

MANIFESTO:

The Dutch Agriculture Agreement reaches further than the Netherlands: offer prospects for sustainable farmers and consumers worldwide

In the Netherlands, the government, farmers' organizations, supply chain partners and nature and environmental organizations are currently discussing the Agriculture Agreement. While the agreement focuses on the domestic agricultural sector, our trading position and our production and consumption patterns mean that the Netherlands is very much part of the global agricultural system. The agreement will be followed by an international strategy for sustainable agriculture. A substantial reform of the agriculture and food production system, of which the Netherlands is a part not only domestically but also internationally, is urgently needed according to the undersigned organisations. How that reform might look like, we - a collective of Dutch and international civil society organisations, agricultural organisations and companies, environmental organisations and scientists - set out in this manifesto.

Agriculture is changing, in the Netherlands, in the EU, and in less wealthy countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The current agricultural model is reaching its limits, in the Netherlands and abroad. The production of and trade in agricultural produce is destroying vital ecosystems and biodiversity, threatening livelihoods and the right to food, and leading to land-grabbing, climate change and health problems. The intensive agricultural sector is responsible for [80% of deforestation worldwide and 37% of greenhouse gas emissions, and is the main cause of biodiversity loss](#). The Netherlands is also contributing to these developments: our intensive cattle farming model not only accounts for high emissions of nitrogen and greenhouse gases but also, through the import of cattle feed, ensures that [enormous tracts of land around the world cannot be used for growing food](#). Farmers and consumers who see how things can be done differently want a say in how the food system operates. But their voice hardly gets heard, because power in the agricultural supply chain is concentrated in the hands of a small number of parties: suppliers of seeds, pesticides, artificial fertilizer and animal feed, retailers and traders in grain and other bulk products, and their financiers.

A sea change in the agriculture and food system is urgent, and is fortunately also possible! Now that the national debate on food, agriculture and sustainable development is the focus of attention, it is important to strike while the iron is hot and set in motion a transition to a food system that offers prospects and guarantees the well-being of people in the Netherlands and beyond our borders. A food system that takes account of the position of farmers worldwide, and that assures fair prices, food security for all and a better distribution of power. A system where food is once again produced without threatening the Earth's ecological capacity, and where the participation and trading capacity of farmers and consumers are increased by taking shorter supply chains as a starting point. A transition that brings agriculture back to the core of food sovereignty: healthy and affordable food for all! Front runners and pioneers in sustainable agriculture in the Netherlands and elsewhere are showing that it is possible. Their knowledge, experience and future vision must be at the centre of that transition.

As in the Netherlands, there are already a large number of sustainable food initiatives in the Global South. But the [development of local food markets is suffering severely from the import of cheaper Western food](#). Sustainable initiatives by farmers face obstacles because most of the fertile land and scarce water resources are being used primarily for the production of bulk products like soya, palm oil and flowers for export. That means that less good land is available for small-scale farmers and women – the largest food producers in the Global South. Thanks to these long supply chains and favourable trade agreements, the West can enjoy roses and avocados throughout the year, or processed soya and palm oil in cattle feed, shampoo or biofuel. Not only in these countries but also in the Netherlands, farmers who focus on sustainable food production can hardly make a living and receive insufficient support for their revenue model from legislation.

We are therefore calling on the government to view and reform agriculture from a system perspective. In a strongly globalized world, this also means critically examining the Netherlands' role as a trader and consumer of food and agricultural products and reducing our use of natural resources elsewhere in the world. That can be achieved firstly by emphasizing in the national Agriculture Agreement that the Netherlands can also expedite the transition to a fair and sustainable food system beyond its borders. Secondly, it can develop an international sustainable agriculture strategy that prioritizes strengthening local food security and the health of ecosystems in the Global South over Dutch agrarian trade interests. That helps us to ensure that progress made through development cooperation, such as restoring ecosystems and building up local markets, is not cancelled out by the activities of our companies. We can also ensure that the development of local markets is based on strengthening and using local knowledge, supplemented by knowledge and expertise from the other countries.

It is high time that we use our capital, our knowledge and our far-reaching networks to promote food systems that give centre stage to food sovereignty, food security, health and well-being, increase the participation of farmers and consumers, make a fair revenue model possible and respect the limits of our planet. This ambition is achievable. We therefore call on the government, as the highest governing body of a leading agricultural and trading nation like the Netherlands, to embrace a future-oriented agricultural policy and to take the rest of the world along on that journey. By setting a good example.



Our proposal to agriculture minister Piet Adema and foreign trade and development minister Liesje Schreinemacher is as follows:

1. Make sure that the national Agriculture Agreement works for farmers, both within and outside the Netherlands. Ensure that it does not have a negative impact on local food security in countries in the Global South.
2. Make reduction of the Netherlands' ecological footprint a main focus of the Agriculture Agreement.
3. Pursue a gender-responsive agricultural policy that leaves no one behind, in line with the Dutch goal of pursuing a Feminist Foreign Policy. Do this by promoting and protecting land rights for women and giving women a place at the table in designing a fair and sustainable food transition.
4. Create a level playing field for Dutch farmers, through fair and sustainable trade agreements; protect them against the import of cheap food produced in countries with less strict environmental standards, such as meat from Latin America (via the EU-Mercosur agreement).
5. Ensure through fair and sustainable trade agreements that the export of Dutch/European products no longer has a detrimental impact on market development in countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
6. Downscale the import of agrarian commodities with an enormous ecological footprint that are not intended for direct consumption – such as soya for cattle feed and palm oil for biofuel – if they are produced at the expense of food production in the countries of origin. Stop imports if their production can be shown to lead to deforestation or other forms of destruction of the living environment.
7. Give priority to the development of robust local food markets in the Global South and make this the main focus of Dutch trade policy. Ensure that the new international agricultural policy aims at the development of short food chains where possible. Make sure that policy benefits small-scale food producers and is tailored to their knowledge, and to local production and consumption patterns and needs. Do this by promoting demand-driven knowledge exchange, agricultural research and agroecological production principles and improving access to means of production, such as credit, fertilizers and markets.
8. Prioritize financing aimed at making local food production systems in the Global South more economy- and climate-proof. For example, by ensuring that Dutch development cooperation funds, trade and investment budgets and the instruments employed by the Dutch Enterprise Agency (RVO) reach small-scale farmers who often already work sustainably, food production that strengthens local markets, or initiatives that promote natural protein production and consumption. Make sure that investments in international supply chains serve these goals. And ensure that this financing reaches those who now often have no access to funding, such as small-scale female farmers in the Global South.

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Interested in supporting the manifesto? Please reach out to us before 8 May 10am (CEST) through the above-mentioned contact details.

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Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development

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Biodynamische Vereniging

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CARE Nederland

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Farmer and Nature Net Association - FNN (Cambodja)

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FoodWatch

Handel Anders! -coalitie

ItforChange (India)

IUCN Nederland

Land van Ons

Lembaga Bantuan Hukum ANGSANA (Indonesia)

Lembaga Bentang Alam Hijau (Indonesia)

Max Foundation

Milieudefensie

Millennium Community Development Initiatives - MCDI (Kenya)

Natuur & Milieu

Non-Timber Forest Products – Exchange Programme - NTFP-EP (Asia)

Oxfam Novib

Pelum Kenya

Persatuan Pemangkin Kesedaran Sosial – PEMANGKIN (Maleisie)

Plenty Food Nederland

Save the Children

Secrétariat permanent des organisations non gouvernementales – SPONG (Burkina Faso)

Slow Food Nederland

SNV

Social Enterprise Development – SEND (Ghana)

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication SAAPE - (Nepal)

Stichting Demeter

Stichting Onderzoek Multinationale Ondernemingen – SOMO

Stichting Voedselbosbouw

StoereVrouwen

Sustainable Development Institute - SDI (Liberia)

The Hunger Project

The NGO Forum on Cambodia

The Rainforest Resources and Development Centre – RRDC (Nigeria)

Toekomstboeren

Transitiecoalitie Voedsel

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