indicated by our study. The '*It is time to increase production - not reduce it*' storyline particularly manifests this trajectory. The storyline is not limited to actors (in this case mainly farmers and agri-food commercial interests) who benefit from exceptionalist ideas that the sector needs special treatment and protection but is also expressed by almost all actors as a hegemonic discourse in Norwegian agricultural policy. We see clear signs of an active discursive strategy by the farmers' organisations positioning themselves as the responsible part to provide solutions and playing into the fears of the economic collapse of rural communities. Together with the organisations' strong institutional power (through *Jordbruksforhandlingane*), new stakeholders are also more likely to adapt their storylines to fit with the organisations' narratives (Hajer, 1995).

These two dominant storylines illustrate that meat reduction as a means of climate mitigation is not widely seen as a viable route ahead within the hegemonic agricultural policy discourse in Norway. There are a few marginal voices within the post-exceptionalist storyline that see meat reduction – under some strict conditions – as an acceptable climate mitigation strategy. Besides these few, the only voices that clearly support meat reduction are categorized under the radical post-exceptionalist storyline, which seems to have a weak position in the mainstream agricultural policy discourse. The exceptionalist and the post-exceptionalist storylines share conclusions on the government proposal, and they dominate the discourse, with most actors adding weight to them. As they have become common ground in policymaking, and to some extent academic research, a hegemonic discourse coalition have arguably been formed. The discursive power of these storylines redefines the problem of climate mitigation of red meat production/consumption towards food security and resource utilisation. By effectively excluding (or suppressing) concerns of environmental and health impacts, the status quo is sustained.

On the issue of post-exceptionalism, our analyses reveal a somewhat double finding. On the one hand, through the discourse on meat reduction as a climate mitigation strategy, the agricultural policy field has certainly been opened up to new issues and new actors. This implies a movement toward post-exceptionalism in line with, e.g., Daugbjerg and Feindt (2017). For example, a multifunctional agricultural sector implies a larger focus on the environmental and social aspects of farming. Earlier research has, however, shown that this discourse has been "applied strategically as a vehicle to legitimate existing practices" where exceptionalist ideas and productivist trajectories prevail (Alons, 2017, p. 1618; Daugbjerg and Swinbank, 2016). The discursive power of "multifunctionalism" lies in what Hajer (1995) calls "multi-interpretability", and it is clear from our material that different actors adopt the multifunctional concept, most of them arguing for 'In our country animal farming is sustainable'. However, the assumption of a common understanding of a "multi-interpretability" storyline is often false (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). As Erjavec et al. (2009) observed in the CAP deliberations, the discourse on multifunctionality might be changing where a focus on environmental and social issues is replaced by arguments of "quality production" and "competitiveness". This might be the case of the post-exceptionalist storyline arguing that animal farming is environmentally friendly if there is little movement towards suggested policy improvements of extensive grazing practises with lower production per area. If so, it might indicate a "shallow" post-exceptionalism where institutional settings favour exceptionalist and productivist ideas (Greer, 2017).

On the other hand, our analyses of the storylines in the discourse show clearly that the support for a continued exceptionalist approach to agriculture and agriculture's role in society is strong – as for now. However, we see that the strongest climate concerns are associated with strong or even radical post-exceptionalist ideas where we see a call for

radical reorganisation of the sector and of agricultural practices. The third storyline did not contain any arguments for a normalized agricultural sector but rather cemented the idea of strong state support and regulation. So, while it called for a power movement from producers to consumers and other stakeholders, exceptionalist legacy thinking was still evident in the submissions. As for now, this storyline did not receive much support, but if some widening of policy networks to provide meaningful inclusion of new policy players is not achieved in the future a “tense” post-exceptionalism might emerge where political viability is undermined by imbalances in power relations (Attorp and McAreavey, 2020; Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017).

The resistance to discuss *any form* of lowering meat production by most actors reveals a strong exceptionalist belief system. Thus, for now, meat beats mitigation.

Appendix 1

Municipality (Kommune, local Government)	County Councils (Fylkeskommune, elected locally)
Arendal kommune	Agder fylkeskommune
Brønnøy kommune	Innlandet fylkeskommune
Folldal kommune	Møre og Romsdal fylkeskommune
Folldal, Os, Tolga, Alvdal, Tynset og Rendalen kommune	Nordland fylkeskommune
Froland kommuner	Troms og Finnmark fylkeskommune
Grong kommune	Trøndelag fylkeskommune
Hægebostad kommune	Vestfold og Telemark fylkeskommune
Indre Fosen kommune	Vestland fylkeskommune
Indre Østfold kommune	Viken fylkeskommune
Kongsvinger kommune	Rogaland fylkeskommune
Larvik kommune	
Meråker Kommune	County governor (Fylkesmannen, appointed by the government)
Oppdal kommune	Fylkesmannen i Møre og Romsdal
Os kommune	Fylkesmannen i Oslo og Viken
Rindal kommune	Fylkesmannen i Rogaland
Roros kommune	Fylkesmannen i Troms og Finnmark
Steinkjer kommune	Fylkesmannen i Trøndelag
Sunnfjord kommune	Fylkesmannen i Vestfold og Telemark
Tolga kommune	Fylkesmannen Innlandet
Tynset kommune	
Vefsn kommune	Association of Municipalities
Bergen kommune	Klima Østfold
Gloppen kommune	Namdal regionråd
Kinn kommune	Regionrådet i Valdres
Klepp kommune	Vest-Telemarkregionen, Hallingdal, Midt Buskerudregionen og Kongsbergregionen
Orkland kommune	Ålesundregionen Interkommunale Miljøsekskap IKS (ÅRIM)
Sola kommune	Lofotrådet og Vesterålen regionråd
Stavanger kommune	Regionrådet for Sør-Østerdal
Oslo kommune byrådsavdelingen for miljø og samferdsel	
Agri-food industry organisations	Political parties and organisations
Animalia, MatPrat, KLF og Nortura	Alliansen Ny Landbrukspolitikk
NHO (Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise)	Fjellnettverket
NHO Mat og Drikke (FoodDrinkNorway)	LO Norge
Norsk Sau og Geit	Sandnes venstre
NORSØK (Norwegian Centre for Organic Agriculture)	Trondheim senterparti
Norsvin	Tynset Miljøpartiet De Grønne
Opplysningskontoret for Meieriprodukter	
TYR (national breeding- and interest organisation for Norwegian beef producers)	Research organisations
	CICERO
Animal welfare NGOs	Fakultetet for biovitenskap NMBU
Dyrevernalliansen	Grønn Forskning (Regional agri-food interest organisation)
NOAH	Klimarealistenes Vitenskapelige
	Naturviterne
Environmental NGOs	Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research (NIBIO)
Citizen Climate Norway	Norges Forskningsråd
Framtiden i våre hender	Tekna
Natur og Ungdom	Vestlandforskning
Naturvernforbundet	
Naturvernforbundet i Troms	Other NGOs
NORGES MILJØVERNFORBUND	KFUK-KFUM Global
Norsk Økosamfunns forening	UN Global Compact Norge
Økologisk Norge	
Sabima	Other

(continued on next page)

(continued)

Municipality (Kommune, local Government)	County Councils (Fylkeskommune, elected locally)
Spire	Kirkerådet Innovasjon Norge Jentekonferansen NTNU Trondheim 12.02.20 Norsk Gartnerforbund Riksantikvarens (Directorate for Cultural Heritage) Veterinærinstituttet VIRKE (The Federation of Norwegian Enterprise) Forum for utvikling og miljø (Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment)
Farmers associations Hordaland Bondelag Møre og Romsdal Bondelag Norges Bondelag Norsk Bonde- og Småbrukarlag	
Health organisations Helse Vest Helsedirektoratet (The Norwegian Directorate of Health) HePla Helsepersonell for plantebasert kosthold Klimautvalget i Norsk psykologforening Legenes klimaaksjon NCD-alliansen	

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