

## **Farming for Nature**

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### ***Farming for Nature is an opportunity for both farmers and nature to adapt to the new EU Common Agricultural Policy and needs for Natura 2000***

Farming for Nature is a policy instrument which supports for instance dairy farmers which are confronted with low prices due to changes in the Common Agricultural Policy. Farming for Nature offers new opportunities to innovative farmers to switch from intensive farming towards extensive farming systems in a country where prices of agricultural land are as high as 35000 euro/ha. Farmer's original income is compensated by agri-environmental measures: payments for so called green (a better landscape and biodiversity) and blue (water retention and conservation) services. The compensation is on an annual base and may be as high as 1000 euro per ha. This high payment for agri-environmental services demonstrates that there is a high demand for this kind of services in Dutch society.

Half of the Netherlands is reclaimed from the sea, but also above sea level the land was reshaped by farmers. Hundred thousands hectares of arable land (plaggen soils) in former heathland areas were raised one meter in height by the farmers, reshaping topography of the landscape also above sea level. So one may ask whether there is still nature in Holland.

Fortunately man can be part of nature. The fact is that 20 percent of the country (720,000 ha) is designated now as nature area by the government. Following requests of society through the parliament. Most is concentrated in the EHS or National Ecological Framework, which is also more or less the Dutch contribution to Natura 2000. In the EHS about half of the land is forest (planted on former heathlands) and the other half is arable land, grassland and meadows. The base area of the EHS were existing nature reserves including forest and heathlands and meadows to support the meadow birds. The idea of the government in the early 1990<sup>th</sup> was also to buy all private agricultural land within the EHS, but this policy has changed and the view now is that farmers should also be allowed to be involved.

In 1995 in one of the proposed areas of the EHS an area of 500 ha in Gaasterland farmers did not agree to sell their land. They wanted to continue farming taking on board the public demand to generate more biodiversity in agricultural land. This nature management by farmers ("agrarisch natuurbeheer") was agreed as an experiment by the previous minister of agriculture and nature management, Mr. J. van Aartsen. Later experiments with Farming for Nature proposed by Alterra and LEI were also agreed by the present minister, Mr. C. Veerman. Farming for Nature is somewhat different from other approaches such as in Gaasterland. Its focus is on continuation of farming, which also provides services such as nature, landscape and conservation of water resources.

The income generated for farmers in the Farming for Nature concept is about the same as other agri-environmental payment systems (SN and SAN) applied in Gaasterland and elsewhere in the EHS. The difference is that in Farming for Nature the ministry

shares the costs with local stakeholders. This way of shared financing generates also a better support for policy in local society. In Farming for Nature the ecological prerequisites (water level; level of nutrients/manure allowed) are included in the farming system. This provides more freedom for the farmer-entrepreneur and we believe also more sustainable results for biodiversity and landscape. The system still allows manuring about 20 percent of the land, which is also an advantage for biodiversity.

Farming for Nature experiments sponsored by the ministry and local interest groups are ongoing in the polder region (Polder van Biesland; 100 ha) and in the sandy part of the country in the Twickel estate (1000 ha). Within Interreg projects other Farming for Nature projects are in progress. With respect to Lifescape, where Pas de Calais is our partner, there are 4 projects. The Bleijenbeek estate (10 ha) in the province of Limburg. This is an environmental friendly farm producing fruits and allowing volunteers to be involved in the farm near a golf links location. The capital comes entirely from various private entrepreneurs. The second project is in the *Langstraat* polder located in the EHS in Brabant province. Most of the 1000 ha is farmland, but here is also land nature (forest and meadows) owned by the Dutch Forest Service. As in Gaasterland farmers in Langstraat want to play a central role in the nature and landscape management. On the policy level it is the province of Brabant which has yet to take important decisions on involvement of farmers. The Water Board Brabantse Delta which is responsible for water management has offered to coordinate the efforts of various stakeholders as soon there is a clear view on whether farmers will be involved. The third project is the '*Hemelrijksche Hoeve*'. This farm combines care and producing beef. In this case there are still problems with the adequacy of spatial tools to realize an extensive farming system. But the farmer-entrepreneur already started with his own foundation to raise capital ([www.hoornmankentiend.nl](http://www.hoornmankentiend.nl)). Another interesting case is the "*farm estate de Bleek*". The concept of a farm estate was invented by the municipality of Boxtel taking on board the Farming for Nature approach. Financing is through a so called compensation mechanism (red for green). In this case financing the project is achieved by compensation payments for deprivation of the value of the farm land. The interesting issue here is that it allows to combine farming in a 30 ha farm (outside the EHS) with arable land with the management of 1000 ha of heathland (Kampina nature reserve).. The presence of what is now a nature reserve (Kampina) is of vital importance for the extensive beef producing farm, whereas the private arable land outside the EHS is important to grow sufficient fodder crops.

In conclusion a few remarks. There is a high demand for nature in The Netherlands, which provides new opportunities for farming. But already now farmers manage a lot of grassland and heathlands in public owned nature areas. If these farmers disappear due to changes in the EU Common Agricultural Policy also nature conservation will be badly affected. Now farmers are even paying nature organisations to allow their cattle to graze grassland and heath in the public nature reserves. In case farmers abandon their farm there will *no* longer be a net income from the farm to nature organisations. Without farmers there is no longer an income for nature conservation organisations, but a cost of 1000 euro per ha to maintain grasslands designated as Natura 2000 area. Farming for Nature is a tool for both rural policy and achieving goals of Natura 2000.