

PRESS RELEASE

Thursday, the 18th of August 2022

Advice of think tank Regie op Ruimte:

Government, correct the market and support the farmer

If the government corrects the market and supplements the market with long-term payments for ecosystem services, a perspective arises for future-proof business operations for farmers. This way, the government stands alongside the farmer rather than oppose him in achieving ambitious goals in climate, nitrogen, biodiversity, water, air quality and human and animal health. This, in essence, is what the think tank Regie op Ruimte (Direction of space) a spinoff of the Food Transition Coalition, recommends to the Dutch government and all other organisations involved in the future of agriculture and rural areas in the Netherlands.

Market failure

The significant problems in nature and farming have everything to do with the fact that sustainability is currently insufficiently rewarded by the market. There is a systemic problem. Currently, the market is steered primarily by price and scale. Suppliers and supermarkets are trapped in a low-price model. Because of this, both farmers and nature suffer.

At the same time, farmers are socially, ecologically, and legally expected to contribute substantially to reducing emissions and promoting biodiversity and an attractive rural area. This requires a fundamentally different approach to agricultural and food production. In this, the government has an important guiding and directing role.

Next to the farmer, not opposite the farmer

Regie op Ruimte is a think tank formed by farmers, policy makers and experts, brought together by the Transition Coalition Food, proposes in the report "Toekomst zoekt boer" (the future seeks sustainable farmers) that things can be done differently.

To this end, the government is expected to have an integral long-term vision on the future role of agriculture in the Netherlands. It must stand alongside the farmer and not opposite the farmer. The farmer must be empowered to contribute to the new social and ecological requirements. The think tank argues that the government must correct the market so that the farmer is paid for his efforts toward sustainability. This can be done in several ways. For example, the government could require the agro and food industry to mix a substantial share of sustainable raw materials into their products, as has been done with gasoline for years. Farmers who meet certain sustainability requirements must be paid a true and fair price for their products. This measure increases the demand for sustainable products, raises the price of sustainable agricultural products and improves the farmer's income.

In addition, the government should start paying structurally for ecosystem services. These are services that promote the quality of climate, biodiversity, and nature. These government contributions should be made available long-term, supplemented with extra rewards or discounts from regional water authorities, land leaseholders, the industry, and financiers. This, too, can structurally increase the farmer's income.

Certification

To achieve all the above, extensive certification of agricultural businesses based on critical performance indicators is needed. This will allow the farmer to steer toward the most sustainable business model possible and toward emission levels that meet the goals that apply to his location. The more sustainable the farm, the more the farmer is rewarded.

Furthermore, it is of great importance that the government firmly contributes to proper and independent support for farmers to make the necessary change. A growing number of area-based organisations and knowledge institutions are achieving a lot already. They obtain the farmer's trust. The government should give that kind of bottom-up initiatives a massive long-term boost. Several farmers' organisations are developing proposals under the name Farmer's Perspective (Boerenperspectief), which are currently being discussed with the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality.

The full report "Toekomst zoekt Boer", including a series of recommendations for both a short and long-term vision, is available via: www.transitiecoalitievoedsel.nl/toekomstzoektoeboer

Presentation

The report "Toekomst zoekt Boer" is offered to the Dutch Government. This report is submitted to all other parties involved in the debate on the future of agriculture, such as farmer and nature organisations and provinces. The report has been shown to Mr Remkes, who is trying to unite parties to break the deadlock on agricultural, nature and nitrogen policies.

Members of the think tank Regie op Ruimte, are Alex Datema (dairy farmer), Cees Veerman (former Minister of Agriculture, Frans Keurentjes (farmer and administrator), Jan Willem Erisman (professor), Jos Verstraten (dairy farmer), Krijn Poppe (agricultural economist) and Willem Lageweg (Transition Coalition Food).

Regie op Ruimte previously made proposals in this area via a widely endorsed manifesto that was supported by more than 300 organisations last year:

<https://transitiecoalitievoedsel.nl/regie-op-ruimte/>

Note to editors

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