



PRACTICE ABSTRACT No 8

Keywords

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Advantages and challenges of collective agri-environmental schemes from Dutch farmers' perspective

The collective implementation of agri-environmental measures in the Netherlands shows many advantages for farmers, in particular improved ecological impacts and the support by the collectives. Farmers appreciate the facilitation of applications and administrative tasks as well as the opportunities for exchange with fellow farmers, which offer room for discussions, mutual learning, inspiration and the creation of networks. Another big advantage is the provision of knowledge and advice with a close contact between farmers and field workers, who speak the farmers' language and know what's going on in the region.

However, farmers still wish for more flexibility and a better integration of their knowledge and experiences into processes of scheme design and decision-making. Policy processes should be transparent and promises should be kept to avoid disappointments and mistrust. Consequences of joining the schemes should be communicated openly to prevent concerns of farmers about raising conservation standards and land possibly becoming protected and excluded from farming activities. For certain measures it might be worth evaluating the possibility to provide voluntary long-term contract options to allow for better planning. Also, the government should try to guarantee sufficient funding to enable all applying farmers to join the schemes.

Communication can still be improved to better show the farmers' achievements. Also between the different collectives, communication could be enhanced to allow for an increased exchange, for example on how to approach the challenge of predation in meadow bird management, which in some collectives seems to be tackled much better than in others.

Author(s)

Margarethe Schneider

Contacts

margarethe.schneider@zalf.de

Country/Region

The Netherlands

(Drenthe, Groningen West, Noord Holland, West-Brabant, Westergo, Zeeland)

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Within the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy, agri-environment schemes (AES) have been designed to address the degradation of the natural environment. To improve the schemes' ecological effectiveness, a collective approach focusing on a landscape instead of a single farm level is recommended. This approach is rarely applied across Europe except for the Netherlands, where all AES have to be realised collectively since 2016. To participate in Dutch AES, farmers need to join regional collectives, through which group applications are organised.

A Q-study with 15 farmers from six regions who participate in AES was carried out in early 2021 to explore farmers' motivation for participation and to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the collective schemes.

Q-methodology aims to explore different perspectives on a topic by combining quantitative and qualitative elements within an interview. It is not meant to test a hypothesis or theory, but to discover the diversity of perspectives regardless of whether they are frequently represented in the population.

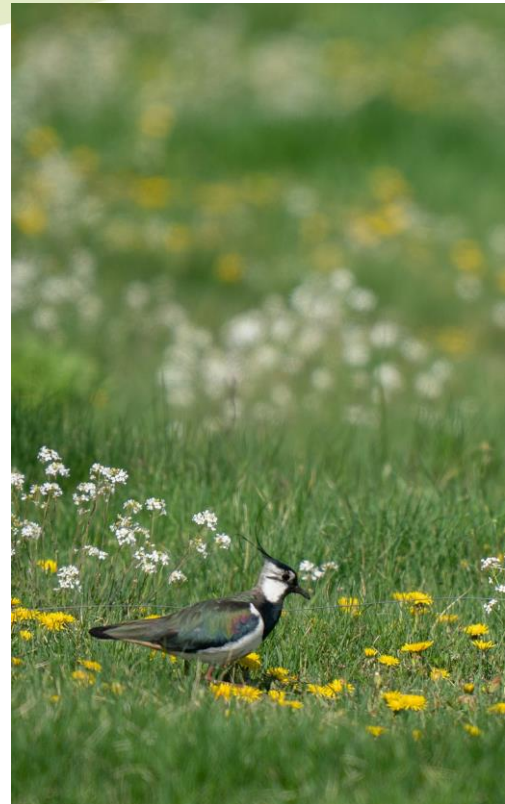


Fig: Northern lapwing, one of the key target species of Dutch AES (source: pixabay)

ABOUT CONTRACTS2.0

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Contracts2.0 aims to develop innovative contract-based solutions, which increase the motivation for farmers and land managers to produce more environmental public goods and allow them to reconcile the profitability of their farms with sustainability objectives. To do so, 28 research and practice partners closely cooperate to co-design and evaluate the novel contracts. Lessons learned from successfully tested contracts will also provide support for policy makers on local, national and EU-Level.

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 contact@project-contracts20.eu

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