

# International aspects of the Agriculture Agreement (Landbouwakkoord)

Report of an online dialogue



On Tuesday 2 May, NFP hosted an online briefing session to discuss the Manifesto [“The Dutch Agriculture Agreement reaches further than the Netherlands: offer prospects for sustainable farmers and consumers worldwide.”](#) The Manifesto has been signed by over sixty civil society organisations, farmers organisations, and academics<sup>1</sup>, and will be offered to the Dutch parliament on 9 May.

The session facilitated a constructive dialogue on the interlinkages between the Dutch Agriculture Agreement and the international agenda for food security and sustainable food systems. Over 40 participants from civil society, knowledge institutions, private and public sectors took the opportunity to ask questions and share their insights about the key messages presented in the Manifesto.

## The Manifesto’s key messages

- Farmers worldwide face a number of similar challenges, which for a big part need similar solutions;
- The Dutch Agriculture Agreement and the upcoming International Agriculture Strategy are a key opportunity to develop and implement these solutions;
- Starting points: local food security and resilient local food markets in LMICs, fair prices, reduce the ecological footprint, and strengthen the decision-making power of (female and male) farmers worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the signatories are organisations and institutions. Some academics have signed individually, as there was not enough time and opportunity to get formal permission from their institutes.



## Perspective of the NFP network

Among the participants of the online dialogue session, several were fully supportive of the Manifesto and expressed their interest to co-sign. Many other participants supported the call for close and effective connections and policy coherence between the Agriculture Agreement, the future strategy for International Agriculture, and the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation agenda.

Several recommendations were made for this inter-Ministerial and comprehensive agenda:

- Pay more attention to the need to change the narrative about the Dutch agricultural system, especially given the social and environmental costs of the Dutch system's pursuit of efficiency. A new narrative could be beneficial in the collaboration with African countries for example, as this could facilitate them to “leapfrog the errors made by the Dutch”;
- Link the agenda promoted by the Manifesto to the national pathways for food systems transitions, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). The Manifesto could become the starting point of a broader debate, including learning from existing practice and knowledge, and better understanding what consumers and farmers in LMIC need;
- Realise that the talk and negotiation is often with the institutions only, not with the farmers and companies. Think of addressing the new generations, there are good examples of experiential learning with TVET students to include them in the discussion. In practice, this means connecting with the education sector, as one of the sectors needed for the sustainable transition of the food system;
- Import and export flows should become more sustainable. Sustainable trade agreements are necessary to meet the interests of farming communities both in LMIC and in the Netherlands, while promoting other sustainability aspects;
- Biodiversity is considered a key area of interest.

## The essence of the Manifesto

Background and clarification on the Manifesto were given by representatives of the Food 4 All Coalition, Karin van Boxtel (Both Ends) and Nout van der Vaart (Oxfam Novib) and by Bert van Ruitenbeek (Demeter). The Manifesto is a pledge for the domestic Agriculture Agreement to offer prospects for sustainable farmers and consumers worldwide. It calls for the development of a coherent international sustainable agriculture strategy, as a prerequisite for a sustainable social system: “Care for people, for food, for soil and for environment”. The initiators of the Manifesto are concerned whether the right checks and balances regarding its global impact and dependencies will become part of the Agriculture Agreement. The Manifesto is a societal actors’ effort to bring these issues to the stage and to open up the debate.

The focus of the Manifesto is on the worldwide environmental, social and economic impact of the



(Dutch) agriculture sector and how this should be addressed in the Agriculture Agreement. It calls for a broad and systemic approach of agriculture sector transformation. This is possible only by shifting the power balance in the sector. Certain issues are addressed in [the accompanying letter](#), like the call to reduce the Dutch ecological footprint, in alignment with the upcoming National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Specific issues like the need to reduce the use of antibiotics or of chemical inputs are not addressed in detail in the Manifesto; this will need to be elaborated in further stakeholder dialogues and negotiations in different sectors and contexts.

## Looking ahead

The Manifesto seems well timed, and participants consider it as useful input to the parliamentary debate on the Agriculture Agreement and related policies. Various upcoming moments of relevance:

- **9 May:** The Manifesto will be [offered to the Dutch parliamentary commission of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality](#). It is supported by a separate and more [comprehensive letter from the initiators to the two Ministers](#), which includes further references to academic and other evidence, and more specific recommendations. These include links to existing policies and strategies, and tools such as for example the SDG assessment tool.
- **10 May:** Parliament breakfast meeting : Food Security (closed session; with access to [preparatory academic factsheets](#))
- **23 May:** Parliament Commission BHOS : Food Security and Water. See [link](#) (with [livestream](#))
- **June-and beyond:** NFP will continue facilitating meetings to engage you in policy debates at national and international level (incl. the UN FSS stocktaking moment)
- **July:** UN FSS Stocktaking moment.

## Background on Dutch agriculture policy negotiations

The Dutch Agriculture Agreement is currently being negotiated between the government, farmers' organisations, supply chain partners and nature and environmental organisations. It focuses on the domestic agricultural sector. Later this year, it will be followed by an international strategy for sustainable agriculture. The signatories of the Manifesto assert that the Netherlands are very much part of the global agricultural system, given the Dutch trade position and production and consumption patterns. They recommend the Agriculture Agreement works towards a substantial reform of the agriculture and food production system both domestically and at the international level.

The Manifesto therefore addresses both the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality Piet Adema and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Liesje Schreinemacher. These Ministers jointly submitted the Dutch the global food security [step-by-step plan](#) to parliament in December 2022, which includes the announcement that the Netherlands works on a National Food Systems Pathway through its Agriculture Agreement.