



When Maps Don't Match Reality:

A qualitative study of the gap between policy and practice in Swedish food preparedness

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Abstract

This thesis examines the gap between Swedish food preparedness policy and the lived experiences of farmers, using narrative policy analysis and the concept of the implementation gap. Through document analysis and interviews, the study explores how preparedness is defined, how challenges are framed, and how responsibility is distributed. The findings reveal a divergence between the dominant policy narrative and a farmer counter-narrative. Official policy frames preparedness as a reactive response to external shocks, emphasizing profitability and growth. In contrast, farmers identify structural vulnerabilities, such as centralization and administrative burdens, stressing that preparedness is built through everyday resilience and the long-term viability of agriculture. The analysis further shows that while responsibility is formally described as shared, the practical burden is often shifted to local producers while strategic control remains centralized. The thesis concludes that food preparedness is not merely a matter of crisis management but is fundamentally dependent on whether the everyday conditions of production are stable and viable during peacetime. Ultimately, the study illustrates that the capacity for crisis response is shaped by the material and structural realities of agriculture during ordinary circumstances.

Keywords: Food preparedness, Implementation gap, Narrative policy analysis, Swedish agriculture, Policy vs. Practice, Resilience.

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Table of contents

Abbreviations	7
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Thesis aim & Research questions.....	9
1.2 Thesis outline.....	10
2. Background	11
2.1 Historical Context and Policy Shifts.....	11
2.2 Swedish agriculture since joining the EU.....	13
2.3 Agricultural Regulation and Policy Coordination.....	14
3. Previous Research	16
3.1 The conceptual foundation.....	16
3.1.1 Food preparedness.....	16
3.1.2 Rethinking self-sufficiency and food security.....	16
3.2 Literature Review.....	17
3.2.1 Literature review.....	17
3.2.2 Comparison and gaps.....	18
4. Theory and concepts	19
4.1 A qualitative approach to policy and practice.....	19
4.2 What Policies Reveal About Problem Definition.....	20
5. Methodology and methods	22
5.1 Analysing the data.....	22
5.2 Data collecting methods.....	23
5.2.1 Qualitative Interviews.....	23
5.2.2 Participant observations.....	24
5.2.3 The study sites and participants.....	24
5.2.4 Reflexivity and challenges.....	25
5.3 Coding the data.....	26
6. Empirical findings	27
6.1 Food security preparedness in policy.....	27
6.1.1 Food strategy 2.0.....	27
6.1.2 Civil preparedness authorities and advisory services.....	29
6.1.3 The responsibility of municipalities.....	31
6.1.4 Lantmännen.....	33
6.1.5 Recipe for resilience.....	33
6.1.6 The “Green Transition” Report.....	35
6.2 Food security preparedness according to Swedish farmers.....	37

6.2.1	Challenges	37
6.2.2	Solutions.....	45
6.2.3	Responsibility	50
7.	Analysing narratives	53
7.1	The dominant narrative.....	53
7.1.1	Constructing the policy problem	53
7.1.2	Challenges and solutions	54
7.1.3	Responsibility	57
7.2	The counter-narrative	58
7.2.1	Constructing the problem	58
7.2.2	Challenges	58
8.	Discussion	64
9.	Conclusion	68
10.	References	70
	Popular science summary	73
	Appendix: Interview Questions	75
	Appendix: Declaration of AI use	79

Abbreviations

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Swedish name</i>	<i>Translation and Description</i>
	Jordbruksnämnden	Former National Agricultural Board (later replaced by Jordbruksverket)
SJV	Jordbruksverket	(Current) Swedish Board of Agriculture
	Konkurrenskraftsutredningen	Government inquiry on agricultural competitiveness in Sweden
LRF	Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund	Swedish Farmers' Association
	Lantmännen	Swedish farmer-owned cooperative active in agriculture, food production, and agricultural inputs
	Livsmedelsföretagen	Swedish Food Industry Federation
	Livsmedelsverket	Swedish National Food Agency
MCF	Myndigheten för civilt försvar	Swedish Civil Defence Agency
	Regeringskansliet	Government Offices of Sweden
	Tillväxtverket	Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth

1. Introduction

Swedish civil- and food preparedness have evolved considerably over recent decades, shaped by shifting political priorities and threat perceptions. During the post–Cold War period, particularly in the early 2000s, Swedish preparedness policy was guided by optimism about lasting peace, reduced geopolitical risk, and confidence in international markets following Sweden’s entry into the EU. In this context, a series of political decisions led to the scaling back of military and civil defence structures and the dismantling of strategic stockpiles of food, raw materials, and other essential goods. Preparedness measures were increasingly framed as outdated or unnecessary, while responsibility for food supply security was implicitly redistributed to market actors and transnational supply chains. At the same time, certain capabilities were maintained, such as shelters, backup communication systems, and parts of the energy and information infrastructure. (Myndigheten för civilt försvar, 2025)

These developments reflect not only material changes in preparedness capacity but also shifting policy narratives about risk, responsibility, and solutions. Food security came to be understood less as a matter of state-led preparedness and more as an outcome of efficient markets, EU-level coordination, and private sector resilience. Such framing shaped which vulnerabilities were rendered visible, which actors were positioned as responsible, and which forms of preparedness were prioritized or neglected.

These shifts can be understood through a narrative policy perspective. Narratives are commonly conceptualized as collectively constructed storylines through which societies and their institutions interpret and structure reality. Within narrative approaches to policy analysis, these storylines are not regarded as merely rhetorical devices, rather, they exert material influence on policymaking by shaping both the problem definition and the range of perceived legitimate policy responses (van Eeten, 2007). As such, narratives perform a constitutive political function by stabilizing shared beliefs, underlying assumptions, and normative understandings of what is considered appropriate or “reasonable” public policy (Roe 1994).

Recent geopolitical developments, including Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Sweden’s accession to NATO in 2024, have challenged previous assumptions and prompted a renewed emphasis on civil- and food preparedness. Policy discourse has increasingly highlighted robustness, crisis management, and the mobilization of domestic and local capacities. The Swedish government has invested in total defence capabilities, emergency reserves, and municipal and regional preparedness planning (Regeringskansliet 2025:1). The 2026–2028 state budget further highlights this shift, allocating substantial resources to food preparedness, including the reestablishment of grain stockpiles and proposals for

legislation mandating preparedness storage across the food supply chain (Regeringskansliet 2025:2).

Taken together, these shifts illustrate how food preparedness policy in Sweden has been repeatedly redefined through changing interpretations of risk, causality, and responsibility. They also raise questions about how policy intentions translate into practice and how responsibility for preparedness is negotiated across different levels of governance and among diverse actors within the food system. These questions form the point of departure for the theoretical and methodological approach developed in the following chapters.

1.1 Thesis aim & Research questions

Food preparedness in Sweden is supported by a multilayered network of stakeholders that spans the European Union, national government, public agencies, local municipalities, private firms, and producers. Each of these actors contribute distinct responsibilities, resources, and priorities, shaping how preparedness measures are implemented on the ground. When policy documents are examined alongside actual practice, discrepancies often appear. These gaps expose underlying power dynamics, highlight vulnerabilities, reveal the under-use of local knowledge and capacities, and point to concrete opportunities for improvement (Mosse 2004). By recognizing and addressing these mismatches, Sweden can strengthen its overall food-security framework and ensure more resilient, coordinated responses to potential disruptions.

This study therefore investigates the relationship between policy and practice within the Swedish food preparedness framework. Rather than assessing simple metrics of success or failure, the research explores the "implementation gap", the space between intended outcomes and ground-level reality. This study therefore examines how local actors engage with policy in their everyday decisions and strategies, including how they negotiate, adapt to, and sometimes resist it while navigating institutional credibility. Additionally, the research employs Roe's narrative policy analysis (1994) to examine how competing interpretations shape the narratives defining Swedish food security.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What specific challenges and policy-proposed solutions are articulated in the official food-preparedness documents, and how do they differ from the challenges and solutions identified by farmers?

2. How is responsibility for food preparedness described and distributed across stakeholders according to the dominant narrative, and how is it perceived and reallocated in the farmers' counter-narrative?

3. How do dominant policy narratives and farmers' counter-narratives construct different understandings of food preparedness, and how do these differences shape power relations and the implementation of policy in practice?

1.2 Thesis outline

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides the necessary background on Swedish agriculture and preparedness to situate the study. This is followed by a review of previous research, where I identify the gaps this thesis seeks to address. Chapters 4 and 5 outlines the theoretical framework and the methodology, respectively. The empirical findings are then presented, starting with policy findings followed by the interview results. These findings are analysed in a separate chapter, before being synthesized in a discussion that addresses the overarching aim. Finally, some concluding remarks are presented.

2. Background

This chapter explores the significant transformation of the Swedish agricultural sector over the last century, focusing on how technological innovations and shifting political priorities have reshaped food security and production practices. It begins with a historical background of food preparedness in Sweden, tracing developments from the pre-EU era, through EU membership, the dismantling of civil defence structures, and up to current policies and practices.

2.1 Historical Context and Policy Shifts

Over the past century, the agricultural sector in Sweden has undergone significant transformations, shaped by technological innovations, shifts in governance, and changing societal priorities. These changes have influenced not only production practices but also the ways in which food preparedness and security are conceptualized and governed. Understanding this historical context is essential for situating contemporary policy frameworks and for examining how past developments continue to shape current practices, capacities, and policy debates.

Until the 1990s, prices for agricultural products were set through negotiations between three parties: the farmers, the state, and the consumers. The Swedish food market was heavily regulated, with import tariffs and export subsidies designed to achieve three goals: the production goal, which aimed to ensure Sweden's self-sufficiency in staple goods; the consumer goal, which aimed to guarantee affordable and high-quality food for consumers; and the income goal, which aimed to provide farmers with an income comparable to that of industrial workers. During this time, Jordbruksnämnden (the former National Agricultural Board) was responsible for implementing policies and rationalizing farming. As the production goal was relatively easy to achieve, a new target of 80–100% self-sufficiency was set in 1967. The policy shifted toward concentrating agricultural production in a smaller number of large, high-output farms. Smaller farms were merged into larger so-called production units, and land use was reorganized to prevent rural depopulation and to maintain agricultural capacity in sparsely populated areas. These larger farms were allocated the most productive land to help meet the more challenging income goal (Eriksson & Kuns 2025).

By the 1980s, the number of farmers had declined drastically, while output continued to increase due to technological advances such as fertilizers and pesticides. This resulted in overproduction and a profitability crisis, as surplus goods had to be exported at lower prices due to domestic regulations. This sparked growing criticism from different groups in society, as the policy was seen as costly for consumers and as creating unnecessary surpluses and wasting resources. It was also criticized for distorting international competition and

limiting Sweden's participation in global trade agreements such as the World Trade Organization and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Neoliberal ideas promoting minimal state intervention started to gain traction. These developments culminated in the sweeping reforms of the 1990s, known as "Omställning-90" (Transition-90). During this time, agricultural policy was deregulated to shift market control from farmers to consumers. Food production was to be guided by the free market, accompanied by support measures to mitigate social impact. Some farmland was converted to alternative uses, such as energy crops. However, these changes were never fully realized. As Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, farmers became a part of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) compensation system, meaning that Swedish agriculture returned to a regulated framework under the EU. (Eriksson & Kuns 2025)

Parallel to the transformations in Swedish agriculture, the EU agricultural framework also underwent significant changes. Since the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the EU pursued five key objectives on agricultural policy, justified by both security and social considerations: to increase productivity, stabilize markets, ensure food security, guarantee farmers a reasonable standard of living and to provide consumers with goods at affordable prices. By the 1970s, European agricultural policy faced criticism from environmental movements concerned about the impact of chemicals on birds and biodiversity. At the same time, farmers sought to secure their incomes by intensifying production, which often had negative environmental consequences. During the 1980s, economic criticisms became more prominent. Agricultural policy was seen as a barrier to free trade, while organizations such as Oxfam criticized EU subsidies for undermining local markets in the Global South. Price support also led to overproduction, particularly of meat and milk. While environmental concerns had little impact on policy during the 1970s and 1980s, economic critiques began to drive reform efforts. (Eriksson & Kuns 2025)

Reform work began in earnest in 1992, introducing production-linked income support to compensate farmers as market regulations, such as price supports, were phased out. Efforts were also made to limit grain overproduction. When Sweden joined the EU, its farmers became eligible for production-linked payments, incentivizing increased output.

As part of Agenda 2000, EU agricultural policy was structured into Pillar I and Pillar II. While Pillar I aims to maintain production and provide income support to farmers, Pillar II focuses on environmental protection and rural development. In 2003, the Fischler reform aimed to make EU agriculture more market-oriented, environmentally sustainable, and compatible with global trade rules by replacing production-linked income support with decoupled payments. Instead of rewarding output, it introduced a fixed per-hectare payment, conditional on farmers

complying with certain environmental and regulatory requirements. This change aligned EU policy with WTO agreements and reduced costs and bureaucracy.

Today, farm payments account for two-thirds to three-quarters of the EU agricultural budget and have been supplemented over time with targeted support for young farmers, greening measures, and livestock support, aiming to reduce the average age of farmers, prevent monocultures, and stabilize milk and meat production. However, critics argue that while these measures provide some incentives and funding for investment, they are insufficient to transform agricultural systems or build long-term resilience, as most of the support remains focused on direct income payments (Mathijs et al. 2022).

Pillar II continues to emphasize environmental stewardship, requiring all member states to implement rural development programs, previously planned in seven-year cycles. In 2023, these programs were replaced by national strategic plans covering both Pillar I and Pillar II. While Pillar I is fully funded by the EU, leaving limited scope for national discretion, Pillar II is co-financed by the EU and member states. The 2023–2027 plan in Sweden has a total budget of 60 billion SEK, with 45 billion from the EU and 15 billion from national budgets. This plan is based on the EU's three overarching objectives, which guide the agricultural policies and actions of all member states. These objectives aim to foster a smart, competitive, resilient, and diversified agricultural sector that ensures long-term food security, while also supporting environmental protection and climate action in line with the EU's broader goals. They further seek to strengthen the social and economic fabric of rural areas (Jordbruksverket 2024).

2.2 Swedish agriculture since joining the EU

Since joining the EU, initial excitement and optimism about opportunities for Swedish agriculture have been replaced by growing scepticism following the economic crisis of 2008. Some scholars and critics argue that leaving the EU would restore decision-making power to democratically elected national governments (Collantes, 2020). Others in the debate claim that the EU represents a form of neoliberal governance and that withdrawal could help preserve Europe's tradition of socially responsible capitalism.

Sweden's entry into the EU in 1995 marked the beginning of significant changes in its agriculture. The number of farms in Sweden has decreased by approximately 40%, leaving around 56 thousand agricultural holdings. Of these, only about 13,400 farms provide full-time employment for at least one person. Dairy production, one of the most labour-intensive sectors, has been hit especially hard: nine out of ten dairy farms have closed during this period, and the national herd has been halved. (Eriksson & Kuns 2025)

While EU membership promised access to a larger export market, Swedish agriculture has lost market shares, with exports covering only about one-third of

imports. Low domestic production of meat and dairy means self-sufficiency goals are unmet, and overall production depends heavily on imported inputs such as fuel, fertilizer, feed protein, and seed. (Eriksson & Kuns 2025)

Swedish agricultural policy now balances two sometimes conflicting objectives: environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable farming, and increased national self-sufficiency. Collantes argue that policy consensus is often prioritized over practical implementation, with biodiversity declining between 2014 and 2020 despite full compliance with greening requirements. (Eriksson & Kuns 2025)

At the EU level, the “Farm to Fork” strategy seeks to transform the food system, from production to consumption, with targets to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use by 2030 and bring 25% of farms under organic management (currently 18%) (Eriksson & Kuns 2025). However, geopolitical events, such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, have shifted priorities, leading to temporary relaxation of fallow land and crop rotation requirements, with fallow obligations fully removed by 2025 to boost European production.

2.3 Agricultural Regulation and Policy Coordination

Both the EU and its member states legislate agricultural and related policies. In 1987, the first EU legislation addressing environmental protection, animal welfare, and food safety was introduced, largely to strengthen the internal market. In Sweden, however, national legislation has historically been stricter. For example, several regulatory features that today distinguish Swedish food production were introduced progressively from the late twentieth century, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, and were further consolidated in connection with Sweden’s accession to the EU in 1995. These include stricter regulations on pesticide use compared to other EU member states, higher animal welfare standards, such as more extensive space requirements for pigs and poultry, and the legal requirement that all milk for human consumption be pasteurized. (Eriksson & Kuns 2025)

These differences have led to debates about fair competition within the internal market. According to Konkurrenskraftsutredningen (the Government inquiry on agricultural competitiveness in Sweden), who has the task of analysing the competitiveness and possible development opportunities of Swedish agriculture (Kungl. Skogs- och Lantbruksakademien 2014), environmental and animal welfare standards in Swedish law should be lowered. While previous governments led by the Social Democratic Party, historically positioned on the centre-left of Swedish politics, did not pursue reforms, the current right-wing government has reopened the issue, and a new inquiry recommends abolishing mandatory pasture requirements for dairy cows.

The national strategic plan for agriculture is developed by Regeringskansliet (the Government Office), while SJV (The Swedish Board of Agriculture) acts as the administrative authority, preparing the basis for decisions and contributing to the design of new planning periods. Because decision-making is shared between the European Commission and the Swedish government, the national plan must be approved by the EU. Once approved, SJV issues guidelines and requirements for the implementation of specific measures. Implementation is decentralized to the county administrative boards, which decide which payments can be applied for and how the budget is distributed across different measures within their counties. These priorities must then be approved by SJV. As a result, environmental payments vary not only between countries but also within Sweden itself. (Eriksson & Kuns 2025)

3. Previous Research

The aim of this chapter is to critically review existing research on food preparedness in Sweden. I begin by outlining studies that address definitions and key concepts within the field, thereby establishing the conceptual framework for the study. This is followed by an examination of recent research, with a particular focus on vulnerabilities within the Swedish food system as well as proposed solutions. The chapter concludes by identifying and discussing existing research gaps that this study seeks to address.

3.1 The conceptual foundation

3.1.1 Food preparedness

Milestad et al. (2025) explain that while food production and consumption will inevitably change during crises or war, strengthening protective measures in peacetime can improve society's ability to secure the food supply. This is referred to as *food preparedness*, which corresponds closely to the Swedish concept "livsmedelsberedskap". The Swedish Defence Commission defines it as activities aimed at ensuring the food supply needed for population survival, essential societal functions, and military defence capability (Milestad et al. 2025, p. 4), highlighting its basis in planning, policy, and strategic coordination.

In contrast, *food security* is a wider and internationally established concept defined by the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) as "access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for all people always". Related concepts include *contingency planning*, *food planning*, and *food system planning*, which emphasize preparedness processes at different levels, from crisis planning to broader system perspectives. Additionally, *food resilience* focuses instead on a system's ability to maintain food security despite disruptions, while *robustness* refers to resistance within supply chains.

For this reason, *food preparedness* is used in this study as the central concept, as it most directly captures the policy-oriented, planning-focused, and defence-related dimensions relevant to safeguarding the food supply under conditions of crisis and war.

3.1.2 Rethinking self-sufficiency and food security

According to Clapp (2017), a common misconception is that food self-sufficiency automatically ensures food security. Food security depends on availability, access, nutrition, and stability, regardless of whether food is produced domestically or imported. Self-sufficiency focuses mainly on domestic availability, yet poverty or unequal access can limit food security even in countries that produce most of their

food. Conversely, some import-dependent countries maintain high food security through trade. High-income nations, for example, can afford imported food even when global prices are high or volatile. Thus, self-sufficiency and food security are not the same, and it is this distinction that determines how food security functions in normal versus crisis conditions.

Clapp (2017) explains that in a crisis scenario, major disruptions in global markets, such as natural disasters, political conflicts, war, or sudden price spikes, can make countries like Sweden more vulnerable due to its reliance on imports. In such cases, access to certain foods may become limited, prices can rise rapidly, and food security may be threatened, even if global production is sufficient to meet caloric needs.

3.2 Literature Review

3.2.1 Literature review

In previous research, Swedish food security is extensively analysed through the lens of technological and structural vulnerabilities. Eriksson (2018) identifies that modern food production is acutely dependent on electricity for automated systems such as milking and water supply and highlights how specialization has increased reliance on imported inputs like fuel, fertilizers, and feed. This vulnerability is framed as the result of a historical shift from a state-centred Cold War preparedness model to a liberalized market system, where farmers are now embedded in global flows without the state-supported strategic reserves of the past. Later research by Eriksson et al. (2020) introduces the concept of "technovisions" exploring how technological solutions like renewable fuels and circular production systems could increase farm-level self-sufficiency. However, they find a significant gap between farmers' perception of risk and their actual implementation of these measures.

Parallel to this technical focus, recent studies have introduced institutional and nutritional perspectives. Granvik et al. (2026) show that while Swedish municipalities possess a strong political will to support local food systems, they are often paralyzed by resource shortages and restrictive legal regulations regarding procurement. Furthermore, Einarsson and Rööös (2026) challenge the traditional narrative of impending starvation due to high imports by using a method that focuses on nutritional needs rather than current consumption patterns. Their analysis reveals that Swedish agriculture produces 150–200% of the population's caloric needs and over 200% of its protein requirement during normal years. They argue that the primary vulnerability lies not in production volume, but in infrastructure, logistics, and the resource inefficiency of livestock production.

Complementing these findings, Öhlund (2025) introduces the framework of Multifunctional Agriculture (MFA), which defines farming not solely through food production, but through its contribution to diverse social and environmental functions. Through an analysis of policy documents and interviews with Swedish farmers, Öhlund argues that while MFA is a dominant concept in EU policy, there is a profound disconnect between these high-level ambitions and the reality on the ground. Her research highlights that goal conflicts, such as those between environmental protection and increased production, are inherent and often impossible to resolve fully, yet are frequently ignored in policy design.

3.2.2 Comparison and gaps

In previous literature, food security is primarily described based on structural and technical vulnerabilities, where particular emphasis is placed on external inputs and technological dependencies (Eriksson, 2018; Eriksson et al., 2020). This has later been developed to also encompass nutritional resilience and municipal governance (Granvik et al., 2026; Einarsson & Röös, 2026), which implies that the concept of self-sufficiency has evolved from a purely quantitative production issue into a question of logistical robustness and institutional coordination.

A comparison of these sources reveals a central tension. While Eriksson et al. (2020) focus on "technovisions" to solve vulnerabilities, and Einarsson and Röös (2026) advocate for "the right production" to align with health and environment, Öhlund (2025) weighs these perspectives by pointing out that such goals often conflict. For example, a policy pushing for "technological intensification" may directly conflict with the environmental functions of MFA, leading to a situation where Swedish agricultural land is exploited more than policymakers intend.

Within the framework of this thesis, the structural vulnerabilities, the nutritional and logistical resilience, and the inherent goal conflicts of multifunctionality are regarded as central to the understanding of food security. However, most research remains oriented toward supporting policy frameworks rather than critically examining how they function in practice.

By weighing the literature's focus on policy development against the practical realities and diverse strategies of the producer, this study seeks to bridge the gap between isolated parts of the system. Following Öhlund's call for diversity in agricultural strategies to improve crisis preparedness, I aim to examine how these conflicting narratives and policies are interpreted and negotiated by farmers, thereby developing a more comprehensive understanding of how food preparedness is truly shaped in practice.

4. Theory and concepts

This chapter outlines the theories and concepts used to interpret the empirical findings on policy narratives and farmers lived experiences of food preparedness in Sweden.

4.1 A qualitative approach to policy and practice

In this study, a qualitative research approach is used to investigate how understandings of food preparedness in Sweden differ between policy and on-the-ground practices. The connection between policy and practice is often seen as a gap between theory and reality and it is generally assumed that it can be closed through better-designed policies and more effective implementation. However, Mosse (2004), drawing on an extensive ethnographic study of a British-funded rural development project in western India, challenges this assumption. His research examines the complex social dynamics and organisational interests that shape development work beyond its official goals. From this perspective, he raises a set of critical questions: What if development aid doesn't follow policy? What if the criteria for "good" policy differ from what makes it workable on the ground? What if development practices are not created by policy but rather hidden from it? Drawing on these insights from Mosse's (2004) ethnographic work on development practice, this study approaches policy as something that is interpreted, negotiated, and reproduced through everyday actions, decisions, and strategies of actors involved in food preparedness. From this perspective, policy does not simply guide practice, it is also continuously shaped by practice, as actors seek to maintain credibility, legitimacy, and coherence in how preparedness is represented.

Further, Mosse (2004) uses the concept "mobilising metaphor" to explain how policies are shaped and gain support. A mobilizing metaphor is a simplified and persuasive way of framing a complex issue so that it becomes easier to understand and act upon. Rather than aiming for precision, it works by creating a shared narrative that aligns different actors and justifies policy interventions. In this sense, mobilizing metaphors help generate consensus and make coordinated action possible.

Mosse (2004) argues that these metaphors do not need to fully reflect reality. Instead, their strength lies in their ability to hold policy together by masking tensions, simplifying contradictions, and presenting a coherent direction. As a result, they can persist even when they do not align with how policies work in practice on the ground.

4.2 What Policies Reveal About Problem Definition

Stone (1989) suggests that policies are created when societal difficulties, meaning conditions often perceived as natural, accidental, or inevitable, are framed as resulting from human action, and therefore amenable to human intervention. Policy, in this sense, is not a neutral technical solution but a product of interpretation, argumentation, and narrative construction. She argues that defining a policy problem is a deliberate process in which political actors assign cause, blame, and responsibility to a situation. Rather than relying solely on scientific or cultural explanations, they craft narratives or stories that connect perceived harms to human actions, thereby legitimizing government intervention. This social constructionist view of policy problems underscores that problem definition is inherently political and socially constructed.

Stone (1989) explains that policy narratives assign responsibility, blame and obligation for action. In this perspective, responsibility is not an objective outcome of facts or data. Instead, it is actively constructed through political debate, policy language, and narratives, through which actors seek to define who caused a problem, who is affected by it, and who is responsible for addressing it. By describing a problem as caused by political decisions, policy effects, institutional structures, or external factors, policy narratives influence how responsibility and legitimacy are understood. This, in turn, determines which actors are positioned as appropriate “fixers” of the problem and which actors are relieved of responsibility. When problems are framed as “accidental”, political responsibility is minimized and consequences are seen as unavoidable. Alternatively, they may be framed as inadvertent, emphasizing how past policy decisions have increased vulnerability. Each framing implies different forms of accountability and different expectations of corrective action.

This framing also highlights that assigning responsibility is inherently normative, as it carries moral and political consequences. Narratives determine who must bear the costs of reform, who is expected to change their behaviour, and whose knowledge and capacities are considered relevant. In food preparedness policy, this may influence whether responsibility is placed primarily on state institutions, private actors within the food system, or local producers and communities.

By examining how responsibility is assigned within policy discourse, this study can reveal underlying assumptions about governance, control, and agency in Swedish food preparedness. Such analysis helps explain why certain policy measures are prioritized over others and why gaps may emerge between policy intentions and practical outcomes. Responsibility assignment thus becomes a key analytical lens for understanding both policy design and its enactment in practice.

Building on Haikola and Anshelm (2018), this study further develops the concept of *horizons of expectation*. Their analysis highlights how futures are

socially and institutionally constructed, and their work can be used to conceptualise how farmers' futures are embedded within broader, co-evolving structures of expectations. Rather than assuming a single shared temporal orientation, different actor groups, such as policymakers, local communities, and farmers, operate within distinct temporal and institutional horizons that shape what is perceived as urgent, plausible, or actionable. Where these horizons intersect, they may temporarily align and produce shared priorities or coordinated responses; however, they remain grounded in different material conditions, experiences, and normative frameworks.

The relative stability of any given horizon of expectation is therefore contingent. It depends on the extent to which it is continuously reinforced by both material developments and culturally embedded understandings of the future. Horizons may thus persist, gradually transform, or collapse when they lose resonance with either changing conditions or shifting interpretive frameworks.

This perspective highlights that anticipatory action is not merely an individual or procedural response to uncertainty but a dynamic product of interaction across multiple horizons, where practical knowledge, affect, and material engagement coalesce to shape how certain futures become perceived as plausible, relevant, and actionable in practice. For this thesis, it means that food preparedness is produced through everyday farming practices, institutional frameworks, and lived experiences of uncertainty. What counts as "prepared" or even "possible" futures is therefore not fixed in advance, but emerges through ongoing interactions between farmers, authorities, and organisations, as well as the material realities of food production.

5. Methodology and methods

This chapter outlines and critically reflects on the research approach adopted for this study. It provides a rationale for the selection of participants and the chosen research methods, highlighting the factors that guided these decisions. Furthermore, I explain how the collected data were systematically analysed to identify patterns, themes, and insights relevant to the research questions.

5.1 Analysing the data

In this study, policy is approached as a dynamic set of guidelines and discourses that are interpreted, negotiated, and shaped by the actors responsible for implementing them, rather than as a fixed blueprint to be followed. The empirical material consists of guidance documents, reports, and public statements produced by key actors involved in food preparedness, including the Swedish Government, public authorities, and relevant private sector actors in Sweden.

To analyse policy narratives, this study draws on the first two steps of Roe's (1994) narrative policy analysis approach, which is situated within post-structural policy analysis. The approach is particularly suited for policy domains characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and polarization. Uncertainty and complexity stem from the interdependent and multi-sectoral nature of policy problems, where changes in one part affect many others, making outcomes hard to predict and agreement difficult. Polarization refers to the tendency of stakeholders to cluster around competing and often conflicting interpretations of the issue. Narrative analysis helps to uncover these competing framings by examining how policy problems are constructed through different stories.

Additionally, narrative policy analysis emphasizes that narratives do not merely describe policy processes but actively shape them. They influence how problems are understood, which solutions are considered legitimate, and how policy options are evaluated in terms of feasibility and desirability (Shanahan et al., 2017).

Roe (1994) conceptualizes policy analysis as the examination of competing narratives that structure policy debates. Policy problems are typically framed through dominant narratives and counter-narratives, which offer alternative interpretations of causality, responsibility, and appropriate solutions. A dominant narrative generally follows a coherent structure with a beginning, middle, and end (or an if-then logic), which helps simplify complex policy problems into more manageable forms for decision-makers.

While Roe ultimately develops a meta-narrative to reconcile or reframe these competing stories, this study does not include this step. The aim is not to synthesise conflicting narratives into a unified account, but rather to analyse how

policy problems are constructed through contrasting and competing framings. Therefore, this study applies only the first two steps of Roe's approach, focusing on dominant narratives and counter-narratives in the context of food preparedness. The analytical categories, challenges, solutions, and responsibility, are predefined in line with the research question. As such, the analysis is not inductive but instead examines how these categories are constructed and articulated within policy narratives.

This method will be complemented with Stone's (1989) social constructionist view of policy problems by analysing how the dominant- and counter narratives construct the problem, how blame and responsibility are assigned, and how certain interventions are legitimized over others. By integrating these perspectives, the analysis moves beyond a simple description of narratives to explore why certain stories gain authority and how they frame the causal logic of a policy problem.

A central focus of this approach is the "implementation gap", the disconnect between formal policy frameworks and their practical enactment, shifting the analytical lens away from binary success/failure evaluations toward a more nuanced understanding of competing constructions of reality.

The analysis is therefore deductively structured, utilizing predefined categories of problem definition, responsibility, and solutions. These categories serve as a systematic guide for identifying and interpreting how narratives function within the material to shape both policy debates and final decision-making processes

5.2 Data collecting methods

5.2.1 Qualitative Interviews

To uncover the counter-narratives, four recorded qualitative interviews with farmers were conducted, as well as a tour of two of the farms. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain, interviews offer a detailed understanding of the attitudes, perceptions, opinions, meanings, and experiences that participants bring to the research problem. These insights can in turn help address potential gaps identified in the literature review. This method seemed appropriate as the aim of this thesis is to explore farmers' perspectives and lived experiences of food preparedness, and how they differ from policies.

The interview questions focused on farm-level solutions they have implemented or wish to implement, what support they require from other actors to enhance their preparedness, which challenges they consider most critical at both the farm and national levels, and how local capacity is utilized within the governance network. Although around 20 questions were prepared (see Appendix), the interviews were semi-structured, which meant the conversations evolved more flexibly. In practice, I found that only 5–8 key questions were

needed as the participants' responses naturally guided the discussion and covered the remaining topics.

Finally, all participants and their farms have been anonymised in this study to ensure confidentiality and protect their identities. Pseudonyms are therefore used to prevent any information from being traceable back to individual participants.

5.2.2 Participant observations

All the interviews were conducted on the participants' farms. I was also given tours of two farms, including their facilities and livestock. This allowed for participant observations which according to Bernard (2006) offer several benefits for research. It allows researchers to develop an intuitive understanding of the culture or context they are studying, enhancing both the internal and external validity of insights gained from interviews and other observations. This was something I found to be true as the observations provided a deeper understanding of the daily operations, practical conditions, and context in which their preparedness strategies are implemented. Bernard (2006) explains that by immersing themselves in the field while periodically reflecting on their experiences, researchers can gain perspective on their observations and critically assess their own biases. This approach helps ensure that researchers see not only what they expect but also what is present in the field.

5.2.3 The study sites and participants

The empirical interviews of the research were carried out across a region in eastern Sweden, spanning Uppsala County and northern parts of Stockholm County. Choosing these areas was strongly influenced by their proximity to Stockholm, making them potential routes or destinations for people fleeing the city in the event of a crisis. It was also important for me to visit the farms in person rather than conduct interviews online, which made this region particularly suitable for the study.

The first farmer I interviewed was Anders. He grew up on a farm and explained that he often related more to the fathers of his peers than to his peers themselves. After pursuing a formal education, he took over the farm. At most, his family owned 350 hectares, split across two properties. Today he manages horses and crop production with his wife, using organic (EKO) methods. Their produce is mostly sold to Lantmännen.

Anders is childhood friends with Johan, my second participant. Johan began taking on significant responsibility at a young age. He was only 15 when he started helping on the family farm due to his father's asthma. He took over the farm in 1995, which has been in the same family since the 1600s. The farm is currently 200 hectares and is leased with no children wanting to take over. Johan previously managed dairy production and became an organic farmer around the

year 2000. Today, he focuses on beef production, which he is gradually phasing out. He does however plan to continue some organic grain production for a few more years.

My next interview was with Lasse, who manages both dairy and beef production, with dairy as the primary focus and beef as a by-product. His herd consists of approximately 130 dairy cows, with a target of 110–112. Lasse stopped organic farming in 2022 because the market collapsed. He now operates conventionally, which allows cheaper feed, higher milk yields, and the ability to buy nitrogen and use crop protection. He notes that he became frustrated with the high costs and restrictions of certification (~15–20,000 SEK) and decided that compliance with Arla, LRF (the Swedish Farmers' Association) and the municipal requirements was sufficient.

My last interview was with Peter, a farmer who manages a diverse farm, including sheep (80 animals), dairy and Swedish Red Polled for grazing, chickens, ducks and vegetable and berry cultivation. They also grow traditional cereals, which he explained have lower yields but require less fertilizer. Peter sells and processes all products himself, targeting private consumers through a farm shop and local retail. Approximately 60–70% of the meat is sold directly in boxes to consumers. The farm maintains high nature value and uses the animals for grazing to support biodiversity. Peter is certified organic and a member of LRF.

5.2.4 Reflexivity and challenges

I started this research with limited prior knowledge of the field. Having only visited a farm once before and limited experience of conducting interviews, I initially felt concerned about my ability to connect with the farmers and ask the right questions. This also meant that my understanding of agricultural practices and everyday farming conditions was limited to academic literature, which shaped my position as an outsider throughout the research process. I did, however, enter the field with certain preconceptions, particularly an assumption that farmers would largely express dissatisfaction with the current situation. Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I encountered a range of conflicting narratives, which initially led me to seek clarity in terms of which interpretation was “true.” This is a perspective I had to move beyond, as it became clear that no single narrative captures the full truth.

My main challenge during the interviews was feeling guilty for taking up the farmers' valuable time, especially since my study does not guarantee any direct benefit for them. Many farmers expressed that numerous people come to interview them, taking the information they need without producing tangible results for the farmers themselves. They often struggle to have their voices heard, and although student interviews can provide one avenue for engagement, meaningful outcomes are rarely achieved. This created a sense that I was just one

of many using their knowledge for personal gain, which in turn gave me a strong moral responsibility to make the most of what they chose to share.

5.3 Coding the data

For this thesis, I chose to hand code my empirical data and winnow it down to a few themes and disregarding some data which did not fit into the chosen themes (Creswell & Creswell 2018). This was a deliberate strategy to maintain analytical focus and ensure alignment with the aim of the study. Given that the interviews were between two and three hours long, a wide range of topics emerged, not all of which were central to the research questions. Consequently, excluding certain material was a conscious methodological choice to avoid diluting the analysis with peripheral themes and to preserve the coherence of the study's analytical scope.

The themes were predetermined according to the research questions, focusing on definitions of preparedness, identified challenges, solutions, assigned responsibilities, as well as expressed emotions about the future.

After the coding, the themes were interconnected to create the narrative.

6. Empirical findings

6.1 Food security preparedness in policy

In this chapter, I present findings from key documents on food preparedness in Sweden, including government reports, guidelines from public agencies, reports from private actors, and documents from industry organizations such as Livsmedelsföretagen (the Swedish Food Industry Federation). Rather than limiting the findings to formal government policy, this chapter adopts a broader understanding of policy as shaped across multiple actors and arenas. This approach reflects the empirical reality that food preparedness policy and practice is not governed solely through state decisions, but is co-produced through public authorities, industry actors, and sectoral organizations, all of which contribute to defining the dominant policy narrative.

6.1.1 Food strategy 2.0

The first document I have chosen to include is Food strategy 2.0 (Regeringskansliet 2025:3) which is the Swedish government's updated national food policy, published in March 2025. It is a revision of the original 2017 strategy and a response to recent global disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the increased climate-related extreme weather events, which have highlighted vulnerabilities in the food system. This document therefore represents the government's current and official policy framework for food preparedness, and it serves as a key reference point for how the state defines the problems, solutions, and responsibilities within the food system.

In response to recent geopolitical events, the updated strategy focuses on strengthening competitiveness, improving profitability, and increasing domestic production. Within this framing, Swedish food production is described as already distinguished by high standards of innovation, low antibiotic use, and strong animal welfare practices. However, it is simultaneously portrayed as constrained by insufficient production volumes.

Building upon the foundations of the 2017 national food strategy, the 2.0 version introduces a more rigorous approach by requiring measurable objectives and systematic monitoring.

To provide clear direction, the strategy establishes specific self-sufficiency benchmarks for various food groups, including 80% for meat and milk, 100% for green proteins, and 150% for cereals to create a buffer for exports, feed, and emergency stocks. For seafood, the strategy aims for an 80% increase over current production levels (2025, p. 10).

Achieving these targets requires a coordinated effort across the entire food supply chain. The strategy emphasizes that for Swedish food production to grow,

companies at every stage must have the right conditions to expand, with a particular emphasis on strengthening the profitability of primary production.

Strengthened profitability is presented in the sources as one of the most fundamental pillars for achieving the objectives of Food Strategy 2.0. Stable profitability is described as the single most important factor enabling actors in the food supply chain to remain resilient and to manage an increasingly uncertain external environment.

First, profitability is framed as a prerequisite for increased production. The government argues that improved profitability is necessary to reach the goal of higher domestic food production and to reduce vulnerability across the supply chain. Without sufficient profitability, companies lack the capacity to invest in production, adapt to climate change, or build financial buffers. This is particularly emphasised in primary production, including agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture.

Second, the strategy outlines several policy measures aimed at reducing costs and strengthening cash flow. These include tax-related initiatives such as continued reductions in diesel tax for agriculture, lower alcohol taxes for small-scale breweries, and expanded employment support schemes. In addition, regulatory simplification is highlighted as a key measure to reduce administrative burdens and compliance costs, particularly for smaller firms, and is widely presented as necessary to increase food production. To achieve this, the government has established a Simplification Council and an Implementation Council. The aim is to reduce business costs and strengthen competitiveness. A stated objective is to avoid “gold-plating” of EU regulations. This means that EU directives should not be implemented beyond minimum requirements. It also includes efforts to prevent regulatory burdens that increase costs for Swedish firms compared to foreign competitors. In addition, several agencies, including the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Chemicals Agency, have been tasked with reporting how they incorporate a business perspective and the objectives of the Food Strategy into their work on regulatory simplification.

Third, profitability is expected to be strengthened through market-driven mechanisms. Export promotion is presented to increase profitability by expanding access to global markets and absorbing larger production volumes. At the same time, the communication of “Swedish added values,” such as high animal welfare standards and low antibiotic use, is seen as a means of securing price premiums and improving competitiveness.

Fourth, research and innovation are framed as long-term drivers of profitability. The strategy emphasises the need to accelerate the translation of research results into practical applications to enhance productivity and economic performance across the sector.

The strategy also acknowledges regional disparities, particularly in northern Sweden, where specific measures are proposed to strengthen both production capacity and profitability.

Overall, the document is characterised by the assumption that competitiveness and profitability constitute the central engine of the food system. Without economically viable firms, the strategy argues, neither increased self-sufficiency, sustainability, nor preparedness can be achieved.

As part of this approach, SJV has been tasked with proposing ways to improve and concretize the monitoring and measurement of food production in Sweden. The assignment includes developing the necessary data and analysis to assess how production can increase over time, with a specific checkpoint in 2030 to track progress and follow developments. Additionally, the responsibility for coordinating the operational implementation of Food Strategy 2.0 has been assigned to Tillväxtverket.

Finally, the government claims that the government has maintained a close dialogue with key actors, such as companies and organisations in the food supply chain. These stakeholders are considered essential partners, as they possess the expertise and firsthand experience necessary to identify what is needed to increase food production effectively.

6.1.2 Civil preparedness authorities and advisory services

This section draws primarily on SJV's official description of its role as a civil preparedness authority, as presented in its 2026 regulatory letter, as well as on information from the agency's website and its documentation regarding investment support and advisory services.

In addition to its task under Food Strategy 2.0 to propose ways to improve and concretize the monitoring and measurement of food production in Sweden, SJV is designated as a civil preparedness authority. This designation is part of a new preparedness system introduced in Sweden in 2022, in which government responsibilities are organized into preparedness sectors and assigned to designated civil preparedness authorities. These authorities are required to have a strong capacity to withstand threats and risks, prevent vulnerabilities, manage peacetime crises, and perform their duties under heightened levels of preparedness. In total, Sweden has approximately 60 civil preparedness authorities, divided into 12 preparedness sectors, one of which is food supply. (Jordbruksverket 2026:1)

According to SJV's own website, achieving food security preparedness requires contributions from a wide range of actors, including government authorities, municipalities, primary producers, and private individuals. The agency emphasizes that the issue needs to be prioritized by politicians and other decision-makers and that there needs to be good cooperation between authorities and

producers to provide good conditions for strengthening our preparedness. (Jordbruksverket 2026:1)

As an emergency preparedness agency, SJV claims to work together with other authorities and actors to plan for crises. The agency is required to have a particularly strong ability to withstand threats and risks, prevent vulnerabilities, and manage crises in peacetime. It must also be capable of continuing its work under heightened preparedness, a condition the government may declare in response to war, conflicts in Sweden's vicinity, or severe global events that threaten national security and independence. (Jordbruksverket 2026:1)

Under heightened preparedness, the agency explains on its website that focusing on socially important activities is essential for total defence, including maintaining vegetable production through the prevention and management of plant pests and ensuring access to healthy seeds, supporting exports by managing plant pests in forests, sustaining primary food production and processing through the administration of national and EU support schemes, maintaining livestock and service animal production by safeguarding animal welfare and controlling infectious diseases, and reducing zoonotic risks by preventing and managing animal diseases that can be transmitted to humans.

These responsibilities differ from SJV's peacetime functions, which focus on monitoring, advisory services, and supporting agricultural activities under normal conditions. In other crises that may affect agriculture, the agency provides recommendations and advisory services to mitigate impacts. To ensure rapid response, SJV also maintains an official on standby (TiB) 24 hours a day to receive alerts and initiate initial crisis management in the event of serious, acute incidents. (Jordbruksverket 2025)

These mentioned responsibilities are captured in the concept of a "robust food supply". The agency contributes to this objective, among other things, by designing, administering, reporting on, and disbursing both national and EU investment support (Jordbruksverket 2026:2). One such investment is the investment support for robust primary production which was introduced in 2025 and is scheduled to be processed in 2026. The support targets investments that reduce the vulnerability of primary production in the event of heightened preparedness, thereby contributing to strengthening Sweden's civil defence. Eligibility conditions include operating a company for at least 2 years and no more than 40 years (with exceptions companies meeting the other conditions for start-up support or young entrepreneurs), employing no more than 250 people, having an annual turnover of no more than 50 million euros, and a balance sheet total of no more than 43 million euros. (Jordbruksverket 2025)

SJV also refers to advice on robust primary production provided via Greppa Näringen, which emphasizes that "for robustness-enhancing investments to be effective, it is important that they are adapted to the needs of the individual

company” (Jordbruksverket 2025). On Greppa Näringen’s website page “Stärk gårdens beredskap” (Strengthen Farm Preparedness), the initiative is described as providing advice and investment support for primary producers to increase the preparedness of their businesses. Other parts of the initiative focus on securing access to critical inputs and building emergency food stocks, as well as strengthening preparedness in other parts of the food chain, including processing, the food industry, retail, and public kitchens.

Through the advisory services, producers receive support in identifying risks and vulnerabilities in their production. Together with an advisor, they develop an action plan to enhance the company’s preparedness, ensuring production can be maintained in scenarios such as power outages, prolonged water supply disruptions affecting animal production, transport interruptions, shortages of critical inputs, IT incidents or cyberattacks, and loss of personnel or external services.

Another civil preparedness authority is Livsmedelsverket, which aims to support coordination, planning, and knowledge development across the food system. In this role, the agency collaborates with other government agencies, municipalities, regions, and private actors to ensure the continuity of essential food and water supplies during crises. It provides guidance, conducts risk and vulnerability assessments, and develops tools and recommendations for stakeholders throughout the food chain. As part of this mission, Livsmedelsverket (the Swedish National Food Agency) produces its own situational picture every month and a combined situational picture for the food supply and drinking water preparedness sector. At this moment, late March 2026, Livsmedelsverket claims that the availability of food and drinking water in Sweden is good, both short and long term. They explain that while individual companies involved in imports or exports (particularly with regions such as the Middle East) may experience economic impacts or transport delays, these disruptions are not expected to significantly affect Sweden’s overall food and water supply. The agency highlights risks related to cyberattacks, misinformation, and other security threats, and emphasizes the importance for all actors to maintain contingency plans, stay informed, and ensure flexible sourcing agreements. It also stresses the need for cooperation between authorities, municipalities, and industry, particularly in addressing local water scarcity and maintaining resilient infrastructure. (Livsmedelsverket 2026:2)

6.1.3 The responsibility of municipalities

Livsmedelsverket puts emphasis on the responsibility and importance of municipalities and regions to act. In its 2026 guidance for municipal crisis preparedness, Livsmedelsverket (2026:1) writes that municipalities need to ensure

that their own operations, such as meal services and drinking water supply, functions during crises and war. In addition, they are responsible for considering local businesses and actors that are important for both local and national food supply, including producers and suppliers of essential services. Livsmedelsverket suggests that planning should be carried out in collaboration with the private sector, voluntary organization, county administration boards and neighbouring municipalities. It should be based on risk assessments and designed to maintain operations under severe conditions, including potential war. Further, municipalities are supported through guidelines, handbooks, and training materials, particularly regarding public food services, food storage, crisis menus, and contingency planning. Food control authorities must also be able to operate during crises.

For municipalities to strengthen their food preparedness, SJV allocated investment support as a part of an investment programme aimed at improving resilience in areas such as food supply, drinking water, sewage, and waste management in 2025. According to Livsmedelsverket's 2025 documentation on this programme, a total of SEK 75 million was allocated to enhance emergency preparedness in public meals. The support was provided in two forms: general support for municipalities with advanced preparedness planning, allowing them to implement tailored measures, and targeted support for materials and storage capacity. The targeted support focuses on ensuring access to food and the ability to prepare and serve meals under disrupted conditions in sectors such as healthcare, schools, and elderly care. Municipalities receiving general support are expected to test new preparedness measures and report their experiences, which will inform the development of future support schemes. (Livsmedelsverket 2025)

However, SJVs investment support to municipalities is not the only one. In March 2026, the government announced a preparedness package of approximately SEK 1.4 billion for 2026 to strengthen municipalities and regions in civil defence. The funding aims to improve their ability to maintain essential services during crises and wartime. (Regeringskansliet 2026)

A large share of the investment focuses on decentralized supply preparedness, including funding for equipment and resources to ensure access to critical goods and services. MCF will manage significant parts of the funding, both through procurement and distribution of grants in municipalities.

Additionally, selected municipalities of strategic importance will receive targeted funding to strengthen infrastructure such as command centres and emergency hubs.

This investment is part of a border plan to invest up to SEK 3 billion between 2026 and 2028, aiming to enhance resilience, ensure continuity of essential services and support both civilian and military defence capabilities.

6.1.4 Lantmännen

As food policy is shaped across multiple actors and arenas, the private actor Lantmännen is included in these findings. This is because many of the farmers in this study sell their produce through them, thereby influencing the conditions under which farmers operate and the terms on which they can market and sell their products.

According to Lantmännen's own 2024 inquiry into Swedish food preparedness, preparedness ultimately lies with the government. The inquiry highlighted that Sweden currently lacks sufficient food preparedness and called for urgent action. In this inquiry (Lantmännen 2024:1), Lantmännen emphasizes that words must be translated into concrete measures. They propose that the government should rapidly build up stockpiles and production capacity for key resources such as grain, fertilizers, and other critical inputs. Grain is considered particularly important due to its long storage life, cost efficiency, and versatility as both food and animal feed. At the same time, Lantmännen stresses that long-term food security depends on a strong and competitive agricultural sector. Improving profitability and conditions for farmers and the food industry is therefore essential to enable increased production and ensure a resilient food system over time.

Lantmännen often makes statements about Swedish food preparedness, together with other companies and authorities. In a joint debate, Lantmännen, Scan (which Lantmännen owns), Arla foods, and LRF, argue that a strong total defence requires a well-functioning food preparedness system, which Sweden currently lacks. They highlight that low self-sufficiency (around 50%), heavy dependence on imports, and weak profitability in the agricultural sector create significant vulnerabilities, especially in times of crisis or war. (Lantmännen 2024:2)

Lantmännen, Scan, Arla foods, and LRF also emphasize that increasing domestic food production in peacetime is essential for resilience and calls for concrete government action. Proposed measures include boosting national production, building strategic stockpiles of food and critical inputs, developing domestic production of key resources, and ensuring that the food sector is prioritized in access to infrastructure, energy, and labour. They stress that while the industry is ready to contribute, the government holds primary responsibility for ensuring a robust food preparedness system. (Lantmännen 2024:2)

6.1.5 Recipe for resilience

The report “Recept för resiliens – 10 åtgärder för att stärka Sveriges livsmedelsberedskap” (“Recipe for resilience – 10 measures to strengthen Sweden's food security”) (Livsmedelsföretagen, 2025) explains that Swedish supermarket shelves have remained well-stocked despite crisis such as the

drought in 2018, Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine thanks to the capacity of Swedish food producers to adapt, diversify, secure supply chains, and invest in their own energy resources. This adaptation came at a high cost for an already heavily pressured food industry. The report quotes Björn Hellman, CEO of Livsmedelsföretagen who says that the fact that large parts of the food industry are operating at a loss poses a threat to Sweden's food security. He emphasizes that producing food in Sweden must become cheaper and simpler to enable companies to be profitable and to grow during peacetime. This is said to be the strategy to be able to remain robust and flexible in times of crisis. He continues to explain that increased exports, simplified regulations, and a supportive governmental culture are crucial. At the same time, the state must take responsibility for securing access to energy, water, and fuel, and build national reserves of critical inputs, ensuring that food production can continue even in wartime.

In the report, food preparedness is defined as preparing to deal with different types of crises and emergencies at multiple levels. It notes that for decades, Sweden took cheap, available food for granted, but the era of ignoring how food reaches the shelf is over.

The source describes self-sufficiency as a blunt and potentially misleading measure, as it only captures domestic production relative to consumption and overlooks the sector's dependence on imported inputs such as fertilizers, fuel, and technology. Without these inputs, production cannot be maintained, meaning that practical self-sufficiency may in some cases be close to zero. High self-sufficiency levels can therefore create a false sense of security. Instead, the source presents supply capacity as a more relevant indicator of preparedness, as it includes the entire food system, from production to trade, storage, and distribution. From this perspective, even export-oriented production can strengthen preparedness, as it can be redirected to domestic use in times of crisis.

The report describes a division of responsibility between the public and private sectors, though they note that current roles are often "unclear". The public sector is responsible for overall preparedness. This includes maintaining essential infrastructure such as energy, water, and transport, building strategic reserves of critical inputs, including fuel, mineral fertilizers, grain, and seeds, rather than finished food products, and ensuring legal and bureaucratic flexibility by providing clear directives, "one-stop-shop" agency contacts, and the ability to adjust regulations during crises to facilitate production shifts.

The industry is responsible for the production and distribution of food. Their preparedness measures include building operational resilience through supply chain diversification, increasing storage capacity, and securing alternative suppliers. Companies are also expected to be adaptable, for example shifting production from vodka to hand sanitizer during a pandemic. The industry has

called for voluntary, formal agreements with the state to clarify expectations and compensation during crises. Additionally, every household has a role in home preparedness, maintaining sufficient food and water to manage at least one week of temporary disruptions. Since no country is fully self-sufficient, ensuring a stable food supply also depends on maintaining free trade and strong international relations, particularly within the EU and the Nordic region.

6.1.6 The “Green Transition” Report

“Green Transition, A Growth Agenda for Swedish Agriculture and Food Production” is a report produced by 5 big agricultural industries in Sweden: Arla, LRF, Lantmännen, Scan and Livsmedelsföretagen. It is described as an industry collaboration which aims to create a shared direction within the agricultural sector and the food industry. The project “Green Transition” was launched in 2025 to show the way forward for Swedish agriculture and food production and to develop a knowledge foundation. In the report, the government’s updated food strategy, Food Strategy 2.0, is described as having raised the level of ambition for Swedish food production, and achieving these ambitions will require both resources and concrete action. They also explain that the purpose of the project is to meet the high expectations that both policymakers and the public have for the food supply. In relation to the project, strategic investments have been planned. For example, Lantmännen is establishing a new pea protein facility in Lidköping, which is expected to begin production in late 2026. Arla is planning to invest in a new cheese production facility in Götene that will double its processing capacity, and Scan Sverige is conducting a feasibility study on establishing a new slaughterhouse in northern Sweden.

Further, the green transition is described to strengthen Sweden’s preparedness and employment across the country by increasing food production, while simultaneously reducing agriculture’s climate footprint and nutrient emissions and enhancing biodiversity. The goal is for growth to occur in a long-term sustainable manner. The scaling up is possible due to favourable conditions such as available land, expertise, technology, infrastructure, and consumers who value domestically produced food. They also claim that negative impacts can be reduced even as more food is produced with innovation, technology, and modern methods.

In the report, multiple initiatives are mentioned as important for Sweden to achieve the climate goals, such as Lantmännen’s “Klimat & Natur”, Arlas Farm Ahead™ Technology, Scan Sverige Hållbarhetstillägg (sustainability premium), as well as various policy support systems that provide financial support to farmers engaged in the green transition. The authors claim that these initiatives prove that solutions exist to further improve the sustainability performance of current production.

Further, the report constructs a chain in which growth in food-producing and processing companies enables investments in technology, which improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact. This, in turn, creates a positive cycle that generates more jobs, strengthens preparedness, and enhances biodiversity. It also places strong emphasis on investing in development and increasing production in the sector, which is described as generating significant effects both upstream and downstream in the value chain.

The report mentions that the government is investing in emergency reserves, primarily for grain and critical inputs in primary production, but also for later stages of the food system. It is further stated emergency fuel reserves do exist but that the agricultural and food sectors are not yet prioritized for access to these reserves.

Additionally, the report calls for a holistic analysis of current conditions, historical developments, and the potential within land use, production, and value chains, although this is not further elaborated. It also highlights the potential to expand production by bringing fallow and underutilized grassland into cultivation, while emphasizing the need for further mapping of these resources.

Further into the report, profitability is discussed. It argues that an increased focus on low prices has weakened Swedish food production over time. Since Sweden's EU membership in 1995 domestic production has lost market share to cheaper imported foods, and recent inflation years further strengthened consumers' preference for low-cost foreign alternatives. This has contributed to declining production volumes and profitability in the Swedish food sector. Low profitability across both primary production and the food industry is described as a major risk to the entire value chain. Without profitability, companies cannot invest in competitiveness, sustainability, preparedness, workforce development or innovation. In fact, the food industry even experienced negative profitability in 2022-2023, and Sweden ranks low compared to other EU countries. The report highlights structural challenges, including a highly concentrated grocery retail market where a few dominant actors' control most of the market, giving them strong bargaining power over producers. The growing share of private-label products is also seen as a potential risk to innovation and long-term sector resilience, often associated with lower profitability for producers. Rising input costs (e.g. energy, raw materials, packaging, and transport), along with policy-driven costs such as packaging fees, electricity grid charges, and regulatory compliance (e.g. cybersecurity directives), are further increasing pressure on the sector. These factors make it difficult for producers to reduce prices, despite political expectations. At the same time, the share of disposable income spent on food in Sweden has declined significantly. In the early 20th century, food accounted for about 44% of household income, whereas today it is around 13–14%. This decline is attributed to higher incomes, changing consumption patterns,

and increased efficiency in the food system. However, the lower share of spending on food puts pressure on producers' profitability and limits their ability to invest in innovation, development, and sustainability.

Overall, the report suggests that sustained low prices and structural market conditions risk undermining domestic food production, competitiveness, and long-term food security in Sweden.

6.2 Food security preparedness according to Swedish farmers

The findings from the qualitative interviews will be presented according to the themes: challenges, solutions and responsibility. This structure allows for a clear and systematic analysis of the counter narrative according to the participants' experiences in the following chapter.

6.2.1 Challenges

Centralization

According to the farmers, there is a lack of actors in the food sector in Sweden. Both Anders and Johan sell most of their produce through Lantmännen, which, together with Swedish Agro, are described as the main actors in the food industry in the area. They describe how logistics are being centralized, but without a clear allocation of responsibility. One example of this centralization is the closure of silo facilities used for grain storage, which makes transport increasingly difficult and contributes to rising costs, as farmers themselves bear the costs of transporting their produce to silo and processing facilities. For organic production, the nearest processing facility is approximately 160 kilometres away. Organic wheat must now be transported around 30 or 40 kilometres, while oats are transported approximately 80 kilometres, compared to around 30 kilometres earlier. At the same time, the Västerås silo facility, located 30 kilometres from Anders, in an area now surrounded by residential development, is being demolished, and the silo facility in Uppsala, which is located 45 kilometres away, has already been closed. As distances to facilities increase, farmers are left with greater responsibility and higher costs. Given the lack of actors, they are compelled to accept these less favourable conditions.

According to both Anders and Johan, these measures to centralize production are often justified by the high costs of maintaining such facilities. However, instead of being sold, several silo sites are being demolished. This has been disappointing as Anders notes that there had been expectations that some silo facilities could be converted into dedicated organic facilities.

Peter also points to the role of companies such as Protos, Scan and KLS which have acquired local slaughterhouses and subsequently closed them down. As a result, Peter is increasingly dependent on a single conventional slaughterhouse in Upland. The only one which handles lamb. Peter says that despite adhering to all regulations and investing in high-quality feed and animal husbandry practices, farmers may still face difficulties in having their animals slaughtered. This creates substantial challenges for farmers, who invest considerable labour and resources yet remain dependent on limited and centralized processing capacity.

Peter adds that centralization poses a risk to food production during a crisis. For example, key infrastructure, such as Lantmännen's main grain storage facility located in the port of Gothenburg, may be highly vulnerable and relatively easy to target in a conflict. He says, "If I was the Russians, that is the first thing I would bomb".

Peter also explains that because there is a lack of actors in the sector, a single company handles both conventional and organic products. In the case of Arla, its organic milk competes with its own conventional milk, creating an internal form of competition within the company. This limits the incentives to actively promote the organic segment, as increased sales of organic products come at the expense of conventional products within the same portfolio.

Demographics

A recurring concern raised during the interviews is the lack of farmers and their old age. Johan argues that there are too few farmers relative to the amount of available agricultural land. As each farmer has limited energy and time, they are only able to cultivate a portion of the land, approximately half of their potential area. While farmers strive to utilize as much land as possible, this does not translate into full production capacity. As a result, not all agricultural land is fully used, which in turn limits overall food production and makes national self-sufficiency difficult to achieve.

Peter also adds to this argument, noting that farmers are becoming older, and that he is considered one of the 'younger' ones, being under 60 years old. This poses a significant challenge to the industry, as younger generations are not replacing older farmers at a sufficient rate. He further emphasizes that this trend threatens not only production capacity, but also cultural heritage and accumulated knowledge within the farming sector, which risks being rapidly lost. He notes that things (in the food sector) must change, however, farmers are a dying breed and there is not a lot of time to fix past mistakes.

"Bondeskam"

A recurring term used to describe the discourse surrounding farming is the Swedish word "bondeskam", which can be translated as the shaming of farmers.

Johan explains that farmers have often been portrayed as a burden, as environmental culprits, and as dependent on subsidies. This is something that Johan has grown tired of and one of the main reasons why he plans to stop farming cattle.

According to the farmers, the shaming became more pronounced around 2015 with the rise of veganism and the growing influence of the Green Party in Swedish politics. Many of them have experienced threats, including letters left with messages such as ‘I know where your kids go to school’. This movement changed the environment, with many companies embracing the negative perception of farming. The farmers say that before this shift, representatives from authorities and municipalities would regularly visit farms, share a coffee, and engage in conversations, which contributed to closer and more personal relationships. However, these interactions have largely disappeared following this change.

Today, the role of authorities has shifted from an advisory function to a more rule-based and controlling approach, characterized by less personal contact and a reduced understanding of farmers’ everyday realities. Peter describes this relationship as “humiliating”.

Bureaucracy and regulations detached from practical realities

According to the farmers, the disappearance of a relationship with key actors in the food sector, added to the bureaucracy and even more regulations which lack grounding in practical reality.

Anders argues that actors have become so detached from reality over many generations that one cannot expect them to see what they do not understand. He highlights that risk assessments are limited when risks are not perceived in the first place. At the same time, what other actors, like municipalities, perceive as risks does not align with the perceptions of farmers. This is something that Johan has experienced first-hand. He describes how the municipality conducts inspections approximately every three years to review how he stores and handles manure. He has not made any changes since the previous inspections and if he did, he would have to report it anyways. He questions whether cow manure should be considered a burden in organic farming, arguing that it is instead a resource. For him, the manure represents an important input, while the cows also graze in a nature reserve, contributing to landscape management. He argues that the authorities fail to recognize this broader circular perspective. The inspections cost him around 4,500 SEK each time and require compliance measures such as ensuring that manure can be stored on a concrete surface during wet periods. He therefore perceives these regulatory controls as unnecessarily bureaucratic and costly, as they do not adequately consider the overall system in which manure functions as a natural and essential part of organic farming.

He further illustrates this point with the example of a farmer who needed permission from 190 homeowners to spread manure; if just one person refused, the operation could not proceed, according to a decision by the County Administrative Board. He argues that this effectively prevents the continuation of core agricultural activities. From his perspective, such activities are an essential part of both food production and national preparedness. He therefore suggests that the regulatory framework is too strict, as a single objection can halt a farmer's operations. In his view, this is problematic, since authorities such as the County Administrative Board should be more supportive of farmers given the importance of agriculture for food security and crisis preparedness.

Anders explains that this is a consequence of failing to consider the broader context, as the focus is instead narrowly placed on factors such as environmental intrusion and impacts on fish species, which are given such weight that applications are often rejected. The problem according to Lasse, is that it is the ones who don't see the full picture who unfortunately write the policies. He argues that it is one thing to sit at a desk and write regulations, but another to try to comply with them in practice. Therefore, "the map and reality do not always align".

Peter remarks that there is no longer a sense of willingness or understanding among the bureaucrats. Many sit comfortably in their offices and no longer have a relationship with agriculture, partly because so few people now have farming in their family background. At the same time, the fear of sabotage and threats has made him more closed off to visitors on his farm. This perceived distance is further reflected in his view that authorities tend to prioritize maintaining their own operations and safeguarding their employees during crises, which he sees as indicative of an overextended administrative structure with too many officials. As Peter puts it, "You're trying to keep a machine running that doesn't produce anything".

Further, Peter explains that bureaucracy has seeped into support systems, making them inefficient and difficult to navigate. Although he has attempted to apply for support, he describes a lack of case officers at the municipal level in Uppsala and a complex points-based system that is difficult to navigate. According to him, there is limited guidance available, and he has even had to hire external consultants to assist with applications, increasing the costs further.

He further illustrates these challenges through the example of grain drying facilities. He explains that support is only granted for upgrading or improving existing installations, not for replacing them entirely. This means that a farmer cannot receive funding for a completely new system, only for modifications. Similarly, when attempting to replace an old diesel boiler, he must provide detailed historical documentation, such as fuel usage over the past 5–10 years, to demonstrate need and qualify for support. However, since he previously relied on

a neighbour's drying facility, which is no longer operational, he lacks the required documentation. As a result, he is unable to meet the criteria for support when attempting to invest in his own system. This, he argues, illustrates how current support structures fail to reflect real farming practices and instead create barriers to necessary investments.

Lasse expresses a similar view, explaining that although he can apply for support to improve manure storage, he believes a more effective solution would be investment support to increase the number of cows.

This has, in turn, increased the daily administrative task for the farmers. Lasse explains that as a farmer, you must deal with finances, accounting, administrative tasks related to animals, and various reports, which means a lot of paperwork around livestock. This is seen as tedious and not what farming is about. He adds that this was not his motivation for becoming a farmer, and that if this were the focus, he might just as well work as a civil servant at SJV.

“It just works”

According to the farmers, bondeskam exists in parallel with the overall mentality of ‘it just works’, meaning that whilst farmers are blamed for societal problems on one side, this occurs alongside a broader perception that the system functions without deeper reflection on its underlying dependencies and complexities. Anders notes that there is an underlying lack of knowledge and competence, masked with the societal notion of “it has always worked”. This hinders progress as most people don't understand why things work, it just always has. According to the farmers, this mentality is a consequence of Sweden not being in a war for centuries, in other words “peace damaged”. “They become like headless chickens,” says Lasse, unlike the Finns. Anders states the same, saying that we need to learn from the Finns as they have maintained stockpiles and have a better overall knowledge and awareness across society. Even the Norwegians do more as they utilize virtually all available land, compared to Sweden where we do not cultivate every piece of land because it is not considered rational, according to Johan.

Lack of profitability, stability and power

An important challenge for the farmers is the lack of profitability and a sense of stability. Johan explains that grain prices are the same today as they were in the 1950s. While farmers have become increasingly efficient over time, this development eventually reaches a breaking point. Larger conventional grain producers report having very good harvests but still struggle to make a profit. According to him, a stable system should allow farmers to break even in a bad year and generate surplus in a good year. He argues that this is not the case today. Instead, he contends that the current agricultural economy is unsustainable:

despite increased efficiency, farmers earn too little, and the system lacks stability. In addition, there is a historical problem of low profitability in the sector, making it nearly impossible for young individuals to start from scratch. In a functioning agricultural system, farmers should be able to withstand bad years and build reserves during good years, which is not possible under current conditions.

While profitability remains low, input prices are high, which inhibits investments in eco-friendly alternatives, development and preparedness. Anders highlights, for example, that organic fertilizers (e.g. Biofer) are too expensive, and that there is no clear incentive to purchase them, as costs must be economically viable. He also points to market competition as a key factor influencing input prices. For instance, when China purchased protein meal for animal feed, prices increased, which in turn affected farmers' costs.

Because farmers are not compensated fairly and input prices are high, they become dependent on investment support. Lasse notes that he fulfils many requirements automatically. A recurring theme among the farmers is that compliance often occurs implicitly, as they already act in ways they consider best for their animals, rather than because of laws or policy requirements. However, this is sometimes framed politically as evidence of positive change, with policymakers and others pointing to such practices as improvements that have been achieved through regulation. According to Lasse, investment support functions as compensation for low milk prices rather than as genuine support. This raises the question of why market prices are not adjusted so that farmers receive fair compensation. He argues that, as a result, consumers' money must pass through a longer chain before reaching the producers.

Lasse further notes that, in his view, there is a long-standing concern among policymakers that those who control the means of food production gain significant power. He argues that this has contributed to a system in which large actors, including wealthy individuals and investors, acquire agricultural land, thereby reducing farmers' autonomy. As a result, farmers become increasingly dependent on subsidies, receiving only marginal income from the global market, while their economic independence is gradually weakened.

He adds that veganism and the environmental movement, along with the notion that farming (milk and meat) is harmful, has added a further layer of power over them, as it is directly harmful to their occupation.

On the topic of subsidies, Peter argues that they can also distort the market. For instance, if grain processing facilities are aware that farmers receive support, they may raise their prices, accordingly, reducing the intended benefit. In his view, support schemes are therefore not necessarily effective, and preparedness-related support is described as unrealistic and not grounded in practical conditions on farms.

He argues that because of the low profitability, it is cheaper and more sensible to discontinue grain production than to invest 1.5 million in starting a drying facility. He also knows a farmer who has chosen to sell his fertilizer rather than use it for food production, as it is currently more profitable to sell the fertilizer itself because of the rising prices following the war in Iran

Peter explains further that it is not until cheap imported products from abroad are no longer able to reach the market that local resources will gain higher value. However, currently, the opposite is happening. When Ukrainian grain intended for Africa did not reach its destination, it was instead sold in Europe, which drove down prices for local production and reduced its profitability. In response, several Eastern European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, introduced temporary restrictions on Ukrainian grain to protect domestic production. In Sweden, however, local production was instead scaled down. A similar dynamic is now being discussed in relation to trade agreements with South America.

Lasse notes that farmers are operating in a constant state of crisis, living under persistent pressure and uncertainty. Agriculture, he argues, lacks stability, where farmers are forced to “survive” rather than develop their operations.

At the same time, food is often perceived as being too expensive, even though grain prices remain at levels like those of the 1950s. This suggests a gap between public perception and the economic realities experienced by farmers. Johan argues that farmers who produce the food are not paid significantly more than retail employees who place products, such as milk, on store shelves. Anders adds that the issue is not primarily that food is too expensive, but rather that overall living costs, particularly housing, are high. In his view, the increasing cost of living is often attributed to food prices, even though the underlying pressures lie elsewhere.

All the farmers agree that if they were paid fairly, they would not spend additional income on personal consumption, such as vacations, but would instead reinvest it in their farms to increase food production. This is due to the nature of their work, which involves caring for both animals and the natural environment. Fair compensation would also make it possible for them to invest in preparedness measures, such as stockpiling, as well as in more environmentally friendly alternatives related to fuel, feed, and manure. Lasse argues that if farmers were given greater autonomy, they would be better positioned to address challenges related to climate change and preparedness. However, he suggests that there is a reluctance to grant farmers this level of control. Instead, money and decision-making power is given to authorities and municipalities. For example, 1.4 billion SEK is allocated to municipalities in 2026, raising questions about whether they possess the necessary knowledge to determine what is needed. There is a concern amongst the farmers that these resources may instead be used to employ even more office clerks who lack the practical expertise required, leading to decisions

based more on assumptions than on grounded knowledge. At the same time, there is a perceived reluctance to invest independently, as many actors wait for funding from the EU rather than committing their own resources. Authorities such as SJV is therefore seen as a “spider in the web” of food production, meaning that it primarily focuses on its own operations and staff, while hindering real progress.

For the farmers, it is a common notion that civil servants, who are paid for their time, visit them who are not compensated for the same meetings. During the meetings, they discuss potential projects, but these often do not materialise, leaving the farmers without any tangible results from the process and a loss in time that could have been invested in their operation or time with family. One example by Peter, is a local apple juice production facility involving multiple actors, aimed at adding value to local resources and creating jobs. After four meetings, amounting to eight hours of unpaid time on his part, the response was that the project was too large and that he should instead start with project-based support.

Additionally, many farmers attend municipal meetings, often in the evenings and always unpaid, while municipal officials are compensated for their time. During the meeting they discuss potential solutions with the farmers. However, when they go home, they often never hear about it again. Peter says that he does not expect significant compensation for his attendance, but that they could at least cover the cost of the fuel he uses to get there. He also explains that in the past, he would attend these meetings at the expense of time with his family. He has now learned that it is not worth the sacrifice.

Anders explains that he has often tried to engage with the municipality about potential risks and preparedness solutions, but he feels that no one listens. Similarly, Lasse has informed his municipality that he has the capacity to supply schools and elderly care facilities with food in a crisis. Although the municipality appears positive towards the idea of collaboration, no concrete action has been taken.

Conflicting interests

One explanation, according to Peter, for why politics does not match the lived realities of farmers is that politics operates in four-year electoral cycles, whereas farmers work with much longer time horizons. As a result, policies are often misaligned with agricultural production cycles, making it difficult to sustain production levels in a way that remains economically viable.

Additionally, politics can be driven by considerations other than what is best for the operation itself. For example, there are strong interests surrounding oil that, according to the farmers, hinder Sweden from making greater use of local resources such as wood, despite its potential to provide energy, materials, and economic benefits. An example is HVO as a diesel alternative, which costs

roughly twice as much as diesel. Although it is considered more environmentally friendly, and can be produced in Sweden, its use remains limited. While it was actively promoted by the Swedish government a few years ago, adoption has been low, and some of those who invested in it reportedly regret their decision, as it is not possible to deduct it for tax purposes in the same way as diesel. This shows that even if politicians say one thing, their economic policies often suggest something different.

6.2.2 Solutions

It takes a crisis

At the farm level, all farmers maintain some form of stockpile of essential inputs. This includes manure lasting for about half a year, as well as diesel, feed and straw. Further, crises have prompted farmers to adapt their operations, leading to investments in machinery and other changes aimed at mitigating identified vulnerabilities. For example, in 2017, Lasse invested in a pasteuriser, enabling him to process milk, yogurt, and other dairy products on-site. This allows them to extend shelf life and remain less dependent on external collection, such as if Arla does not come to pick up the milk in the case of a crisis. The motivation behind establishing the pasteuriser was a desire to sell products under his own brand and to have control over pricing. While customer demand seemed positive, the operation has not yet met expectations, and profitability has been lower than anticipated, taking around three years to break even. Based on his experience, he argues that combining dairy processing with livestock farming is too demanding: if you are going to run a dairy, you should not also have cows, and if you have cows, you should not run a dairy, as the workload becomes too extensive.

In 2018, during a dry period, Lasse built a dam to secure irrigation capacity. In 2020, after a seven-day power outage, he invested in a diesel backup generator capable of powering both the farm and household within seconds. The farm also uses milking robots, which he can often repair himself thanks to long experience, allowing operations to continue until technical service arrives. If there is no electricity failure, he can handle most issues independently. Similarly, Anders and Johan maintain wells that allow manual water access during power outages.

Anders is also planning a wood gas generator, developed with support from Greppa Näringen, which could produce both electricity and heat from local forest resources and potentially supply the surrounding area. The investment, estimated at around 4 million SEK, is conditional on public support.

Lasse argues that crises are often necessary to reveal system vulnerabilities and therefore sees current preparedness discussions as valuable in promoting forward-looking planning and identifying weaknesses in advance rather than relying on a “just-in-time” logic.

Limiting the role of big actors

Many of the farmers have tried to reduce their dependence on large companies by taking greater control over parts of the value chain. Peter explains that if he was selling lamb to a major company such as Scan, he could receive approximately 75 SEK per kilogram, without having to cover slaughter or transport costs. However, by managing slaughter and transport himself, he can sell the meat directly at around 220 SEK per kilogram. While this requires more work, it is significantly more profitable.

Apart from selling everything he produces directly to consumers, Peter also maintains an unstaffed farm shop on the property where people can shop products like flour, eggs, vegetables, milk and yoghurt. Additionally, all the farmers maintain websites, and some also have Instagram pages where they share photos of their farms, animals, and daily work, as well as information about opening hours and opportunities to visit the farms.

Collaboration

Many of the farmers maintain collaborations with one another to support each other's operations, including sharing machinery and resources. For example, Anders and Johan share machinery, each paying half of the cost while both having full access to its use. They also support each other in daily operations, which they see as a mutual strength. If one of them becomes ill, they help each other out and can take over management of each other's farms when needed. While several people work for them, decision-making remains centralized with the farm owners.

Lasse also collaborates with neighbouring farmers who produce too little grain to sell commercially, as transport costs would otherwise be too high for such small volumes. He therefore buys from them when needed, even though he is not dependent on it in normal years. However, in poor harvest years, this collaboration has proven valuable. For example, during the dry year of 2018, when grass growth was limited, he purchased feed from neighbouring farms to secure supply for that season. He describes the arrangement as highly valuable in times of need.

Peter collaborates with 6–7 farms, all with comparable farm size and production levels, growing either heritage cereals or conventional varieties. Most use their own seed, although availability is not always sufficient, and Peter takes responsibility for coordinating seed supply while other farmers assist with sowing. Processing and sales are jointly coordinated, improving efficiency and resulting in better prices, and machinery is shared across the farms as part of a broader system of collaboration. The cooperation also extends to energy and technology, where diesel and electricity generators are shared, solar panels have been installed, and knowledge about their use is actively exchanged. One farm has developed expertise in battery technology, which benefits the entire group through

knowledge transfer. Overall, the collaboration is based on the principle that the success of one farmer benefits all because if one farm tests or develops a new method or technology, the others can quickly learn from and adopt it.

Risk assessment

To secure Swedish food production in the event of a crisis, farmers emphasize the need for structured risk analysis and planning. Anders outlines a stepwise approach: identifying challenges, assessing the current situation, defining a desired state, and determining the measures required to reach it. To operationalize this, he proposes the SMART framework: Specific (clear and precise goals), Measurable (trackable progress), Accepted (agreement among stakeholders), Realistic (feasible given resources and conditions), and Time-bound (defined deadlines).

To implement such planning, Anders and Johan argue for a single preparedness authority with responsibility for the entire food chain, from farm to table. They contend that the current fragmentation across multiple agencies prevents a coherent overview and leads to slow decision-making, as no actor has responsibility for the system. A unified structure, they argue, would improve coordination and clarify goals that are currently diluted by competing institutional interests.

At the local level, Lasse suggests that crisis preparedness should also be practiced at municipal level, not only within civil defence structures, to better identify vulnerabilities. Similarly, Anders highlights the need for municipalities near urban centres to plan for population movement during crises, where urban residents may seek refuge in rural areas and thereby strain local resources. He argues that current measures, such as converting schools into temporary shelters, are insufficient.

Finally, farmers point to a lack of systematic risk analysis among key food system actors. They note that disruptions in input supply, such as fertiliser shortages linked to geopolitical conflict, are not sufficiently accounted for in existing planning. Anders therefore argues that major actors such as Lantmännen should develop scenario analyses and forecasts to better anticipate how such disruptions would affect agricultural production.

Investments in local alternatives

When talking about a national solution to preparedness, Anders refers to lessons from Russia, highlighting large investments in infrastructure and energy. In his view, given Sweden's abundant forest resources, it should be self-evident to aim for self-sufficiency in diesel and fuel production by using forest biomass as a raw material. He argues that instead of building only a few large-scale facilities, such as two mega plants, production should be more strategic, consisting of several

smaller and geographically dispersed plants. This would make the system more resilient and ensure that vehicles and transport can continue to operate even in times of crisis. Anders adds that initially, some investments may not seem worthwhile, but if a crisis occurs, they can create important synergies.

According to the farmers, Sweden should produce more of its own feed and inputs to become more self-sufficient. Otherwise, both farmers and society risk being affected by crises through lower production and less food on the market. Lasse asks why Sweden needs to import so much soy from countries such as Brazil when it is possible to produce protein for animal feed locally. He questions what is preventing Sweden from increasing domestic production, noting that electricity is relatively cheap and the necessary resources are available. He suggests that possible explanations include environmental regulations and lower import costs. In his view, this reflects political choices that prioritize cost efficiency over national vulnerability.

Profitability

One important change that would make a significant difference for farmers is improving the economic viability of farming. Lasse argues that the system is fundamentally flawed, as farmers have no control over pricing and instead receive what remains after others in the value chain have taken their share. He explains that farmers are also private companies, and as any other, they are expected to generate profit. However, unlike other actors, they are constrained by global market prices, while others in the chain can set their own prices. At the same time, input prices are determined on the global market and continue to rise, while prices for products such as milk and grain remain low. As a result, farmers are unable to benefit from inflation in the same way as other sectors, which can pass increased costs on to consumers.

Lasse notes that a part of the Swedish preparedness plan should be to stop criticizing the people who contribute. He adds that if farmers were left to operate more freely, they would be able to address issues related to the environment, food production, and preparedness. However, he believes there is a reluctance to grant them that level of autonomy.

He illustrates this by explaining that increases in dairy cow numbers have occurred due to good feed conditions and favourable prices, while grain production has expanded following good harvest years, developments driven by conditions rather than political measures. He argues that if farmers are given greater autonomy, the system would largely regulate itself. While regulations are necessary, he emphasizes that many practices, such as compliance with animal welfare standards, are not primarily followed because they are mandated by law, but because farmers themselves want their animals to be well cared for. In this sense, compliance often occurs as a natural part of good farming practice.

He argues further that if profitability were higher, the situation would look very different, for example, farmers would be able to maintain larger reserves, such as diesel storage, without relying on external support. He describes a chain effect in which improved profitability would lead to greater resilience, increased production, and make farming a more attractive occupation. This could also support a diversity of farm sizes. However, he notes that access to capital is a barrier, as banks are often more willing to lend larger sums for large-scale operations than smaller amounts for small farms, making it difficult to establish or maintain smaller-scale agriculture.

Peter explains that while the broader societal and policy discourse among actors such as the state, industry organisations, and companies often focuses on growth, it would be more appropriate to ensure fair compensation for the work already being done.

The full potential of farming

The farmers note that there is a lot of potential within farming that they feel is being ignored by authorities and the government.

Lasse reflects on the significant potential of milk production in a preparedness context. While grain can be stored for long periods, fresh milk has a shorter shelf life of around 7–15 days depending on processing, whereas value-added dairy products such as cheese and butter can be stored much longer. He suggests that milk and meat production could play a more central role in food security, arguing that in a crisis, direct consumption of fresh milk is less critical if it can be processed into more durable products. These dairy products contain a large proportion of essential nutrients and therefore have strong potential to contribute to nutritional security.

At the same time, he acknowledges that this perspective is not yet fully developed. He highlights the importance of maintaining robust distribution systems and adapting them to support more resilient forms of processing, such as converting milk into milk powder with a long shelf life. However, he notes that such processing facilities are largely concentrated in southern Sweden, which may create regional vulnerabilities.

Further, Peter reflects over the 90 million investment that has been made to support around one million people, including plans for five mills in Norrland (northern Sweden). He raises concerns about practical implementation and lack of clarity regarding grain quality and usability. Questions remain about what types of flour can be used, whether it is sufficiently clean, its protein content, and whether it may contain spores or contaminants. He also points out potential limitations in milling processes, noting that traditional hammer mills produce only coarse flour that is not suitable for baking. He further highlights unresolved logistical challenges, such as where yeast would come from, where production should be

located, and whether there are sufficient systems to transport grain from storage facilities to mills. Packaging and distribution are also unclear, particularly since these processes are not automated and would require manual labour. Additionally, because the mills will not be used during peacetimes, they have no chance of working during war times. On the other hand, Peter maintains his own mills, which have a capacity of 95 kg per hour and could theoretically produce enough flour to support many people with a year's supply of bread flour, operating with a relatively low investment cost of around 200,000 SEK. He therefore questions why the government does not utilize farmers like him and family-run enterprises which are the most cost-efficient form of production. This way, the government can distribute risk through decentralisation and support local processing.

Similarly, Lasse has told the municipality that his farm could supply the municipality, like schools and elderly homes, with food in a crisis, but that this would require positive signals and support during peacetime. While the response is generally positive, he feels that the authorities fail to make use of this potential in practice, as little concrete action follows.

Peter also sees significant preparedness potential in organic farming, arguing that organic production follows a more cyclical logic than conventional agriculture. He explains that organic farmers are more widely distributed across the country and are generally less dependent on external input resources such as synthetic fertilisers. As a result, he suggests that this type of production may offer greater resilience in times of disruption, due to its lower reliance on centralized supply chains and external inputs.

He argues further that even natural values on farms are not being fully utilised, for example land that could be converted into wetlands by qualifying for environmental support schemes. In his case, however, this opportunity remains unrealised because there are no case officers available to come out and assess the land in person, which is required for approval and funding. At the same time, he experiences the regulatory framework is so complex that even the responsible authorities appear uncertain about how the rules should be interpreted and applied. As a result, potential environmental measures are not implemented, not due to a lack of interest from farmers, but because of bureaucratic constraints and insufficient practical support.

Peter suggests that we should ask ourselves which regulations are necessary in times of crisis and war? And if they are not needed in such situations, we should question whether we need them at all in normal times.

6.2.3 Responsibility

Lasse notes that the national preparedness is bad but maybe it will get better, saying "you can always hope". He argues that awareness alone makes people think differently, as the conversation itself raises preparedness considerations

such as keeping cash at home or maintaining basic emergency supplies. He refers to earlier systems of household food storage, suggesting that while such practices may no longer be necessary at the individual level, larger actors should be responsible for maintaining strategic reserves. In his view, these responsibilities should be placed on major food companies, as they continuously handle and distribute food and therefore already operate within the system. He argues that this would reduce the need for separate storage facilities such as underground reserves. However, he believes that large actors are reluctant to take on this responsibility due to the associated costs.

On this subject, Peter argues that responsibility is passed along different administrative levels, with municipalities waiting for regions, regions waiting for national authorities, national authorities waiting for the government, and the government waiting for the EU. At the same time, investments intended for preparedness are being held back rather than distributed, as each level waits for action from the level above before making decisions themselves. Peter argues further that this is a cultural problem where everyone is waiting for someone else to take responsibility and make the sacrifice. In his view, society is in a passive state where everyone is waiting, and no one is clearly held accountable.

On the other hand, if farmers had the authority to direct investments, all funding would be directed towards developing production. At the same time, Lasse feels that there is a desire to shift responsibility down to their level, particularly regarding resilience. He argues however that it is not possible to meet these expectations, as farmers simply do not have the financial capacity to do so.

Peter describes the financial risk as a constant concern, saying he does not sleep well at night. He feels that the state is effectively waiting for farmers to absorb all the risk, while support schemes tend to favour larger actors who are already profitable. As a result, he argues that smaller farmers carry a disproportionate share of financial uncertainty without receiving equivalent support.

When discussing preparedness, Peter explains that as a consumer, he wants to be convinced that there is a clear plan in place. As a producer, he wants confidence that there is an understanding of how food is produced, whether there is access to fuel, whether distribution can function, and whether inputs such as seed and fertilizers are available, along with effective control systems that support production. He notes that current disruptions, such as those linked to the situation in Iran, already reveal a lack of adequate stockpiles, raising the question of what has been done over the years. From a consumer perspective, he believes state preparedness is often overestimated. From the producers' perspective, there is also a lack of trust in the state, leading to the view that farmers themselves must create the necessary conditions for production.

He further argues that politicians claim they are “simplifying regulations” but they are mainly shifting responsibility. For example, a municipality that previously carried out one inspection per farm per year for 8,500 SEK now does so only once every five years. However, he explains that the cost has not decreased, but is instead redistributed, since these inspections constitute an important source of municipal income. As the number of farms declines, he argues that costs are adjusted elsewhere to compensate. For example, on his farm, where around 28 people live across nine houses, they currently share two bins for combustible waste and one compost bin, while recycling most materials directly on the farm. However, regulations require them to have 18 separate bins, significantly increasing costs. He concludes that these regulations do not simplify the system but instead shift costs and bureaucracy from authorities to farmers, resulting in higher expenses and inefficient solutions, even though farmers often already operate in a resource-efficient way.

7. Analysing narratives

7.1 The dominant narrative

This chapter builds on Roe's policy narrative approach, alongside Stone's work on policy problems and causal stories, to examine how preparedness is constructed in the policy material. The analysis traces not only how preparedness is defined, but also how different actors are positioned in relation to responsibility for identifying risks, addressing them, and implementing proposed solutions.

The analysis is organised in three steps. It first identifies how preparedness is defined through Roe's policy narrative approach and Stone's framework. It then analyses how responsibility for addressing identified risks is assigned to different actors, before tracing how proposed solutions are framed and who is positioned to implement them.

In line with Roe's narrative policy analysis (1994), the dominant narrative is not created by a single actor or document but is formed through the convergence of perspectives from multiple key stakeholders who interpret the same developments in broadly similar ways. It emerges at the intersection of government policy, industry representation, and sectoral authorities, all of which respond to a shared set of external pressures such as geopolitical instability, economic shocks, and environmental change. Together, these developments have fundamentally reshaped how the Swedish food system is understood as it is no longer seen as stable and self-evident, but rather as vulnerable and strategically important.

7.1.1 Constructing the policy problem

The dominant narrative attributes the need for policy intervention to both the current geopolitical context and structural weaknesses within the food system. Russia's war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation, and climate change are, according to the sources, presented as factors that have increased the need for heightened preparedness. Food is thus securitized, meaning that political actors transform it into a "security issue," thereby legitimizing the use of extraordinary measures to address it. In this process, food is reframed from a primarily economic and agricultural concern into a matter of national security and societal resilience. This has led to a reconfiguration of responsibility across the food system. First, the Swedish government has designated certain agencies as preparedness authorities, thereby introducing a security framework into institutions that were previously primarily focused on food production in a peacetime context. Second, the securitization of food has redirected investments towards preparedness-oriented measures, prioritising activities such as stockpiling, infrastructure development, and contingency planning. This shift

frames preparedness as a distinct area of intervention, where resources are allocated specifically to managing risks and ensuring system functionality under crisis conditions, rather than to broader structural development within the food sector.

The identification of structural weaknesses has also created space for policy intervention. In many ways, these weaknesses can be understood as having been exposed, rather than newly created, by recent geopolitical developments. As Stone (1989) explains, policies are created when societal difficulties are reframed as the result of human action and therefore as amenable to human intervention. This raises the question of whether these vulnerabilities would have gained the same political attention in the absence of these external shocks, or whether they would have remained embedded and largely unaddressed within the system. At the same time, many of the weaknesses are attributed to past political decisions, thereby shifting causal responsibility to earlier policy regimes rather than current actors. This positioning allows current policymakers to appear as managers of inherited constraints rather than primary originators of the problem, thereby reducing their direct accountability while still legitimising current intervention.

7.1.2 Challenges and solutions

The main challenges identified in this narrative are low domestic production, dependence on imported inputs, weak profitability, high production costs, regulatory burdens, and just-in-time logistics.

As described in Food Strategy 2.0, Swedish food is characterized by high standards of innovation, low antibiotic use, and strong animal welfare practices, with the main challenge being that it is constrained by insufficient production volumes. This is often described in terms of low self-sufficiency, which in turn, constructs national food preparedness as dependent on increasing internal production capacity. This production-centric logic frames increasing domestic output as the primary legitimate solution. Growth is therefore framed not simply as an outcome, but as a prerequisite for preparedness.

Low productivity is also linked to a high dependence on imports and is framed as a key vulnerability, particularly in times of crisis or war. To address this challenge, investment in stockpiles of input products is presented as a key solution, thereby constructing preparedness as a capacity that can be achieved through material accumulation and infrastructure expansion. This also reflects a horizon of expectation in which imports of critical inputs may be disrupted or temporarily halted by external shocks, thereby creating the need for enhanced preparedness and contingency planning. The stockpiles are being realized through government investments, divided between national stockpiles and targeted funding to municipalities, with an emphasis on locally anchored implementation. This points to an increased emphasis on local preparedness, where municipalities

are assigned responsibility and are perceived as appropriate fixers. It is also assumed that municipalities possess the necessary knowledge and, when provided with adequate funding, have the capacity to act effectively.

Further, regulatory burdens are also presented as a key factor that needs to be reduced to increase food production. To achieve this, two new councils have been established by the government, indicating that this capacity did not exist, or was not sufficient, within the food system before. Additionally, objectives have been set to avoid implementing EU regulations beyond minimum requirements, reflecting a growing perception that Sweden has previously over-implemented such regulations. It also places the cause of current challenges in domestic regulatory practices rather than in market structures or broader economic conditions. In simpler terms, the issue is framed as one of excessive or overly strict rules, rather than because of market structures that make profitability difficult.

At the same time, monitoring mechanisms have been introduced to assess whether agencies incorporate these objectives into their work. This may indicate a perceived lack of willingness or capacity within agencies to sufficiently reduce regulatory burdens, which has prompted the government to introduce additional structures and oversight mechanisms.

Taken together, these developments suggest a form of regulatory layering, where new structures and oversight mechanisms are added on top of existing governance arrangements rather than replacing or removing them, thereby increasing institutional complexity even within a policy agenda framed around simplification. At the same time, these same regulations which are perceived as excessive and costly, are also described as what distinguishes Swedish food production, particularly through low antibiotic use and high animal welfare standards. This suggests a fundamental tension within the narrative, where regulation is simultaneously constructed as a competitive burden and as a key source of added value and differentiation.

Finally, all these weaknesses are framed in a way that positions increased profitability as the primary solution. Historically, low profitability is linked to Sweden's integration into the European market, where domestic production has struggled to compete with cheaper imports. Over time, this has weakened production capacity and reduced resilience. In this framing, responsibility is partially displaced onto past policy regimes and structural developments, thereby reducing the accountability of current policymakers and reframing present challenges as the legacy of earlier decisions rather than ongoing political choices. Conversely, the proposed policy measures, such as increasing productivity, lowering production cost and dependencies on important inputs, are designed to enhance profitability, which is in turn assumed to resolve issues related to preparedness. This reflects a circular logic in which economic viability is both the

means and the end of policy intervention. They explain that without profitability, companies cannot invest in innovation, sustainability, workforce development, or preparedness. This is reflected in policy measures where investment support is implemented by multiple actors across different parts of both the food system and civil preparedness. Preparedness packages and targeted funding programs illustrate how the state seeks to actively stimulate and de-risk investments that might otherwise not occur.

Private actors also put profitability as the main obstacle for Swedish food production. The report “Recipe for resilience” argues that Swedish supermarket shelves have remained stocked even during major crises. This stability is attributed to the adaptability of the food sector, its ability to diversify supply chains, secure inputs, and invest in alternative solutions such as energy production. However, it has been costly on an already strained sector. This duality, resilience in practice but fragility in structure, is central to the narrative. It reinterprets everyday resilience as evidence that the system is currently holding together despite structural weakness, rather than proof that the system is robust. This statement further suggests that primary producers are actively keeping the system functioning in practice, since resilience is produced through their everyday work, adaptations, and coping strategies. They are thereby the actors who prevent the system from collapsing under pressure. However, at the same time, the framing implies that their effort is not sufficient to indicate a sustainable long-term food system. As Mosse (2004) argues, this creates interpretive space for policy actors to justify continued intervention and the introduction of measures aimed at securing and strengthening system-wide stability.

Even the “Green transition” report presents increased food production as central to both preparedness and sustainability and is integrated into this investment-driven narrative. Planned initiatives, such as new processing facilities, expanded production capacity, and technological innovation, are framed as dual-purpose investments that both increase output and reduce environmental impact. In this way, sustainability is not treated as separate from preparedness, but as something that can be achieved through the same investment flows that strengthen the sector economically.

Despite this strong emphasis, some gaps remain. The narrative acknowledges the need for a more holistic analysis of land use, production systems, and value chains, as well as the potential of underutilized resources. However, these areas are less concretely developed, suggesting that while investment is clearly positioned as the solution, the strategic direction of those investments is not always fully specified.

7.1.3 Responsibility

Responsibility within the narrative is formally described as shared, but in practice it is continuously shifted between actors rather than clearly anchored. Across sources, there is strong and consistent emphasis on collaboration between government authorities, municipalities, industry actors, and other stakeholders. For example, Jordbruksverket frames preparedness as a shared responsibility across authorities, municipalities, producers, and individuals, where coordination and joint action are essential. Public authorities position themselves as coordinators responsible for infrastructure, regulation, and overall systems, while municipalities and regions are assigned responsibility for local implementation, particularly in areas such as public meals and crisis planning.

However, beneath this shared framing lies a more consistent pattern: each group of actors ultimately places primary responsibility on another actor. For example, Livsmedelsverket puts emphasis on the responsibility of municipalities and regions, while Lantmännen points out that the government is ultimately responsible for preparedness. The state, in turn, redistributes this responsibility across the system, primarily through targeted investments and institutional design. By allocating funding, setting priorities, and designating certain bodies as preparedness authorities, responsibility is effectively passed on to agencies, municipalities, and sector-specific actors. In this way, investments do not only function as economic tools, but also as governance mechanisms: they assign responsibility in practice by directing who is expected to act, adapt, and implement preparedness measures.

This redistribution of responsibility is also visible in other forms of governance. Many authorities work extensively with producing recommendations, guidelines, handbooks, and advisory materials, often directed at each other, at municipalities, or at private companies. While framed as support, these instruments also function as a way of assigning responsibility, as they define expectations, outline appropriate actions, and implicitly position certain actors as responsible for implementation.

At the same time, industry actors more explicitly shift responsibility toward the government, arguing that it must ensure access to essential resources such as energy, water, and fuel, and take the lead in building strategic reserves of critical inputs. From this perspective, the state is positioned as the key enabler of the system, even as it simultaneously distributes responsibility onward through funding structures and guidance.

Thus, a subtle dynamic emerges in which responsibility is constantly circulated, often within different parts of the state itself, rather than fixed. Collaboration is consistently emphasized, yet responsibility is repeatedly reassigned across levels and actors. This framing is allowing multiple actors to align around shared goals while positioning responsibility elsewhere, with

investments and guidance serving as the main mechanisms through which this distribution takes place.

7.2 The counter-narrative

Across the interviews, the farmers construct a counter-narrative that challenges the dominant policy framing of Swedish food preparedness. This narrative is characterised by a strong sense of dissatisfaction and disempowerment, expressed both emotionally and as interpretations of how the food system is organised and governed.

7.2.1 Constructing the problem

Contrary to the dominant narrative, the counter narrative frames the structural weaknesses in Sweden's food system as resulting from the actors who design and implement regulatory frameworks, rather than from external shocks. It is a general perception amongst the farmers in the study that decision-making power and autonomy is given to anyone but the primary producers, particularly to administrative officials without experience in the field. This reflects a broader tension between how agriculture is governed through formal rules and administrative frameworks, and how it operates in everyday practice on farms. Policy is seen as being shaped by actors whose expertise lies in designing policies, rather than in carrying them out in practice. This differs from the knowledge held by farmers, which is grounded in the practical realities of implementation and the material conditions of production. Echoing Mosse (2004), this points to a gap between the criteria used to define successful policy and the conditions that make implementation workable on the ground, highlighting how different forms of expertise shape both the design and enactment of policy.

This gap enables policymakers to continue producing successive layers of policy without necessarily resolving the underlying implementation challenges, thereby creating an accumulation of governance layers that adds further complexity to the system rather than addressing existing tensions.

The challenge of addressing preparedness is, however, not the farmers' primary concern, but rather a structural issue that constrains progress across multiple areas.

7.2.2 Challenges

Causal stories and mobilising metaphors

Several of the interviewed farmers point to increased centralization as a challenge that affects them both in peacetime and poses a significant risk in times of crisis. They observe large companies shutting down silo facilities and slaughterhouses,

which increases both transportation costs and system vulnerabilities. Centralization is often justified by efficiency and cost reduction, but farmers question why facilities are dismantled rather than repurposed. These justifications simplify complex structural changes by presenting them as necessary improvements, thereby legitimizing the closure of local infrastructure. This “efficiency” narrative therefore functions as a mobilizing metaphor that foregrounds cost reduction while obscuring how burdens, risks, and vulnerabilities are redistributed onto farmers and the wider food system. Drawing on Stone’s (1989) causal stories framework, there is an ongoing struggle over how responsibility for systemic risks is assigned and understood. Companies may frame the changes as a response to market necessity, while farmers frame them as deliberate decisions to shut down facilities. This also points to a conflict between companies’ economic liberty to shut down facilities, and the security (resilience) of the agricultural system during times of crisis. As Mosse explains, policy is not always about successful implementation on the ground, but about maintaining the coherence of the organizational model. This helps explain why farmers experience increased vulnerability, despite the system being officially described as more efficient and resilient.

At the same time, in the report “Green transition” companies such as Lantmännen, Arla and Scan claim to plan investments to establish new facilities, including a pea protein facility, a new cheese production facility and a slaughterhouse. This kind of technological innovation can be seen as a symbol for a modern and forward-looking system, which in turn, creates a narrative of control and progress. However, in the eyes of the farmers, it mostly contributes to specialization where instead of maintaining a broad network of local facilities capable of handling different types of raw materials, the system develops large, specialized units. Further, these new facilities require substantial investments. To make them economically viable, they will depend on processing large volumes of raw materials. This, in turn, encourages a more centralized system in which raw materials are transported over long distances to a limited number of processing sites.

Loss of historical allies

For several of the farmers in this study, the main challenges intensified around 2015 with the rise of what they identified as a vegan and anti-farmer discourse. This discourse operates as a powerful narrative that increasingly frames farmers as culprits, thereby legitimizing stricter regulations both socially and politically and constructing a broader narrative of control and progress. Feeling singled out as the source of societal and environmental problems, farmers come to perceive these regulations not only as administrative burdens but also as forms of moral sanction. From the perspective of Mosse, this shift can be understood as a

transformation in the social relations through which policy is enacted. According to the farmers, their relationship with agencies and municipalities has weakened and become increasingly asymmetrical. Rather than being grounded in mutual trust and cooperation, it is now mediated through oversight, compliance, and regulation, with authorities assuming a more dominant role. In this process, farmers are no longer positioned as partners in dialogue but as subjects of monitoring and governance, shifting from co-creating actors to objects of administration. At the same time, stricter regulations may be interpreted as a way for authorities to demonstrate decisiveness in response to public discourse, further reinforcing this dynamic. These changing relations are not abstract but are reproduced in everyday encounters such as administrative reporting requirements, regulatory demands, and experiences of being ignored or deprioritized by municipal actors all contribute to a growing sense of marginalization. Taken together, these cumulative interactions help consolidate a more strained and unequal social reality between farmers and the state.

This had led farmers to interpret municipal action as ideologically driven rather than evidence based. From their perspective, ideology itself becomes a form of “evidence,” in the sense that they believe municipalities have adopted a specific causal story in which farmers are constructed as culprits. In this framing, evidence is not understood as neutral or objective, but as selectively mobilized to support a predetermined political vision. As a result, stricter regulations are interpreted as a way for municipalities to legitimize an already established agenda, influenced by broader vegan and anti-agricultural discourses, rather than as responses grounded in the practical realities of farming.

Further, the farmers describe how authorities and organisations such as SJV and Lantmännen were once characterised by close cooperation. Although they are still described in these terms, the farmers no longer experience the same level of practical collaboration as before. While collaboration is discursively upheld as desirable by authorities, the actual interactions are increasingly shaped by control. This creates a tension between an ideal of partnership and the perceived reality, where collaboration is seen more as symbolic than substantive. In this sense, what is framed as “working together” may instead function as a softened expression of governance, reinforcing existing power asymmetries rather than challenging them.

Taken together, the farmers’ accounts point to a perceived loss of historical allies, as actors once associated with close collaboration have increasingly come to be experienced as distant and primarily regulatory.

Profitability and investments

In addition to regulatory pressures, profitability is also central to the counter narrative. This issue is explained in a cause-and-effect manner, where low profitability limits farmers’ ability to invest in preparedness. However, lack of

profitability is not only seen as an obstacle to preparedness, but also as a daily struggle even in peacetime, linked to farmers feeling that they are not properly compensated for their work. This is mainly attributed to companies such as Lantmännen and Scan, which are perceived as having significant market power due to the limited number of buyers, creating an oligopolistic structure in which farmers have few alternative outlets for their products.

At the same time, limited action from key actors in the sector places additional pressure on farmers and assigns them a latent responsibility for addressing system-wide challenges. This points to a paradox where the farmers are expected to take responsibility for societal preparedness while simultaneously operating from a financially weak position with limited market alternatives for their products. Within this context, the farmers' low profitability becomes a key constraint on their capacity to act. Even when there is awareness of, or willingness to engage in, transitions toward more sustainable or domestically grounded production systems, narrow economic margins reduce room for investment and increase vulnerability to risk. This not only limits their individual agency but also reinforces existing structural dependencies rather than enabling transformation.

One example is how the farmers perceive that powerful oil interests are actively hindering Sweden from utilizing local resources such as wood. Although wood could provide energy, materials, and economic value, these interests are seen as blocking the transition. At the same time, the issue is framed not only in environmental terms but also as one of national preparedness: politically, there is an ambition to reduce dependence on external inputs, yet domestic potential remains underdeveloped. This tension is evident in the narrative around HVO. While the Swedish government has promoted it as an environmentally friendly, potentially wood-based fuel, this narrative is undermined by economic policy. In practice, HVO costs roughly twice as much as diesel and lacks equivalent tax deductibility, meaning that financial incentives continue to favour oil over "green" and locally sourced alternatives.

For the farmers, this contradiction is not just ideological but material. Low profitability limits their capacity to act on political ambitions around sustainability and self-sufficiency. Even when they recognize the potential of local resources or wish to transition, tight margins constrain investment and increase risk sensitivity, making cheaper fossil-based options the more viable choice. In this way, economic pressure reinforces dependence on existing systems rather than enabling change. This dynamic reflects Stone's (1989) concept of the policy paradox where although policymakers define the goal as environmental sustainability and increased national self-sufficiency, the underlying causal story points to oil interests and tax structures as the reasons these goals remain difficult to realize.

Within this framing, investments are often understood more as compensation for low profitability than as genuine support for capacity building. This also

reflects a broader pattern in which farmers tend to interpret government interventions primarily in restrictive or burdensome terms, suggesting a preference for greater autonomy and reduced regulatory involvement in their day-to-day operations. At the same time, the dominant narrative's investment logic is also often interpreted as being driven by urgency and a perceived need for immediate action despite incomplete knowledge. Within this framing, policy decisions are seen as guided less by robust causal evidence and more by precautionary narratives that emphasize that "we must act" or that "inaction is not an option." Such logics are understood as mechanisms that justify intervention even when the relationship between specific investments and expected outcomes remains weak or unproven. One example of this is the Food Strategy 2.0, which continues to emphasize the same goal as the 2017 Food Strategy and thus reinforces a sense of urgency that action must be taken in relation to food self-sufficiency. However, self-sufficiency was not previously defined in measurable terms, which means that the policy lacks a clear basis for evaluating whether implemented measures produce the intended outcomes. In this sense, the strategy illustrates how urgency-driven policymaking can persist even in the absence of robust indicators of success, making it difficult to determine whether investments are effective or merely symbolically justified.

Investments are thereby viewed by some of the farmers as a performative practice aimed at maintaining the credibility of policy actors under conditions of uncertainty. Funding allocations across multiple areas of the food system are therefore interpreted as attempts to sustain narratives of preparedness, responsibility, and responsiveness rather than as evidence-based strategies designed to directly resolve clearly defined problems.

Differing Definitions of Preparedness

Across the sources, the agricultural sector is described as lacking basic economic stability. Grain prices have remained at roughly 1950s levels despite increasing efficiency demands, leaving farmers with limited room for development or for building financial reserves. As a result, farming is described as a process of "survival" rather than investment, since even productive years do not generate sufficient surplus to buffer against future shocks. This is reinforced by farmers' limited control over pricing, as they receive only what remains after other actors in the value chain have taken their share, producing a persistent sense of structural marginalization.

Against this backdrop, farmers develop a horizon of expectation shaped by anticipated systemic failure (Haikola and Anshelm 2018). This leads them to prioritize individual self-reliance over participation in a centralized system they perceive as fragile. Their expectations are further informed by what they describe as "peace damage": a long period of stability that has, in their view, generated

societal complacency and reduced awareness of structural vulnerabilities. In this framing, crises become particularly revealing moments, as they expose weaknesses that remain hidden in normal times and subsequently trigger concrete investments and adaptations at the farm level. However, farmers also argue that Sweden's prolonged period of peace has weakened preparedness capacity more broadly, making such crisis-driven learning insufficient.

Within this context, knowledge and coordination among key societal actors are perceived as inadequate, which leads farmers to express a desire to play a more active role in shaping preparedness strategies. This is reflected in their accounts of attempting to collaborate with municipalities, as well as in their arguments that the government should better recognize and utilize the potential of family farms in strengthening national preparedness. By expressing a desire to be actively involved and arguing for government recognition, farmers are seeking to have their local, practical knowledge validated by the formal state apparatus. Drawing on Mosse (2004), the farmers are also trying to ensure that preparedness strategies are not just abstract documents but are grounded in the actual capacities of family farms. At the same time, they are positioning themselves as the solution to a perceived failure in the current system's knowledge base. In Stone's (1989) terms, this can be understood as a struggle over how "preparedness" is defined: as a top-down administrative function or as a community-based capacity. In this sense, farmers are pushing for a definition that includes local agency and family farm potential, while emphasizing that the state should create incentives for farmers to contribute.

However, the farmers argue that such collaboration would require a clearer and more centralized allocation of responsibility for preparedness. In the current system, responsibility is dispersed across multiple actors and continuously passed between administrative levels, making it difficult to develop policies based on an overall system perspective.

8. Discussion

This study was guided by three research questions which will be addressed successively throughout this discussion.

What specific challenges and policy-proposed solutions are articulated in the official food-preparedness documents, and how do they differ from the challenges and solutions identified by farmers?

Firstly, the dominant narrative treats Swedish food preparedness as a newly emerging security problem, created by external shocks such as Russia's war in Ukraine, the pandemic, inflation and climate change. These crises are used to securitize food, moving it from a market-oriented sector to a matter of national resilience. Policy therefore frames the system's structural weaknesses as problems that can be solved through top-down interventions: designating preparedness authorities, building stockpiles, and launching new councils to cut "excessive" regulation.

Further, profitability is proposed both as the means and the end of reform as higher margins are presented as a prerequisite for investment, innovation and, ultimately, preparedness. Yet regulation is paradoxically portrayed as a competitive burden while simultaneously being touted as a hallmark of Swedish quality, producing a tension that fuels regulatory layering rather than simplification. This means that regulation is not simply removed when it is seen as costly, because its value also lies in securing trust, legitimacy, and market differentiation. Reform therefore becomes an exercise in balancing competing logics, where calls for lower burdens coexist with demands to preserve the very standards that define Swedish agriculture.

The two main challenges identified by the dominant narrative are profitability and low volume production, thus formulating growth as the central pathway through which resilience and food preparedness are expected to be achieved. Investments are thereby positioned as the primary means through which this growth is to be realized. This aligns with earlier research (Eriksson, 2018; Eriksson et al., 2020), which identifies the Swedish food system as highly dependent on external inputs and thus oriented toward efficiency and scale.

The counter-narrative voiced by farmers reverses this logic. Producers interpret the same structural weaknesses as outcomes of policy-driven centralisation, market concentration, and a growing accumulation of administrative rules shaped by actors distant from everyday farm realities. This aligns with Öhlund's (2025) finding that policy ambitions, particularly within multifunctional agriculture, often conflict with on-the-ground realities. In this view, the key challenges lie in the neglect of existing local resources, combined with insufficient practical

knowledge and constrained agency among producers. However, these challenges are not only hindering food production in times of crisis, rather, they are framed as structural constraints that must also be addressed in peacetime to ensure long-term resilience and viability. This is the main difference between the dominant and counter narrative.

While the dominant narrative tends to conceptualise food preparedness as a matter of scaling production through targeted investments and crisis-oriented measures, the counter-narrative instead frames preparedness as an outcome of continuously maintained capacities at the local level. In this view, resilience cannot be rapidly “built” in response to external threats but must be cultivated over time through everyday practices, knowledge transmission, and the strengthening of local resources.

Therefore, while some challenges identified by the narratives are similar, the difference lies primarily in how the situation is defined and, consequently, in the solutions proposed. While the dominant narrative treats the current situation as a security emergency requiring intervention, the farmers instead understand it as a failure of peacetime infrastructure that calls for a fundamental strengthening of local agency and resources. This divergence reveals how policy responses tend to overlook and underutilise existing local capacities and instead prioritises the creation of new, centralised systems and investment schemes, thereby reinforcing the gap between the government and the producers.

How is responsibility for food preparedness described and distributed across stakeholders according to the dominant narrative, and how is it perceived and reallocated in the farmers’ counter narrative?

Responsibility is formally presented as shared in the dominant narrative, however, in practice, it is continuously circulated and unevenly distributed. Government agencies such as SJV and Livsmedelsverket are positioned as coordinators, knowledge producers, and implementers of preparedness measures, while the state sets priorities through funding, councils, and preparedness authorities. Implementation is largely delegated to municipalities and other subnational actors, for example through responsibilities related to public meals, crisis planning, and local coordination. This is reinforced through targeted investments and institutional arrangements, effectively placing the burden of local implementation at the subnational level. At the same time, these actors refer to higher-level authorities for resources and guidance, including the EU level, which is framed both as a regulatory framework and a source of funding.

What appears as shared responsibility thus takes the form of a chain of delegation. While preparedness is framed as a collaborative effort across sectors, this collaboration is structured by unequal control over resources, problem

definitions, and decision-making. The state retains the authority to define the overall framework, while other actors are expected to operationalise it within their respective domains. Although no explicit responsibility is assigned to private actors such as farmers, the emphasis on growth as the primary solution effectively shifts pressure onto producers to increase output. In practice, this logic tends to favour larger, more capital-intensive farms, while overlooking and undervaluing the capacities of smaller-scale producers.

The counter-narrative describes responsibility in similar terms but interprets its effects differently. Farmers argue that preparedness is delegated across too many actors, creating a fragmented system in which no single actor has a comprehensive overview. Responsibility is perceived as being pushed away from those with formal authority and toward those with the least room to act, particularly farmers. Authorities are described as waiting for one another, municipalities for the state, and the state for the EU, resulting in a system where responsibility is continuously passed along rather than clearly assumed.

At the same time, farmers emphasise that those who design policy often lack an understanding of how it functions in practice, leaving producers to manage implementation on their own. They also highlight the financial burden of mandatory inspections and regulatory compliance, costs that are borne directly by farmers despite their already constrained profitability. As a result, responsibility is not only redistributed but experienced as asymmetrical: farmers carry a significant share of the practical burden while lacking corresponding influence, resources, and agency. They express a desire to be more involved in decision-making processes and to have their knowledge and capacities better recognised. In their view, the current system underutilises existing potential within the agricultural sector while simultaneously placing increasing demands on those expected to deliver resilience in practice.

How do dominant policy narratives and farmers' counter-narratives construct different understandings of food preparedness, and how do these differences shape power relations and the implementation of policy in practice?

In the dominant narrative, preparedness is tied to security, competitiveness, and domestic production capacity, which makes profitability, stockpiling, and investment the key policy levers. Farmers are included as essential actors, but mainly as implementers of externally defined strategies. This reflects Stone's (1989) argument that policy narratives assign not only causality but also legitimacy and authority. By framing preparedness as a matter of investment and structural adjustment, policy discourse privileges actors with access to capital, scale, and institutional proximity, while smaller-scale producers are structurally disadvantaged.

In the farmers' counter-narrative, the central priorities are fair compensation, workable regulation, local infrastructure, and the autonomy to act on practical knowledge. What looks like a shared concern for resilience is therefore built on different assumptions about what the problem is and what the food system should be for. Here, resilience is not achieved through centralised growth strategies but through distributed capacities embedded in local production systems. This aligns with Einarsson and Röös (2026), who show that Sweden already produces sufficient calories and protein, suggesting that vulnerability lies not in volume but in infrastructure, logistics, and system design.

These framings also expose uneven power relations. In policy discourse, the state, sectoral authorities, and major industry actors are the ones defining the problem, selecting the solutions, and setting the terms of preparedness. Farmers are formally included as important actors, but their role is mostly to adapt, comply, and implement measures designed elsewhere. The repeated emphasis on collaboration masks the fact that responsibility is often shifted downward to municipalities and producers, while decision-making power remains concentrated at higher administrative and sectoral levels.

This shapes the relationships between policy intentions and practice in a selective way. There is alignment at the level of broad language, since both policy and farmers accept that preparedness matters. Policy tends to assume that investment support, simplified regulation and local implementation will strengthen the system, whereas farmers experience these measures as costly, bureaucratic or poorly matched to farm realities. As a result, policy intentions do not simply fail or succeed in practice. They are reinterpreted, adapted or resisted according to whether they fit farmers economic conditions, knowledge and priorities.

Seen this way, the issue is not only whether policy is implemented, but how policy is made legible to those expected to carry it out. The dominant narrative presents preparedness as something that can be built through governance, funding and production growth. The counter-narrative shows that preparedness is also a lived and material practice, shaped by profitability, time horizons, trust and local capacity. The distance between these framings helps explain why policy may appear coherent at the national level while still feeling disconnected from everyday farming practice.

9. Conclusion

This study has investigated the relationship between official food preparedness policy and the lived experiences and practices of Swedish farmers. By applying narrative policy analysis and examining the implementation gap, it becomes evident that food preparedness is not a uniform concept, but rather an arena for competing interpretations of responsibility, challenges, and solutions.

The results of the study reveal a distinct divergence between the dominant policy narrative and the farmers' counter-narrative:

- **Problem Definition:** While policy frames preparedness as a new security-political necessity driven by external shocks, farmers instead interpret current vulnerabilities as the outcome of long-term structural changes, including centralization, market concentration, and increasing administrative burdens. Rather than representing fully separate problem definitions, these perspectives can be understood as different ways of explaining the same perceived lack of resilience, with disagreement primarily concerning its causes and appropriate responses.
- **Preparedness as "Crisis Mode" vs. Everyday Resilience:** A central finding is the temporal difference in how preparedness is understood. The dominant narrative tends to treat preparedness as a state of "exception", a system to be activated only in the event of a crisis. In contrast, the counter-narrative from farmers emphasizes that improvements must occur even in peacetime. For them, preparedness cannot be separated from the everyday viability of farming; if the system is not robust and functional during peace, it will inevitably fail during a crisis.
- **Solutions and Growth:** The dominant narrative positions profitability and volume increases through targeted investments as the primary path to resilience. For farmers, preparedness is instead about safeguarding and maintaining local resources, knowledge transfer, and everyday agency.
- **Distribution of Responsibility:** Although policy formally describes a shared responsibility, in practice, there is a downward shift of accountability toward municipalities and individual producers, while decision-making power remains concentrated among central authorities and large industry actors. The consequences of this responsibility shift is likely a fragmented governance structure in which local actors carry the practical burden without corresponding influence. This may in turn produce uneven implementation, blurred accountability and a gap between policy ambition and actual capacity to deliver.

Overall, the findings suggest that food preparedness cannot be understood only as a matter of crisis response or increased production capacity. Rather, it is inextricably linked to whether the everyday conditions of food production are stable and viable over time. By highlighting the disconnect between the official "map" of preparedness and the "reality" of agricultural practice, this study illustrates that the capacity for crisis management is fundamentally shaped by the structural and economic stability of the agricultural sector during ordinary circumstances. Ultimately, while policy focuses on securing the nation in the event of a crisis, the agricultural practice identifies the true state of preparedness as something already determined by the material realities of the present.

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Popular science summary

This thesis examines the conflicting narratives of food preparedness in Swedish policy and by farmers, with a particular focus on how problems are defined, what challenges are highlighted, what solutions are proposed, and who is seen as responsible.

This study uses a qualitative approach based on four recorded interviews with farmers and a thematic analysis of key policy documents to compare the official preparedness narrative with the farmers lived experiences. The document analysis includes government reports, guidelines from public agencies, materials from private actors, and publications from industry organizations.

Rather than limiting “policy” to formal government decisions, this study adopts a broader understanding of food preparedness as something shaped across multiple actors and arenas. This reflects the empirical reality that preparedness is not solely governed by the state, but co-produced through interactions between public authorities, industry actors, and sectoral organizations, all of which contribute to shaping the dominant policy narrative.

This thesis is written against the backdrop of a renewed Swedish focus on preparedness where recent geopolitical developments and broader crises have pushed food supply and civil preparedness back onto the political agenda.

While previous research has mainly focused on improving policy design to bridge the gap between policy and practice, this study instead seeks to understand how preparedness is interpreted and enacted in practice. In doing so, it highlights aspects that may be overlooked in formal policy frameworks.

Theoretically, the study draws on Mosse (2004), who argues that policy is not simply implemented as written but is interpreted, negotiated, and reshaped through everyday practice. This perspective is complemented by Roe (1994) and Stone (1989), whose narrative approaches are used to analyse competing stories about Swedish food preparedness, particularly regarding how problems are framed, where responsibility is assigned, and which solutions are considered appropriate.

A central finding of this study is that while there is broad agreement that food preparedness is important, there is a clear disagreement about how it should be achieved. In the dominant policy narrative, preparedness is framed as a challenge that can be addressed from above through new authorities, coordination bodies, strategic stockpiles, investment support, and streamlined regulation. The main problems are identified as low domestic production, dependence on imported inputs, weak profitability, high production costs, and just-in-time logistics. The proposed solutions therefore focus on increasing production, strengthening profitability, building stockpiles, and reducing what is seen as unnecessary

regulatory burden. Underlying this logic is the assumption that greater efficiency, investment, and scale will translate into national resilience.

In contrast, the farmers' counter-narrative locates the problem not primarily in external shocks or insufficient production, but in the way the system is already organised in peacetime. They point to increasing centralisation, market concentration, growing administrative demands, and regulations that are poorly aligned with everyday farm realities. From this perspective, low profitability is itself a core barrier to preparedness, as it limits the capacity to invest in resilience measures such as storage, infrastructure, and long-term planning. The solutions they propose are therefore not limited to more state support or top-down coordination, but include fairer compensation, greater autonomy, more context-sensitive regulation, better use of local knowledge, and a stronger role for farmers in decision-making.

A key insight is that responsibility for preparedness is formally described as shared, but in practice is largely shifted downward onto producers, while decision-making power remains concentrated at higher levels. This creates a mismatch between political discourse and lived experience, where farmers are expected to contribute to national preparedness without being meaningfully included in shaping its design.

Overall, both narratives agree that food preparedness matters, but they diverge fundamentally in how they define the problem. The dominant narrative emphasises strengthening the system from above, while the counter-narrative emphasises strengthening conditions from below so that farms can realistically function as part of a resilient food system.

Appendix: Interview Questions

Introduction

Thank you for your acceptance to participate in this interview session today. By agreeing, you are contributing to a study I am conducting on Food preparedness in Sweden. The study is a master thesis research project which is part of a Master Programme I study at the Swedish University of Agricultural sciences in Sweden.

Aim

My overall aim is to examine whether there is a discrepancy between policy frameworks and lived experiences of food preparedness, with particular focus on definitions, responsibility, proposed solutions, and governance structures. Today, I am looking forward to hearing your insights and experiences regarding these issues, and to gaining a deeper understanding of how food preparedness is understood and practiced in your everyday work.

Consent Form

I would like to remind you that your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. The information you provide will be treated confidentially, and you may choose whether you wish to remain anonymous or be identified in the study. I hope that you will feel free to talk about your own experiences and thoughts. However, keep in mind that you are totally allowed to not provide any answer to any of my questions and you can end the interview whenever you like.

I cannot guarantee that you will benefit directly from participating in this study. However, the information I am gathering, including your insights and experiences, will hopefully contribute to a deeper understanding of food preparedness and the relationship between policy and practice.

With your permission, I would like this interview to be recorded for a better analysis of what we will have discussed. So, do I have your permission?

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Content Questions

(It should be noted that the interview questions were originally conducted in Swedish. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the questions have been translated into English. The translation was carried out with careful consideration to preserve the original meaning and nuances of the respondents' answers.)

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, where the questions provided below served primarily as guidelines rather than fixed or

strictly followed questions. This approach allowed for flexibility in the conversation, enabling follow-up questions and deeper exploration of relevant themes as they emerged during the interviews.

Section 1: Your farm and day-to-day work

1. Tell me about your farm and your operations (type of production, scale, how long you have been active)?
2. What is it like, being a farmer? How do you enjoy it? What is the best thing about farming? What is the worst?

Section 2: General understanding and work with food preparedness

3. What does the concept of food preparedness mean to you?
4. Would you say that you often think about the future, for example in terms of preventive work or preparedness?
5. According to you, what is the reason that Sweden does not produce more of its own food and is not better prepared?
6. Has your way of thinking about your business changed in recent years, considering the geopolitical situation and increased recommendations regarding preparedness?

Section 3: Risks and threats

7. Which threats or risks do you primarily consider regarding the food supply? Do you think these risks are visible or taken seriously in public debate and politics? Why/why not?

Section 4: Responsibility and solutions

8. What do you see as most important in reducing risks and addressing these threats? What support would you need to achieve this?
9. Who do you believe holds the main responsibility for ensuring that Sweden has a functioning food preparedness system?
10. How do you perceive that responsibility for preparedness is distributed in practice?
11. Do you experience expectations placed on you as a farmer in crisis or preparedness contexts?

12. Have you personally experienced situations where responsibility was unclear or “fell between the cracks”?

Section 5: Governance and policy

13. Are there aspects of your operations that are influenced or governed by national or EU policies related to preparedness or self-sufficiency? Would you act differently if these policies did not exist?
14. There are various investment supports, both at the EU level and nationally. To what extent do you adapt your operations to qualify for these supports? Do you perceive this as an effective or appropriate way of working, for example from an efficiency, sustainability, or preparedness perspective

Section 6: Knowledge

15. Have you developed your own solutions or strategies that are not reflected in policy or regulations?
16. In your opinion, what kind of knowledge is required to actually manage a food crisis?
17. Do you think farmers’ experiences and knowledge are utilized in preparedness work?
18. Are there local resources or capacities that you believe are underestimated or underutilized?
19. Is there something you believe decision-makers need to better understand about the realities of farming

Section 7: The future of food preparedness

20. How do you practically prepare for future crises? (Stockpiling, machinery, relationships, finances)
21. Are there situations that you mentally “anticipate” or plan for, even if they are not part of official scenarios?
22. How does the future feel for you as a farmer today? (Concern, hope, uncertainty, frustration?)

Section 8: Hypothetical questions

23. If you were to design your own national food strategy, which focus areas would you prioritize to strengthen Sweden's food preparedness? (For reference, the current focus areas in the national food strategy 2.0 are increased robustness in the food chain, export promotion, and Swedish quality and gastronomy.)

Appendix: Declaration of AI use

This thesis follows the AI policy of the Division of Rural Development level 2 which allows for limited AI use during preparations but not as part of the submitted thesis document. This means that all material part of the thesis submission including the final thesis presentation need to be the student's work rather than AI-generated.

During preparations the following AI tools have been used:

- Gemini

Used to rephrase sentences and suggest suitable synonyms to improve language and readability.

11. References

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