

Dream contract factsheet 3: Flanders – Koolstofboeren (Belgium)



Dream farming-landscape

Objective

Our vision is to promote a farming sector that contributes to halting climate change and is more adapted to its effects (like more extreme weather conditions). We want to stimulate and support farmers to integrate carbon sequestration as an important component in the farm business in a way that generates as well positive impacts on soil and water conservation, landscape and biodiversity restoration and improves their farm economic resilience.

Enablers

- Great interest among farmers, who are intrinsically motivated
- High EU policy interest
- Good knowledge on effect of measures
- Intermediary organisations ready to facilitate

Inhibitors

- High technical requirements to access the certification market
- Competitive market (different platforms/sellers are arising in a short time frame), which puts pressures on the prices.
- High dependency of policy framework (e.g., eligibility of measures), which is not stable yet.

Actors involved in defining the dream landscape

Consortium Koolstofboeren: Boerenatuur Vlaanderen (BNVL), Innovatiesteunpunt (ISP), Rikolto (NGO), Bodemkundige Dienst van België (BDB; soil science institute) + individual farmers interested in carbon farming techniques.

Method used

Interested farmers have been identified by BNVL and BDB via individual contacts. Two online focus group sessions with farmers have been carried out by ISP to identify their interests and expectations. A more in-depth online survey with farmers has been carried out to investigate their contract preferences. Different bilateral talks have been carried out with carbon trading enterprises to identify possibilities and constraints.

Dream contract

Objective

The aim of this contract is to stimulate farmers to store carbon at their farms (in the soils and the vegetation).

Benefits envisaged

- Societal/environmental benefits:
 - climate change mitigation and adaptation,
 - soil and water conservation,
 - improve biodiversity, and
 - landscape restoration.
- Benefits for farmers:
 - improved soil and water conservation: better soil quality (structure, water retention, health);
 - higher yields on the long term;
 - higher income;
 - better image (appreciation by others).

Application domain

- Farm types: arable, mixed, livestock, fruit production
- Land use: arable land (mainly), grassland, orchards
- Land tenure conditions: Private or leased private land

Measures

- Incorporation of organic matter in the soil (plant residues, wood chips (**Figure 1**), stable manure, compost).
- Extending crop rotation.
- Sowing of cover crops, alfalfa, etc.
- Grass-herb strips.
- Planting of wood trees, hedges.



Figure 1. Improving organic matter in the soil by incorporating wood chips (©BNVL).

Contract duration

- 10–20 years (57% prefer to maintain the measures for 20 years or more, 29% for 10 years, 14% for 5 years)

Actors

- Farmers: The contracts are currently planned to be with individual farmers. Although a farmer group is not active yet, all farmers find cooperation between farmers on this subject important. Cooperation between farmers will be facilitated to share knowledge and experience, coordinate actions and improve results.
- Intermediaries: Intermediate parties will be involved in advisory, monitoring and managing payments + selling carbon certificates. This will be coordinated within a platform structure (to be developed). Facilitation of exchange between farmers will be led by Boerennatuur. Monitoring of soil characteristics will be carried out by BDB (Soil Science Institute). Precise roles of different actors are not decided yet.

Access to land

Not relevant for this case.

Payments

- Private funding combining payments of companies and citizens through carbon markets and/or crowdfunding initiatives.
- The payments will be based on the (forecasted) results: the more carbon is stored, the more a farmer will be paid. The impact of the measures will be estimated and the farmer will be paid accordingly. Adjustments in actual payments may occur based on field monitoring. (64% of the farmers prefer to know in advance the exact payments, while 36% prefer a basic payment with an extra top-up based on results).
- Bilateral payments
- No higher price for agricultural products. It is an additional short-chain selling of an ecosystem

Monitoring

A combination of practices and results will be monitored, with an emphasis on results. The major result indicator is carbon storage in the soil, although other ecosystem services will be monitored as well, depending on the type of measure.

Farm advisors will monitor the practices and results (soil samples by soil science institute), with the help of farmers, which will be asked to collect data and observations in a field diary. Depending on the certification scheme that will be used, extra third party control might be necessary. Every year a more general evaluation will be made, combined with a more in-depth monitoring every 3 years.