



A systematic literature review of factors influencing national food self-sufficiency

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ABSTRACT

Global shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have put food self-sufficiency (i.e., the ratio between domestic production and domestic consumption) back on the political agenda in heavily food importing countries. To extract current insights into this key aspect of food security, this study aimed to identify the factors affecting food self-sufficiency and the actors and actions that influence these factors. Our research focused on actors and actions that promote sustainable development and food self-sufficiency. Here, we conducted a systematic literature review on the factors influencing national food self-sufficiency. Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines, 92 scientific studies were identified. Using inductive coding, individual factors, such as climate change, agricultural land, population, plant-based diet, and protectionism, were grouped into external events, agricultural inputs, macroeconomic factors, dietary habits, trade and agricultural policies, urbanization, alternative agricultural production systems, and food waste and losses. Using the approach of multi-actor constellations, we also identified actors and actions that can influence these factors. The findings showed that beyond the responsibility of policymakers to develop institutional frameworks for promoting food self-sufficiency, the intensification of agricultural production and a change in consumer behavior toward a more sustainable diet, among other factors, had a positive impact on food self-sufficiency. However, a closer look revealed that the intensification of agricultural production had adverse impacts on the environment, highlighting the need for a sustainable intensification. Changing consumer behavior toward a plant-based diet was associated with positive impacts on the environment.

1. Introduction

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization [56], food security at the country level is achieved when food is available, accessible, and nutritious and when food availability and accessibility are stable at all times. Food self-sufficiency (FSS) refers to the availability dimension of food security by focusing on the domestic capacity to produce food in sufficient quantities for domestic consumption [40]. FSS is an important aspect of ensuring food security, especially in developing countries, where undernourishment is a major problem [4,121]. Although neoliberal economic policies promoted trade liberalization between the 1980s and the early 2000s, global shocks, such as the 2007–2008 food price crisis or supply chain disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have put food security and FSS back on the political agenda in import-dependent developed and developing countries [38,146]. For example, 76.3 % of the cereal supply in Northern and Western Africa came from imports in 2020 [63]. The war in Ukraine has therefore threatened the food supply in these regions because they were

heavily dependent on cereal and fertilizer imports from Russia and the Ukraine [59]. The fragile nutritional status of children prior to the conflict was expected to worsen due to rising food prices [132].

Against this background, if a high FSS is considered a strategy for reducing vulnerability to global shocks [147] and contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 2, "Zero Hunger" [129] two components of FSS can be addressed: domestic production and domestic consumption. FSS can be expressed as the ratio between domestic production and domestic consumption (i.e., the FSS ratio) [79]. A country's FSS can take one of three states [37]. First, domestic production is equal to domestic consumption (i.e., FSS ratio = 100 %). Second, domestic production is larger than domestic consumption, indicating a production surplus and a potential for export (i.e., FSS ratio > 100 %). Third, domestic production is lower than domestic consumption, indicating a production deficit and a need to import (i.e., FSS ratio < 100 %). In the European Union (EU), for example, production exceeds consumption for most animal-based products (e.g., butter, cheese, beef, and pig meat), while production is lower than consumption for a variety of plant-based products (e.g.,

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oilseeds, protein crops, sugar, and maize) [52].

The aim of this study is fivefold. First, we aim to identify the factors affecting the two components of FSS (i.e., domestic production and domestic consumption) at the country level and their direction of effect (i.e., positive, negative, or mixed). Second, we aim to develop a framework based on the individual factors that affect FSS. Third, we aim to demonstrate geographical heterogeneity in factors affecting FSS. Fourth, we aim to identify the factors that can (or cannot) be changed, the actors who can change the factors, and their actions. In this context, we aim to analyze which factors and actions promote sustainable development and FSS. Fifth, we aim to discuss the positive and negative effects of FSS and derive policy implications. For this purpose, we conducted a systematic literature review. Although FSS can be applied at the micro (i.e., individual or household) level [78], in this literature review, we consider only empirical and theoretical studies that focus on FSS as an outcome at the macro (i.e., country or regions within a country) level.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to develop a framework based on a systematic review of the factors affecting the production and consumption components of FSS at the country level. Accordingly, this study helps policymakers seeking to strengthen FSS by providing a systematic overview of the factors affecting FSS, their direction of effect, and which factors can be changed by whom and how. Furthermore, this study contributes to the historical debate on FSS versus trade liberalization by discussing the potential positive and negative effects of FSS as a policy objective [113].

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we describe the methods used. In Section 3, we present the results and discuss them in Section 4. We conclude the paper and provide policy implications in Section 5.

2. Methods

2.1. Systematic literature review

In September 2024, we conducted a systematic literature review of studies focusing on the factors affecting FSS at the macro level (i.e., country or regions within a country). To select relevant studies, we followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines [93]. Because the discussion on FSS has a historical dimension, we did not impose any restrictions on the year of publication. We also imposed no restrictions on the type of scientific study (i.e., peer-reviewed study, working paper, book chapter, study published in conference proceedings, research reports). Our goal was to keep the search strategy as broad as possible, so we did not impose restrictions on quantitative or qualitative methods. The focus of our literature search was on the factors affecting FSS or the determinants of FSS. Accordingly, FSS should be the main outcome or one of many outcomes in the included studies. The Web of Science and Scopus databases were used for the literature search. The search strings used and the resulting number of publications, grouped by the Web of Science and Scopus databases, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The search strings used and the resulting number of publications separated by the Web of Science and Scopus databases.

Search strings	Number of publications in Web of Science	Number of publications in Scopus
food AND self-sufficiency AND determinants	29	66
food AND self-sufficiency AND influencing AND factors	46	51
food AND self-sufficiency AND explaining AND factors	5	3
food AND self-sufficiency AND global	236	462
food AND self-sufficiency AND comparative	31	102
food AND self-sufficiency AND trends	126	297
Total	473	981

Fig. 1 outlines the search process used to select relevant studies focusing on factors affecting FSS based on the PRISMA reporting guidelines.

In total, we identified 1454 scientific studies by searching the two databases. In the first step, we screened 703 studies after removing duplicates, studies we could not access, and studies that were not available as a downloadable PDF. In the second step, abstracts and titles were scanned. A study was included if (i) it was in English,¹ (ii) it focused on FSS, (iii) the geographical unit was a country, a group of countries (including the global view), a region within a country, or multiple regions within a country, and (iv) it was a primary source (i.e., not a literature review as ours). In the third step, the criteria were applied to evaluate 303 full texts. Finally, 92 studies (90 peer-reviewed studies, 1 research report, and 1 working paper) were selected based on the defined criteria. The references of the selected studies can be found in Appendix A.

2.2. Analyses of selected studies

2.2.1. Analysis of study characteristics

The following four study characteristics were analyzed descriptively (see Table 2 for an overview). The first is the measurement of FSS. FSS is usually measured as a ratio, with domestic production as the numerator and domestic consumption as the denominator. In some studies, the consumption component of FSS has been further specified. For example, according to the FAO [57] definition of the FSS ratio, the availability of food for domestic consumption (i.e., the denominator) is calculated as domestic production plus imports minus exports. Deng et al. [44] classified domestic grain consumption by use (i.e., human, industrial, feed, seed, and losses). The second is the methodological approach of the study. For example, studies using models predicting the future effects of tariff cuts on agricultural trade and domestic production were classified as “quantitative ex-ante,” while studies relying on a regression analysis based on historical data were classified as “quantitative ex-post.” A third

¹ In line with Pieper and Puljak (2021) [153] we defined “English-speaking study” as an eligibility criterion. We did not consider non-English studies eligible for two reasons: First, translating from a non-English language to English is imprecise due to a lack of foreign language proficiency. Second, selecting English-speaking studies allows an international audience to understand the content of the selected studies. Although not considering non-English studies may be associated with overlooking relevant factors influencing FSS (Jackson & Kuriyama, 2019; Dobrescu et al., 2021), we do not believe this is the case here. The selected studies reveal a broad set of relevant factors. In total, we identified $n = 20$ non-English studies in the literature research, but $n = 16$ were excluded after assessing titles and abstracts. Thus, $n = 4$ non-English-speaking studies remained for the eligibility assessment.

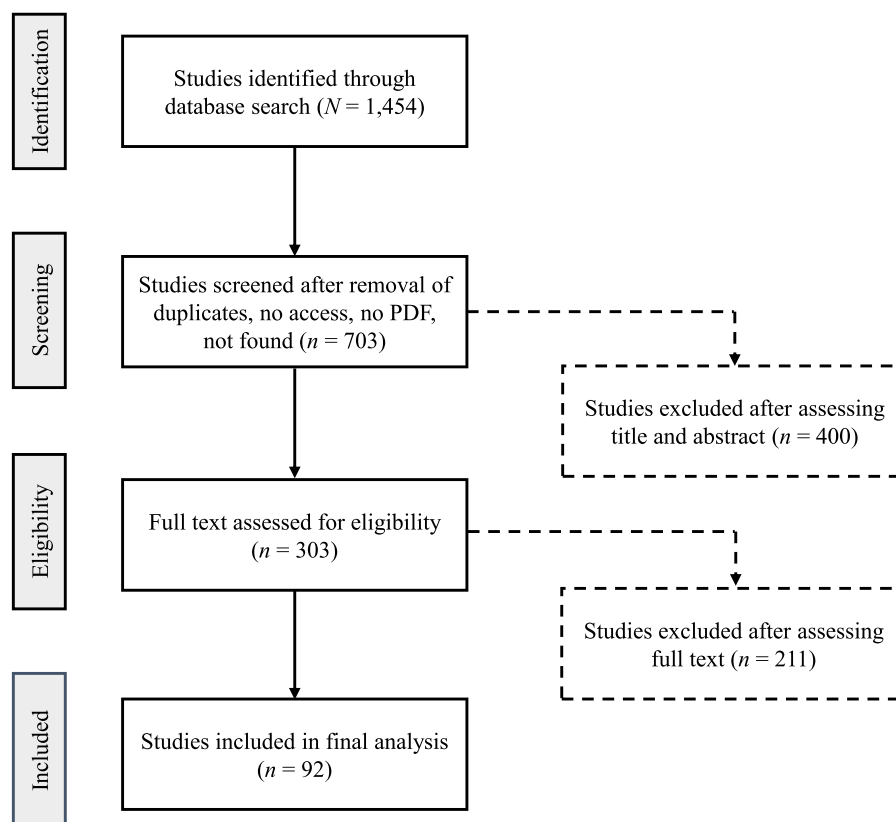


Fig. 1. The search process used to identify studies focusing on factors affecting FSS based on the PRISMA reporting guidelines.

Table 2

Overview of descriptively analyzed study characteristics.

(1) Measurement FSS

- 1 = Domestic production/domestic consumption
- 2 = Other definition of FSS
- 3 = No definition of FSS

(2) Methodological approach

- 1 = Quantitative ex-ante
- 2 = Quantitative ex-post
- 3 = Quantitative ex-post and ex-ante
- 4 = Quantitative no time dimension
- 5 = Qualitative narrative
- 6 = Qualitative narrative + descriptive statistics
- 7 = Qualitative interviews

(3) Product

- 1 = Multiple grains (e.g., rice, wheat, maize, soy)
- 2 = Single grains
- 3 = Animal-based (meat and dairy products)
- 4 = Plant-based (fruits, vegetables, oils, grains)
- 5 = Animal- and plant-based
- 6 = No specification

(4) Geographical unit

- 1 = Single developing country
- 2 = Group of developing countries
- 3 = Single industrialized country
- 4 = Group of industrialized countries
- 5 = World
- 6 = Other

feature is the food products used for the calculation of FSS. For example, a group of food products consisting of fruits and vegetables (incl. roots and tubers), vegetable oils and fats, and grains were categorized as “plant-based food products”. The fourth is the geographical unit of a study. For example, the geographical unit of a study could be a single developing country,² such as Vietnam and Thailand, or a group of developing countries, such as all countries on the African continent. To analyze the four study characteristics descriptively, we created an Excel file with four variables (i.e., FSS measurement, methodological approach, products, and geographical unit). Each of the four variables was assigned a specific value ranging from 1 to 4. For example, the variable “FSS measurement” had the values “1 = Domestic production divided by domestic consumption,” “2 = Other definition of FSS,” and “3 = No definition of FSS.” Finally, we counted the absolute frequency of the selected studies per year for the period 1982–2024.

2.2.2. Grouping individual FSS factors and determining of direction of effects

Inductive coding was used to group individual factors affecting FSS into categories. For this purpose, we followed the five-step coding process suggested by Creswell [41]. In the first step, we created a variable “factors” in the Excel file. In the second step, we screened the texts with a focus on factors affecting FSS and wrote the types of factors into the variable “factors” separated by commas. Where possible, we divided the factors into production factors and consumption factors. In the third step, we created a first draft of FSS categories based on the types of factors. This means that for each category, we created a variable (i.e., a column) that counts the frequency. If a factor was related to a category, we inserted a 1; otherwise, we inserted a 0. Creating dummy variables allowed us to calculate the absolute frequency (i.e., relevance) of a category. In the fourth step, because some factors could potentially be assigned to more than one category, we had to avoid overlapping coding. This implies that the factors were only assigned to one category. In the final step, we refined the categories by linking or combining them. We also created a variable (i.e., a column) that counted the frequency for each factor. If a factor was related to a study, we inserted a 1; otherwise, we assigned a 0, so that we could calculate the absolute frequency (i.e., the relevance) of a factor across all studies. Furthermore, we derived the effect direction (i.e., positive, negative, or mixed) of the FSS factors. We also used information on the absolute frequency of a factor combined with information on geographical units (see Table 2). This allowed us to demonstrate geographical heterogeneity by showing the frequency distribution of factors across geographical units.

The diversity of the methodological approaches and FSS measurements did not always allow for a clear identification of the direction, magnitude, and statistical significance of the effect. The diversity of methodological approaches and FSS measurements did not allow for clear identification of the magnitude, and statistical significance of the effect. However, we only found five studies that empirically quantified the effect of the factors using regression analysis [27,28,51,57,99], which is insufficient for a meta-regression analysis. Therefore, we considered a broad set of methodological approaches in our systematic literature review to obtain a sufficient number of studies. Our study focused on the types of influencing factors and their effect direction. Furthermore, it was not always possible to separate the effects of domestic production from domestic consumption. For example, the quantitative ex-ante models used by Xu et al. [143] and ten Berge et al. [148] considered production inputs or macroeconomic factors to predict future FSS. However, the effect direction of the factors used cannot be identified. Furthermore, 40 studies did not define how they measured

FSS (see Table B4 in Appendix B). Accordingly, we did not distinguish between domestic production and consumption with regard to the direction of the effect. Nevertheless, in the interpretation of the results, we distinguished between domestic production and domestic consumption where possible.

2.2.3. An approach to classifying actors and actions influencing food self-sufficiency

The factors affecting FSS (i.e., domestic production and consumption) can be influenced by multiple actors and actions. To classify actors and actions, we adapted the multi-actor constellation approach developed by Berrang-Ford et al. [21].³ In our context, we identified producers (i.e., farmers), consumers (i.e., individuals or households), and policymakers as relevant actors that possibly influence FSS. The potential types of actions are i) behavioral/cultural, (ii) technical/infrastructural, (iii) ecosystem-based, and (iv) institutional [21]. In our study, a behavioral or cultural action reflects a change in consumption behavior toward a more plant-based diet. The adoption of new agricultural production technologies by farmers represents a “technical/infrastructural” action. Ecosystem-based mitigation is part of nature-based solutions, which represent actions to manage or restore natural or modified ecosystems to adapt to, for example, climate change, water scarcity, or natural disasters [58]. Institutions such as laws, regulations, obligations, and prohibitions guide human behavior. Accordingly, policymakers are responsible for the “institutional” action. Each type of action was coded as a binary decision (i.e., 1 = can be influenced; 0 = cannot be influenced).

3. Results

3.1. Study characteristics

Fig. 2 shows bubble matrices representing the relationship between a study characteristic on the x-axis and a study characteristic on the y-axis. Bubble sizes reflect the absolute frequency (i.e., number) of the studies, with the total number of studies in each panel adding up to 92. The panels present the relationship between the (a) geographical unit and product, (b) FSS measurement and product, (c) methodological approach and product, (d) methodological approach and geographical unit, and (e) methodological approach and FSS measurement. The underlying descriptive statistics for each of the four study characteristics can be found in Table B1 (geographical unit), Table B2 (product), Table B3 (methodological approach), and Table B4 (FSS measurement) in Appendix B.

The selected studies had a strong focus on single developing countries ($n = 61$; see Table B1 in Appendix B). Many of the developing countries depend on imports of grains such as rice, wheat, corn, and soybeans and are therefore more vulnerable to trade shocks [60]. These studies mainly investigated multiple grains ($n = 17$), and single grains ($n = 13$) (Fig. 2a). The FSS ratio (i.e., domestic production divided by domestic consumption) was frequently used to measure the FSS of multiple grains ($n = 15$) and animal- and plant-based products ($n = 14$) (Fig. 2b). Studies that used quantitative ex-ante and ex-post models mainly focused on multiple grains ($n = 9$ and $n = 12$) and a combination of animal- and plant-based food products ($n = 9$ and $n = 7$) (Fig. 2c). The geographical units of the studies that used ex-ante and ex-post models were single developing countries ($n = 19$) and groups of developing countries ($n = 17$) (Fig. 2d). In total, 40 studies did not define the measurement of FSS. In particular, studies combining narrative evidence and descriptive statistics and studies using quantitative ex-ante models

² The country classifications “developing country” and “industrialized / developed country” are based on UN [130]. For simplicity, we use the term “developing country”. This term also includes transition countries and least developed countries.

³ Berrang-Ford et al. [21] conducted a literature review to identify actors and types of actions needed for climate change adaptation. For the sake of simplicity, we do not differentiate actors with respect to the geographic levels of local, national, and international.

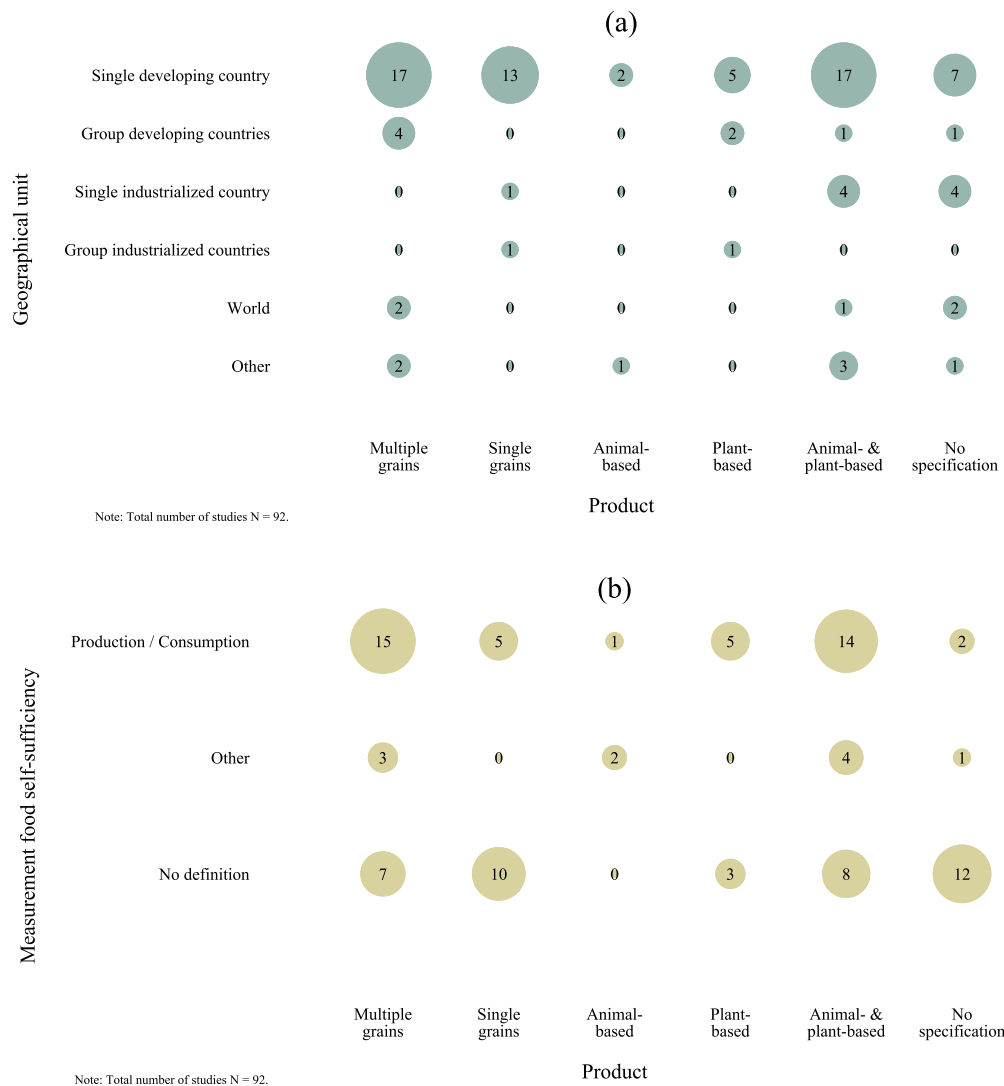


Fig. 2. Bubble matrices depicting the relationship between (a) geographical unit and product, (b) FSS measurement and product, (c) methodological approach and product, (d) methodological approach and geographical unit, and (e) methodological approach and FSS measurement. Bubbles sizes reflect the absolute frequency (i. e., number) of the studies. The total number of studies always adds up to $N = 92$.

did not define how they measured FSS ($n = 14$ and $n = 12$) (Fig. 2e).

Fig. 3 shows the absolute frequency of the selected studies per year for the period 1982–2024. The blue dashed line refers to the 2007–2008 food price crisis, the red dashed line refers to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and the green dashed line refers to the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022.

Between 1982 and 2007–2008, the number of scientific studies focusing on factors affecting FSS ranged from 0 to 2. Surprisingly, the 2007–2008 food price crisis did not lead to an immediate increase in the number of scientific studies. However, the number of scientific studies rose steadily starting in 2012, with a significant increase observed since the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Additionally, research on the effects of climate change and extreme weather events on agricultural production has gained momentum since 2010 [90]. Besides shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the increased focus on climate change and extreme weather events may also explain the steady rise in scientific studies since 2012.

3.2. A framework of factors affecting national food self-sufficiency and their effect direction

Fig. 4 shows the framework with categories, the factors affecting national FSS, and the direction of the effect (i.e., positive, negative, or mixed) of each factor. The frequency of categories and the frequency of factors affecting FSS can be found in Table B5 in Appendix B.

We define external events as events that are largely beyond the control of individual nations. They include long-term environmental trends, such as climate change and extreme weather events, wars, harmful organisms, and nuclear disasters. By contrast, the remaining categories (i.e., agricultural inputs, alternative agricultural systems, macroeconomic factors, dietary habits, food waste and losses, urbanization, agricultural policy, and trade policy) are largely within the control of individual nations. A descriptive analysis revealed a strong focus of selected studies on agricultural inputs ($n = 49$), followed by macroeconomic factors ($n = 33$), external events ($n = 29$), and dietary habits ($n = 28$). By comparison, the categories of agricultural policy ($n = 14$), trade policy ($n = 13$), urbanization ($n = 11$), alternative agricultural systems ($n = 7$), and food waste and losses ($n = 5$) were underrepresented.

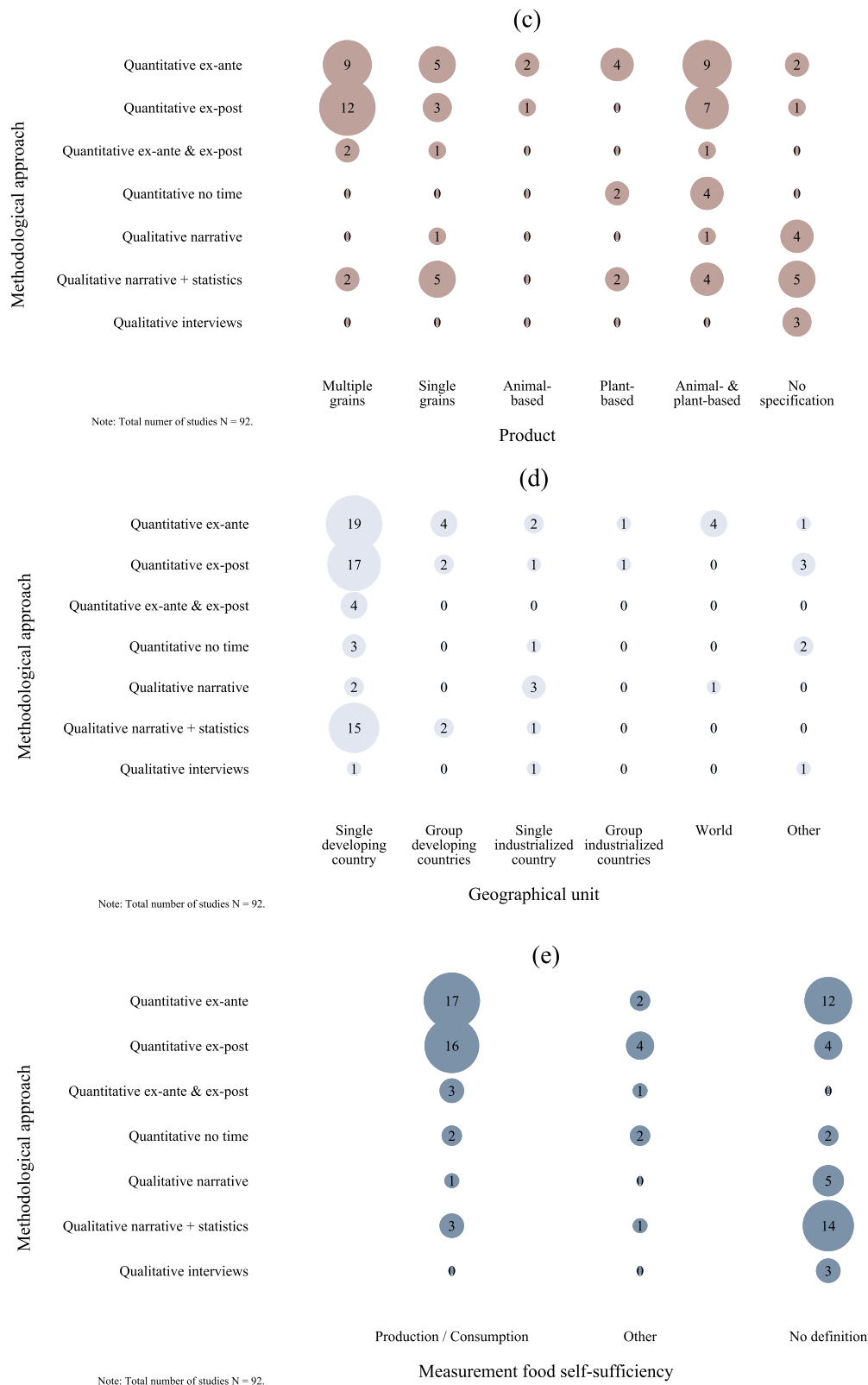


Fig. 2. (continued).

Climate change (i.e., the long-term variation in global surface temperature) and related extreme weather events were the most relevant external events influencing FSS ($n = 23$ and $n = 7$). Climate change was expected to reduce FSS by having a negative impact on agricultural production (e.g., [19,81,138]). The same was true for extreme weather

events, such as hails, floods, storms, and droughts (e.g., [50,112,118]). Precipitation and solar radiation positively affected FSS by creating favorable natural conditions for agricultural production (e.g., [88,122,135]). Wars [97], nuclear disasters [26], diseases, and harmful organisms [85] have all negatively affected FSS by limiting agricultural

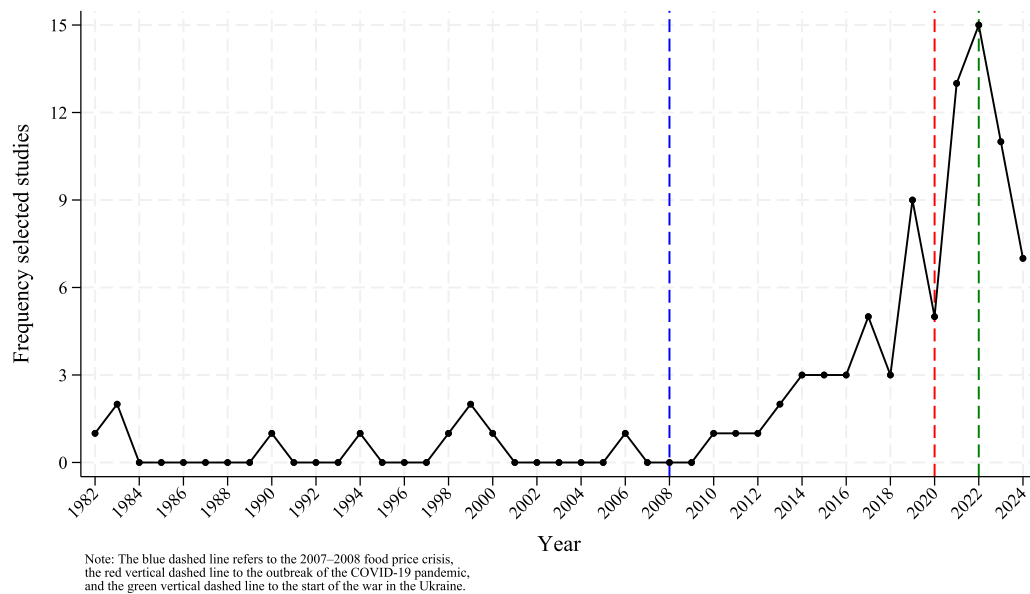


Fig. 3. The absolute frequency of the selected studies per year for the period 1982–2024.

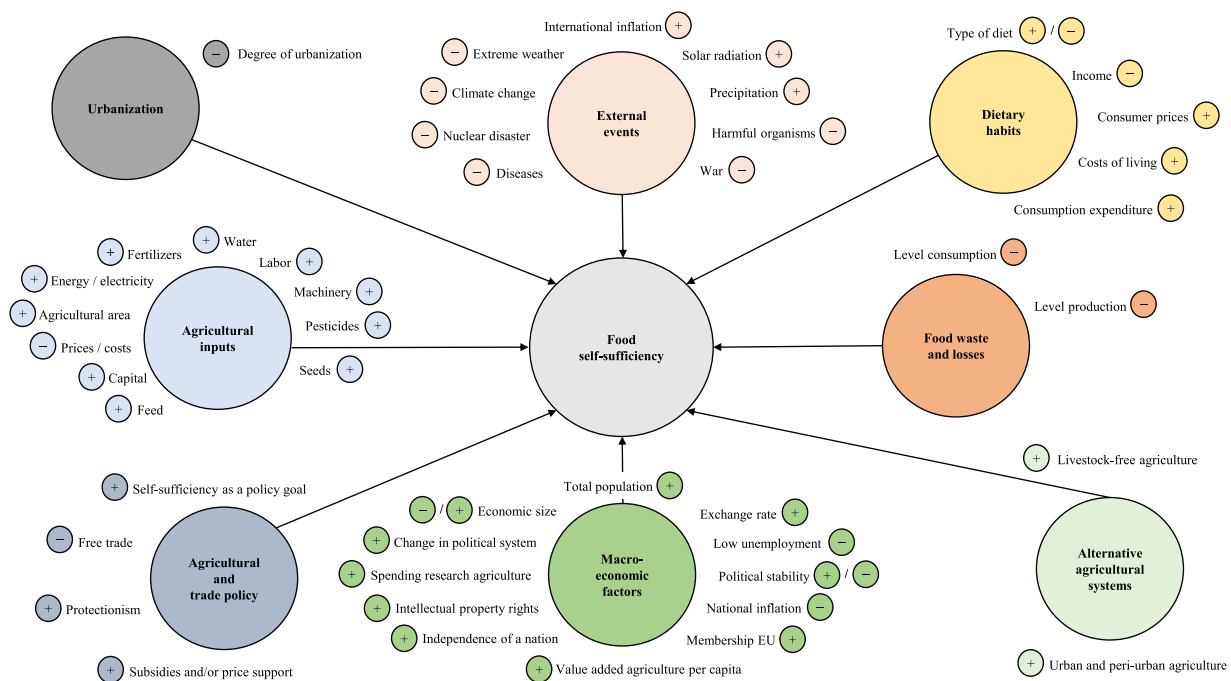


Fig. 4. The framework with the categories, factors affecting national FSS, and direction of effect of each factor. ‘+’ denotes a positive impact on FSS; ‘-’ denotes a negative impact on FSS; ‘+/-’ denotes a mixed impact on FSS.

production. Interestingly, the results by Erokhin [51] suggested a positive effect of international inflation (i.e., rising prices in the world market) on FSS.

Due to its limited availability, agricultural area (e.g., arable land or pastures) was the most relevant production mean influencing FSS ($n = 37$). This factor included the absolute size of the area (e.g., [35,80]), the area available per capita [84], the irrigated area (e.g., [42,68]), the share of agricultural area in a country’s total area [32], and the water storage capacity [19]. In principle, intensifying agricultural production (i.e., increasing yields) by expanding the agricultural area or using more inputs such as fertilizers (e.g., [27,43,75]), water (e.g., [91,96,110]), labor (e.g., [7,99,139]) and machinery (e.g., [30,134,143]) had a positive effect on FSS. A shortage of inputs, such as abandoned farmland

due to urbanization in turn led to a decrease in agricultural production (e.g., [47,81,86]). Rising prices or costs of inputs led to declining agricultural production [98,109].

The total population living in a country, population growth, population density, and economic size, or growth in the economic size of a country (i.e., gross domestic product/gross national income, gross domestic product/gross national income per capita, and agricultural gross domestic product) were the most relevant macroeconomic factors ($n = 27$ and $n = 18$). In particular, population growth in developing countries was expected to negatively affect FSS by increasing food demand (e.g., [7,14,127]). In this context, a low unemployment rate in Japan was associated with a low incentive to work in agriculture, leading to threats to agricultural production [133]. Luan et al. [87], for example, used

gross domestic product per capita as a proxy for purchasing power and found a negative correlation with FSS. By contrast, the regression results from Brankov et al. [28] revealed mixed effects of gross domestic product on FSS at the product group level (e.g., FSS for eggs or cereals). Mixed effects were also found for the political stability of a country [28, 80,97]. The number of intellectual property rights, which represent a country's ability to innovate to increase the efficiency of agricultural production [36], and high spending on agricultural research [75] positively affected FSS by increasing agricultural production. Whereas the exchange rate was positively associated with FSS, national inflation was negatively associated with FSS [51]. A change in the political system (i.e., from communism to capitalism) [16] and independence [122] had positive effects on FSS, while EU membership had mixed effects on FSS [28].

The type of diet (i.e., level of consumption, total demand, demand per capita, growth in demand, and dietary change) was the most relevant factor related to dietary habits ($n = 25$). While a change in dietary habits from an animal-based diet to a plant-based diet increased FSS because more food was available for human consumption, the opposite was true for a change in dietary habits from a plant-based diet to an animal-based diet (e.g., [17,20,44,66]). High income (per capita) was associated with an increase in food demand (e.g., [77,82]), while high consumer prices (e.g., [44,106]), consumption expenditures for non-food products (e.g., [75,149]), and the costs of living limited food demand [143], thereby increasing FSS.

Especially in developing countries, such as China or Indonesia, FSS was defined as a policy goal ($n = 10$) (e.g., [11,50]). For example, with the green revolution in the early 1960s, governments in many developing countries provided subsidies and/or price support to farmers to enable them to invest in modern production technologies (e.g., high-yield seeds, machinery, chemical pesticides, and fertilizers) (e.g., [102,105]). The intensification of agricultural production led to an increase in agricultural yields and an increase in FSS. Trade policy⁴ was characterized by two opposing poles: free trade and protectionism. While the reduction of tariff and non-tariff measures put pressure on domestic agricultural production (e.g., [10,72]), the increase or maintenance of high levels of tariff and non-tariff measures was associated with the protection of domestic agricultural production (e.g., [8,45]). Accordingly, free trade was considered to reduce FSS, while protectionism was considered to increase FSS.

Alternative agricultural production systems in urban and peri-urban areas were associated with increases in agricultural production, and thus increases in FSS. Alternative agricultural production systems comprise, for example, rooftop greenhouses [33], indoor and vertical farming [1], and aquaponics [12]. The conversion from plant-based to animal-based proteins in livestock farming was associated with losses. Livestock-free agriculture avoided these losses and allowed farmers to use agricultural land to produce food for human consumption instead of animal feed. Accordingly, a larger amount of agricultural production was available for human consumption, which increased FSS [17].

Food waste and losses occurred either at the production stage [5,20] or at the consumption stage [14,85,120]. Whereas food waste and losses at the production stage reduced the supply of agricultural products, food waste and losses at the consumption stage created additional demand. Thus, food waste and losses had a negative impact on FSS.

3.3. Geographical heterogeneity in factors affecting food self-sufficiency

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of factors affecting FSS across geographical units: single developing country, group of developing countries, single industrialized country, group of industrialized

countries, world, and other.

Due to the strong focus of selected studies on developing countries ($n = 61$ single developing country; $n = 8$ group of developing countries), we found that most of the factors are more relevant in those countries. This is most evident in the categories agricultural inputs, macroeconomic factors, and dietary habits. Factors with a total frequency greater than one, such as extreme weather events ($n = 7$), energy and electricity ($n = 5$), FSS as a policy goal ($n = 10$), subsidies and/or price support ($n = 4$), and food waste at the consumption level ($n = 3$), were exclusively relevant in developing countries. Only the factor climate change was distributed relatively equally across geographical units, highlighting its global relevance. Conversely, technological and cultural developments in alternative agricultural systems were more prevalent in industrialized countries ($n = 3$, urban and peri-urban agriculture, and $n = 1$, livestock-free agriculture) than in developing countries ($n = 2$, urban and peri-urban agriculture) and other geographical units ($n = 1$, urban and peri-urban agriculture).

3.4. Actors and actions influencing food self-sufficiency

Table 4 shows the actors (i.e., consumers, producers, and policy-makers) and actions (i.e., cultural/behavioral, technological/infrastructural, ecosystem-based, and institutional) that can influence the factors that affect FSS. Factors that can be influenced by an actor's action are marked with a check symbol '✓', and those that cannot are marked with a cross symbol '×'.

In countries where FSS is a policy goal, policymakers have a responsibility to support factors that have a positive impact on FSS and to eliminate or reduce factors that have a negative impact on FSS. Accordingly, except for natural conditions (i.e., solar radiation and precipitation) and external shocks (i.e., wars, diseases, harmful organisms, nuclear disasters, and international inflation), policymakers at the national level are responsible for the institutional framework (i.e., legislation). This applies to effective national institutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation [48], the stability of the macroeconomic environment [76], reliable conditions for agricultural producers [49] and trade partners [126], for limiting the negative impacts of urbanization [83], incentivizing environmentally friendly diets [73], and the mitigation of food waste and losses [31].

Consumers can contribute to climate change mitigation and sustainable resource use through behavioral change by adopting more sustainable diets. For example, a plant-based diet is associated with lower greenhouse gas emissions [39] and reduced use of natural resources, such as land or water [103] and is therefore considered as more environmentally sustainable. The use of environmentally friendly household appliances, such as dishwashers or refrigerators/freezers, that have a longer lifespan, are made from recycled materials, or use less energy also helps reduce energy and resource consumption [13]. As a result, the sustainable use of energy and materials was associated with a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, which had a positive impact on the climate and, thus, on FSS. Reducing avoidable food waste at the consumer level can promote energy, economic and environmental sustainability [62]. This can be achieved through behavioral changes, such as shopping from a list or creating a 3–4-day meal plan [24]. Technologies such as smartphone apps for food planning, shopping, storage, and cooking can complement behavioral changes to reduce food waste [22].

Producers can also contribute to the mitigation of climate change and thus help limit the negative effects of climate change on FSS. Behavioral change and technology adoption are also complementary in achieving a more sustainable agricultural production. The extensification of agricultural production by reducing livestock production is considered an effective option for mitigating greenhouse gas emissions [18]. In this context, the findings of Slater et al. [119] show that shifting agricultural production from fresh vegetative products to more storable products such as cereals, oils, fats, legumes, seeds, and nuts can increase food self-sufficiency. The application of precision agriculture

⁴ Ex-ante trade models used bilateral trade flows (i.e., imports and exports), data on tariffs and non-tariff barriers to trade, and data on supply and demand elasticities, which were not considered in our framework.

Table 3

Frequency distribution of factors affecting FSS across geographical units: single developing country, group of developing countries, single industrialized country, group of industrialized countries, world, and other.

Category	Factors	Single developing country	Group of developing countries	Single industrialized country	Group of industrialized countries	World	Other	Total frequency
External events	Climate change	8	4	2	0	4	5	23
	Extreme weather events	6	1	0	0	0	0	7
	Precipitation	2	1	0	0	0	1	4
	Solar radiation	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	War	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Diseases	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Harmful organisms	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Nuclear disasters	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	International inflation	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Agricultural area	22	7	2	1	1	4	37
Agricultural inputs	Fertilizers	15	2	1	0	0	2	20
	Water	9	5	0	0	2	2	18
	Labor	8	0	2	0	0	0	10
	Machinery/Technology	7	0	1	0	0	0	8
	Pesticides	6	0	1	0	0	0	7
	Seeds	6	0	1	0	0	0	7
	Feed	3	0	2	0	0	0	5
	Energy and electricity	5	0	0	0	0	0	5
	Prices/costs	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
	Capital	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Macroeconomic factors	Population	17	3	1	1	1	4	27
	Economic size	10	2	1	0	0	5	18
	Political stability	1	0	0	0	0	2	3
	Low unemployment rate	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Intellectual property rights	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Spending research in agriculture	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Exchange rate	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	National inflation	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Value added agriculture	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Membership in EU	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Dietary habits	Independence	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Change in political system	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Type of diet	12	3	3	2	2	3	25
	Income	5	1	0	1	0	1	8
	Consumer prices	3	1	1	0	0	0	5
	Consumption expenditure	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
	Costs of living	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Food self-sufficiency as a policy goal	9	1	0	0	0	0	10
	Subsidies and/or price support	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
	Free trade	5	1	1	0	1	1	9
Trade policy	Protectionism	5	0	0	0	1	0	6
	Degree of urbanization	9	0	0	0	0	2	11
	Urban and peri-urban agriculture	2	0	3	0	0	1	6
	Livestock-free agriculture	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Level of consumption	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
	Level of production	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	Food waste and losses							

technologies can, for example, optimize fertilizer application and thus reduce greenhouse gas emissions [65]. The implementation of ecosystem-based adaptation solutions, such as mulching or cover crops, helps improve water infiltration rates and thus adapts to climate change-induced droughts [58]. The counterpart of extensification is the intensification of agricultural production, which is also driven by a combination of behavioral changes and the use of new technologies. A prime example is the green revolution, which was a critical turning point for traditional agricultural methods [107]. The introduction of high-yielding crop varieties, fertilizers, irrigation, and pesticides led to high yields [101]. If urban agriculture is considered an entrepreneurial activity, the expansion of agricultural production through smart

technologies is also a combination of cultural change and the adoption of new technologies [123]. Food waste at the farm level could be reduced, thereby increasing the available supply and positively impacting FSS. For example, potatoes that are not consumed for aesthetic reasons are not sorted out by farmers but are later channeled by wholesalers [140]. Research shows that suboptimal potatoes are accepted by consumers who have been made aware of the amount of food wasted for aesthetic reasons [6]. In addition, crop losses at the farm level can be valorized, for example, by producing biofuels or methane as a substitute for liquefied natural gas [97].

Table 4

The actors and actions influencing the factors affecting FSS.

Categories	Individual factors	Policy makers	Consumers		Producers		
		Institutional	Cultural/ behavioral	Technological/ infrastructural	Cultural/ behavioral	Technological/ infrastructural	Ecosystem- based
External events	Climate change	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Extreme weather events	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Precipitation	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Solar irradiation	x	x	x	x	x	x
	War	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Diseases	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Harmful organisms	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Nuclear disasters	x	x	x	x	x	x
Agricultural inputs	International inflation	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Agricultural area	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Fertilizers	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Water	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Labor	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Machinery/Technology	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Pesticides	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Seeds	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Feed	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Energy and electricity	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Prices/costs	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Capital	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
Macroeconomic factors	Population	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Economic size	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Political stability	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Low unemployment rate	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Intellectual property rights	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Spending research in agriculture	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Exchange rate	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	National inflation	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Value added agriculture	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Membership in EU	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Independence	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Change in political system	✓	x	x	x	x	x
Dietary habits	Type of diet	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
	Income	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Consumer prices	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Consumption expenditure	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
Agricultural policy	Costs of living	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Policy goal food self-sufficiency	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Subsidies and/or price support	✓	x	x	x	x	x
Trade policy	Free trade	✓	x	x	x	x	x
	Protectionism	✓	x	x	x	x	x
Urbanization	Degree of urbanization	✓	x	x	x	x	x
Alternative systems	Urban and peri-urban agriculture	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
	Livestock-free agriculture	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x
Food waste and losses	Level of consumption	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x
	Level of production	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x

Note: Factors that can be influenced by an actor's action are marked with a check symbol '✓', and those that cannot are marked with a cross symbol 'x'.

3.5. Actors and actions promoting sustainable development and food self-sufficiency

In this subsection we synthesize the findings obtained through the multi-actor constellation approach regarding actors and actions that promote sustainable development and FSS. We identified four types of actions that can promote both environmental sustainability and FSS (see Table 5).

We identified policymakers in being responsible for the development and implementation of agricultural and trade policies that focus on sustainability and FSS [55,145]. The EU's common agricultural policy, for example, sets ambitious goals for greening agricultural production by reducing negative external effects such as greenhouse gas emissions from livestock farming, while fostering positive externalities such as

biodiversity conservation [53]. Moreover, the EU considers sustainable development as a key principle in modern trade agreements [54]. The integration of sustainability standards into free trade agreements can mitigate negative environmental externalities caused by trade liberalization [70,128]. Policies that adjust food prices, for example, can promote more sustainable consumption patterns by increasing the consumption of fresh foods and reducing food waste [69].

While the agricultural policy sets the framework for a transition to more sustainable configurations of the food system, we found that producers can adopt sustainable farming practices that increase production levels, and thus FSS. Promising approaches to promoting environmental sustainability include alternative agricultural systems such as livestock-free agriculture and urban and peri-urban agriculture in the form of rooftop greenhouses or aquaponics [67,115,116]. Sustainable

Table 5

Actors and actions promoting sustainable development and food self-sufficiency.

Actions	Policymakers	Consumers	Producers
Policies integrating sustainability as a goal	✓	×	×
- Greening agriculture			
- Environmental trade standards			
Sustainable production	✓	×	✓
- Livestock-free agriculture			
- Urban and peri-urban agriculture			
- Sustainable intensification			
- Smart farming technologies			
Sustainable consumption	✓	✓	×
- Plant-based diet			
Reducing food waste and losses	✓	✓	✓
- Waste management			
- Smart technologies and sharing platforms			

Note: Actions that can be influenced by an actor and that promote sustainable development and FSS are marked with a check symbol (✓), and those that cannot be influenced are marked with a cross symbol (×).

intensification in traditional agriculture aims to raise productivity while increasing resource use efficiency and reducing the negative environmental impacts of agriculture [142]. In this context, smart farming technologies reduce inefficiencies, enhance resource productivity, and lower management costs. These technologies positively impact production levels and contribute to FSS [34,111]. Waste management practices at the farm level, such as donating or selling food at discounted rates, can reduce food waste [74].

Furthermore, our findings revealed that consumers can play a significant part in making the food system more sustainable. In this context, policy interventions are needed to reduce, change and improve consumption [94]. Clear environmental benefits were identified in adopting sustainable diets such as plant-based ones [114]. Moreover, reducing avoidable food waste was found to enhance FSS while alleviating pressure on natural resources [64]. According to Agya [3], smart technologies such as AI-powered management systems and smart refrigerators, as well as food-sharing platforms, can help avoid food waste.

4. Discussion

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to systematically identify factors affecting FSS at the country level using a systematic literature review. In this section, we focus on discussing the limitations of three factors that seemed easily influenced by producers and/or consumers for the consequent positive impact on FSS. First, the intensification of agricultural production by using more agricultural inputs, such as machinery, fertilizers, and pesticides. Second, a shift in consumption patterns toward more sustainable diets. Third, the reduction of avoidable food waste. Additionally, we aim to discuss the results of the analysis of geographical heterogeneity.

Agricultural policies that promoted the intensification of agricultural production during the green revolution have enabled developing countries in Asia and Latin America to achieve FSS [15]. However, with the modernization and professionalization of agricultural production, farmers have become more dependent upon privately regulated markets, retailers, research, and policy measures [71]. Furthermore, the intensification of agricultural production has led to severe environmental impacts, such as soil degradation and runoff from chemical fertilizers and pesticides [104]. Although intensification of agricultural production has been associated with increases in yields in the short and medium term, soil degradation leads to adverse trends in yields in the long term that threaten FSS [125]. This calls for more environmentally and socio-economically sustainable agricultural practices. In this context, sustainable intensification practices, such as increasing crop diversity, adopting intercropping systems or adding fertility crops or

organic matter, have shown positive effects on the yield of staple crops [89,124]. Accordingly, the concept of the sustainable intensification of agricultural production may hold promise for securing future yields and, thus, FSS [20]. Building on this, the EU's "Farm to Fork Strategy" sets ambitious goals to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable food system. These goals include reducing environmental impacts, mitigating and adapting to climate change, conserving biodiversity, promoting healthy diets, and ensuring food security and fair trade [150]. While these goals traditionally target rural agricultural systems, they are increasingly relevant in urban contexts as well. Alternative agricultural systems, such as rooftop greenhouses and aquaponic systems, enable sustainable food production by enhancing FSS of urban spaces, promoting biodiversity, reducing heat islands caused by climate change and improving air quality [151]. Therefore, in urban regions, alternative agricultural systems are a key component in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11, "Sustainable Cities and Communities" [152].

Changing dietary habits from an animal-based to a more plant-based diet is associated with a contribution to climate change mitigation and sustainable resource use. Accordingly, adopting more sustainable diets, such as a plant-based diet, has a positive impact on FSS [144]. However, there are psychological barriers to shifting to a plant-based diet. Bryant et al. [29] argued that many people are ignorant of the cruelty of livestock farming and deliberately avoid thinking about the issue. When engaging with the issue of animal cruelty, meat eaters are driven by cognitive dissonance, which manifests as motivated reasoning aimed at protecting one's image of oneself and society. Although many people tend to prefer the status quo, meat substitutes are gradually moving from niche to mainstream products [23]. There are also barriers to reducing food waste at the household level. Research shows that a lack of education about the importance of the issue, cultural norms of over-consumption, and inappropriate social marketing prevent consumers from adopting sustainable practices [137].

The analysis of geographical heterogeneity has shown that agricultural inputs, macroeconomic factors, and dietary habits were highly relevant factors in developing countries. Therefore, to increase FSS and to reduce vulnerability to global shocks, public-private partnerships are essential to stimulate private investments in the agri-food sector [108]. Although our results highlighted the global relevance of climate change, Africa experiences its negative effects disproportionately [141]. Some regions endure severe, long-term droughts, crop failures, and famine, while others experience intense rainfall, rising sea levels, and coastal and riparian flooding [61]. Consequently, the effectiveness of agricultural extension services must improve in order to help African farmers adopt technologies that will enable them to adapt to climate change and secure agricultural production [9]. To accomplish this, extension policymakers must collaborate with various stakeholders to develop extension policies that address farmers' needs in light of climate change [2]. The correlation between meat consumption and income remains positive [92]. Consequently, the economic growth of emerging economies, such as China, has led to increased meat consumption [46,137]. In order to avoid threatening FSS, meat consumption could be reduced by eliminating subsidies reflecting the true costs of production, which would make plant-based meat alternatives more competitive [117]. In recent years, the expansion of agricultural production in industrialized countries through alternative agricultural systems, such as rooftop greenhouses and aquaponics, has gained momentum. To foster the innovation and adoption of these technologies, public funding for research [25] and subsidies to make adoption economically more viable are needed [131].

5. Conclusion and policy implications

Crises and conflicts have put FSS back on the political agenda of food import-dependent countries. A systematic identification of the factors affecting FSS, as done in this study, is therefore crucial. From a scientific perspective, FSS appears to be particularly important for developing

countries whose food supply is vulnerable to external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine. Accordingly, scientific interest in the factors affecting FSS peaked during these shocks. The various identified factors affecting FSS were grouped into external events (e.g., climate change, wars, and nuclear disasters), agricultural inputs, macroeconomic factors, dietary habits, trade and agricultural policies, urbanization, alternative agricultural production systems, and food waste and losses.

At first glance, some of the identified factors seemed to be easily influenced by producers and/or consumers for the consequent positive impact on FSS. However, a closer look revealed adverse effects or barriers to change in behavior. For instance, agricultural intensification was positively associated with FSS, but also with adverse environmental effects. Therefore, policymakers should provide incentives for farmers to adopt more sustainable practices that maintain production levels. Adopting more sustainable diets was positively correlated with FSS. However, psychological barriers hinder consumers from doing so. One way policymakers could encourage this shift is by eliminating subsidies on meat, which would make plant-based alternatives more competitive and promote more sustainable food consumption.

Given their vulnerability to global shocks, the analysis of geographical heterogeneity revealed that agricultural inputs, macroeconomic factors, and dietary habits played a major role in influencing FSS in developing countries. Thus, it was not surprising that FSS as a policy goal, as well as subsidies and/or price support, were only relevant in these countries. In order to reduce their vulnerability to global shocks and dependency on food imports, developing countries should focus on increasing FSS. Macroeconomic development is essential for enabling investments in agricultural production and extension services, as well as measures to adapt to climate change and extreme weather events in developing countries. In contrast, industrialized countries can expand FSS by investing in alternative agricultural systems, such as rooftop greenhouses, due to their high level of technological development. This strategy would enhance resilience to climate change and strengthen food security.

Policymakers should therefore carefully consider the circumstances of a country, taking into account the economic costs and benefits, the reliability of trading partners, technological developments and

production capacities in agriculture, environmental conditions, consumer preferences, and producer concerns. The debate on the best policy mix to achieve an affordable and stable food supply is controversial. To protect domestic agricultural production, countries may decide to impose high tariffs and strict non-tariff measures on cheap food imports. However, pure reliance on protectionism and FSS increases future potential vulnerability because trade networks are poorly developed. In contrast, pure reliance on trade (i.e., food imports) may jeopardize food security if supply chains are disrupted due to crises or conflicts. Accordingly, FSS policy should be considered a continuum between closed borders for complete FSS on the one hand and complete dependence on trade for food supply on the other. This means that FSS should not be viewed as an “either/or” approach. Our findings also show that the optimal policy mix is context-specific. For instance, climate change and extreme weather events are global challenges. However, due to a low level of economic development, the vulnerability is higher in developing countries. Thus, capacity building and investments in a climate-resilient agriculture are more fundamental in developing countries than in industrialized ones.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Christian Ritzel: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A

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Appendix B

Table B1
Descriptive statistics of the study characteristic “geographical unit”.

Geographical unit	Frequency
1 = Single developing country	61
2 = Group of developing countries	8
3 = Single industrialized country	9
4 = Group of industrialized countries	2
5 = World	5
6 = Other	7
Total	92

Table B2

Descriptive statistics of the study characteristic “product”.

Product	Frequency
1 = Multiple grains (e.g., rice, wheat, maize, soy)	25
2 = Single grains	15
3 = Animal-based (meat and dairy products)	3
4 = Plant-based (fruits, vegetables, oils, grains)	8
5 = Animal- and plant-based	26
6 = No specification	15
Total	92

Table B3

Descriptive statistics of the study characteristic “methodological approach”.

Methodological approach	Frequency
1 = Quantitative ex-ante	31
2 = Quantitative ex-post	24
3 = Quantitative ex-post and ex-ante	4
4 = Quantitative no time dimension	6
5 = Qualitative narrative	6
6 = Qualitative narrative + descriptive statistics	18
7 = Qualitative interviews	3
Total	92

Table B4

Descriptive statistics of the study characteristic “measurement of FSS”.

Measurement of FSS	Frequency
1 = Domestic production/domestic consumption	42
2 = Other definition of FSS	10
3 = No definition of FSS	40
Total	92

Table B5

The frequency of categories and the frequency of factors affecting FSS.

Categories	Freq.	Factors	Freq.
External events	29	Climate change	23
		Extreme weather events	7
		Precipitation	4
		Solar radiation	1
		War	1
		Nuclear disaster	1
		Diseases	1
		Harmful organisms	1
		International inflation/Rising world market prices	1
		Agricultural area	37
Agricultural inputs	49	Fertilizers	20
		Water	18
		Labor	10
		Machinery/Technology	8
		Pesticides	7
		Seeds	7
		Feed	5
		Energy and electricity	5
		Prices/costs	3
		Capital	2
Macroeconomic factors	33	Total population	27
		Economic size	18
		Political stability	3
		Low unemployment rate	1
		Intellectual property rights	1
		Spending research in agriculture	1
		Exchange rate	1
		National inflation	1
		Value added agriculture per capita	1
		Membership in EU	1

(continued on next page)

Table B5 (continued)

Categories	Freq.	Factors	Freq.
Dietary habits	28	Independence of a nation	1
		Change in political system	1
		Type of diet	25
		Income	8
		Consumer prices	5
		Consumption expenditure	3
		Costs of living	1
Agricultural policy	14	Food self-sufficiency as policy goal	10
		Subsidies and/or price support	4
Trade policy	13	Free trade	9
		Protectionism	6
Urbanization	11	Degree of urbanization	11
Alternative agricultural systems	7	Urban and peri-urban agriculture	6
		Livestock-free agriculture	1
		Level consumption	3
Food waste and losses	5	Level production	2

Data availability

No data were used for the research described in the article.

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