

Agricultural crises in The Netherlands.

Small country, large agricultural sector, immense environmental challenges.

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Conference EUROPA: "Agricultural and rural development policies in Europe: for agriculture at the service of the attractiveness of the territories?"

Limoges, November 29, 2019

The Netherlands has a long tradition of a strong and innovative agricultural sector. With Wageningen University the Dutch probably have the best university in the world in the field of agriculture and food. The disproportional large agricultural sector however comes with evenly large environmental problems.

Some figures (2018):

	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>France</i>
<i>Inhabitants</i>	17.18 million	66.8 million
<i>Surface</i>	41543 km ²	551500 km ² (excl. Outre-mer)
<i>Agricultural acres</i>	1.8 million	28 million
<i>Farms</i>	54000	452000
<i>Agricultural export</i>	90.3 billion euro (nr. 2 behind USA) (Netherlands is net exporter)	63,5 billion euro
<i>Agricultural production</i>	65.4 billion euro (75% is exported)	73 billion euro

The Dutch agricultural policy is in close contact with the EU's common agricultural policy. Sustainability is a key pillar.

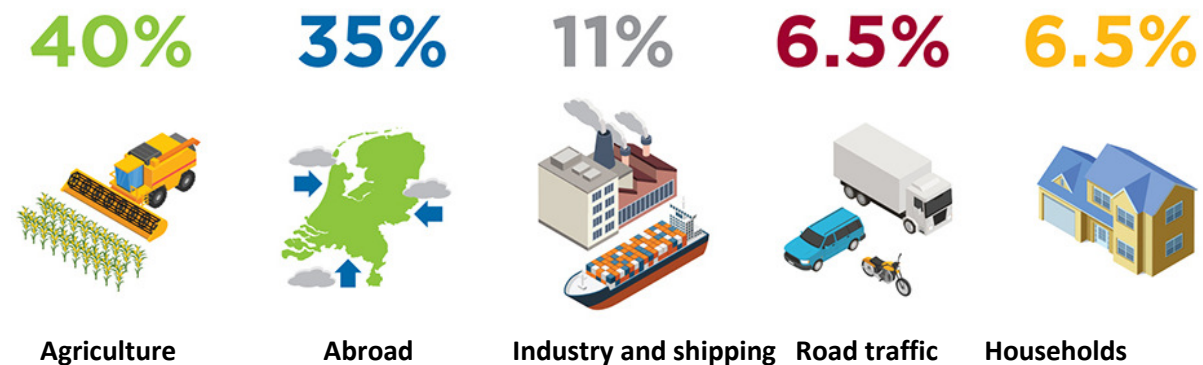
From the CAP, 72% of European funds go to sustainability (climate, environment, circular agriculture), 15% to market organisation and 12% to rural development.

Recent months The Netherlands were faced with a crisis that has put new pressure on the need to reform our agricultural sector into a more sustainable model.

In order to reduce nitrogen emissions in line with European regulations, the Netherlands has set up the PAS (programmatic approach nitrogen) scheme in 2015. In practice, permits for the construction of houses and infrastructure or the extension of stables could be authorised based on general compensatory measures. Nature organisations have challenged this. May 2019 the Council of State ruled that global plans are no longer enough; A builder must demonstrate that the nitrogen deposition in Natura 2000 areas does not increase. In practice, this is very difficult. Since then, many

construction projects have stopped bringing the construction sector almost to a halt. A crisis was born.

40% of nitrogen deposition comes from agriculture.



<https://resource.wur.nl/nl/show/De-stikstofproblematiek-in-vijf-vragen-.htm>

After deduction of the non-influenceable deposition from abroad, the agricultural source is 60% of deposition that can be influenced!

To meet the critical deposition values, 50% emission reduction is required. To get there in 2030 a yearly reduction of 5% is required.

It seems inevitable that the agricultural sector should deliver the largest share.

On the 25th of September a State committee presented a first report (the title "Not everything is possible.") with short term proposals for the solution of the nitrogen crisis. A report with long-term recommendations is in the making.

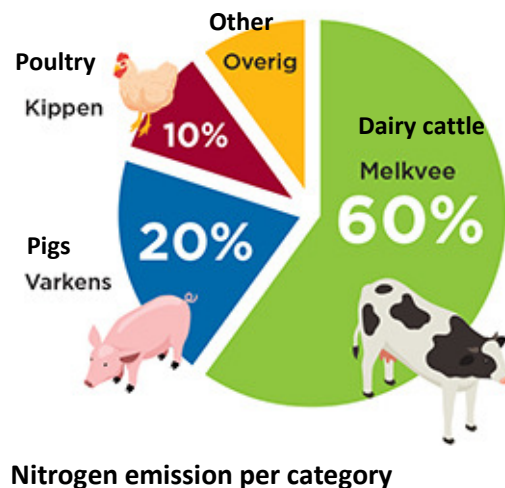
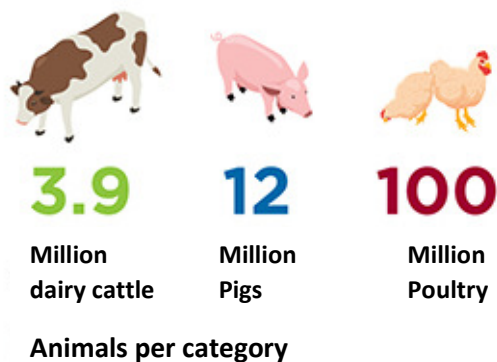
For the short term, the Commission recommends, among other things, targeted policies to buy out farmers around vulnerable natural areas and the introduction of new emission mitigation techniques.

The suggestion of some politicians that in the longer term the cattle herd would have to be halved led to unprecedented mass farmers protests in The Hague and at all provincial houses.



It is true that the reduction of the dairy herd would contribute most. It carries 60% of the nitrogen emissions within the livestock sector, mainly because chickens and pigs are kept in closed systems, with the formation of ammonia being reduced and captured.

However, from an animal welfare and nature perspective open stables for cows and cows in the meadow are preferred.



<https://resource.wur.nl/nl/wetenschap/show/Hoe-halveren-we-de-stikstofuitstoot-in-de-veehouderij-Pak-vooral-de-koeienstal-aan.htm>

On 13 November, the cabinet presented the short-term measures to ensure that construction on housing and infrastructure can be resumed for the time being.

1. Daytime speed limit from 130 to 100 km per hour.
2. An emergency law to allow essential infrastructural works (for instance costal reinforcement) to continue.
3. Mandatory adapted feed for cows, containing an enzyme that reduces nitrogen emissions.
4. The fund to buy out farmers around natural areas increases to 180 million.
5. Half a billion is set aside for nature recovery.

The long-term approach is still being worked on. This crisis, however, is accelerating the inevitable sustainability of the agricultural sector. Wageningen University does work on techniques to reduce emissions by adjusting feed and adapted manure management. The aim is a sustainable circular agriculture, where the nitrogen cycle is closed. This requires research and large investments.

What does this mean for the Dutch farmers?

- In our small country we have reached the limits of growth within the traditional agricultural production.
- Not every farmer's son will be able to follow his father's footsteps and become a farmer.
- Choices must be made; Less cows in the meadow by reduction or by more controlled environments for cows (as already existing for pigs and poultry).
- Consumers may have to get used to less meat based and more plant-based nutrition.
- Development of plant based "meat" products.
- If we want to keep up our export position this will mean even more High tech, intensive and large-scale production.
- On the other hand, the demand for biological farming for local (and seasonable) consumption (reducing need for transportation).
- The educational system for the Dutch agricultural sector is leading in the world but must keep up with changing demands in business models, technological advancements and new ways of farming.