

Dream contract factsheet 4: Flanders – Gulpdal (Voeren) (Belgium)



Dream farming-landscape

Objective

The vision for the Voerstreek is to develop as a strong natural and landscape core within the Meuse-Rhine/Vlaanderen/Belgium Euro-region. In particular to strive for a balanced sustainable development of the natural, landscape, heritage and agricultural values of the region, aimed at preserving and improving the quality of life, supporting a vibrant agricultural sector, conservation of heritage and nature, restoration of ecological water quality, reducing the risk of flood damage and the well-considered touristic/recreational shared use of the landscape in Voeren.

Enablers

- Good dialogue between governmental administrations
- The “island” situation (Voeren is located geographically disconnected from the rest of Flanders region) makes it a good test case for optimising policy instruments
- Great societal appreciation for the unique aesthetic and natural values of the landscape

Inhibitors

- High pressure for land with lands being bought up by foreign investors
- Economic incentives to convert grassland to cropland

Actors involved in defining the dream landscape

This dream landscape developed by governmental administrations at regional, provincial and local level responsible for policy domains of agriculture, nature, environment and heritage, together with private landscape, farming and hunting organisations. These partners developed a charter for this region in 2017, including this vision.

The dream contract characteristics are developed in interaction by on one hand a local steering group (including the partners mentioned above) led by the regional landscape organisation and on the other hand by the local land users (farmers and private land owners) via stakeholder workshops, individual contacts and a survey.

Method used

Participatory workshops with farmers have been carried out by an intermediary partner (regional landscape organisation). Because of the COVID-situation the preferences of farmers regarding the dream contract characteristics have been collected via an online survey.

Dream contract

The dream contract is not fully developed yet but will continue to develop over the duration of the project.

Objective

The dream contract aims at:

- preservation of aesthetic landscape values,
- biodiversity conservation;
- mitigation and adaptation of climate change by improving carbon storage and reducing the impact of extreme weather effects (drought, flooding, erosion).

Benefits envisaged

- Societal/environmental benefits:
 - preservation of aesthetic landscape values,
 - biodiversity conservation,
 - mitigation and adaptation of climate change by improving carbon storage and reducing the impact of extreme weather effects (drought, flooding, erosion).
- Benefits for farmers:
 - more climate resilient farming
 - financial support



Figure 1. Farmers planting high stemmed fruit trees in the meadows of Gulpdal (©RLH).

Application domain

- Farm types: livestock, arable farmer, fruit producers.
- Land use: grassland, arable land, fruit orchards (**Figure 1**).
- Land tenure conditions: Private or leased private land.

Measures

- Grassland management
- Management of landscape elements (trees, hedges, hedgerows, etc.)

Contract duration

Ideal contract period: 5–10 years

Actors

- Farmers: The contracts are currently planned to be with individual farmers (with a potential group bonus). Cooperation between farmers will be encouraged to share knowledge and experience, coordinate actions and improve results.
- Intermediaries: Intermediate parties will be involved in facilitating the exchange between farmers and organisation of training events, monitoring and managing payments. The general coordination and payments will be led by the regional landscape organisation, facilitation exchange between farmers by Boerennatuur. Precise roles of different actors are not decided yet.

Access to land

Not relevant for this case.

Payments

- Public funding combining funding from different policy domains.
- The payment will most likely consist of a basic payment with a bonus based on results (44% of farmers prefer this, while 33% prefer a result-based and 22% a management based contract)
- Bilateral payments with a potential group bonus
- No higher price for agricultural products

Monitoring

A combination of practices and results are intended to be monitored, with a major focus of the steering group on results. Indicators under consideration are both positive indicators: ecological grassland quality (species diversity, cover, vegetation structure), landscape quality (presence of landscape elements, natural flooding areas, grazing intensity) and negative indicators: use of herbicides, reseeding of grassland

Monitoring is intended to be carried out by an independent body, together with a farmer.