

## **Letter of 15 March 2024 from the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) and the Minister for Nature and Nitrogen Policy to the House of Representatives on LNV's international commitment to resilient transboundary food systems**

Geopolitical developments are succeeding each other rapidly. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the technology race between China and the United States, an internationally more active global South, and protectionist tendencies all exerted and continue to exert influence on the international system and global trade. This has put Europe's food security on the agenda once more. Global food security demands our unflagging attention, partly in light of climate problems, the growing world population and migration. Food insecurity is a major cause of instability and national conflict, with spillover effects beyond national borders – migration, for example. Action in less stable regions to strengthen local farming sectors and food production can contribute to peace and security. NATO also underscores the strategic significance of food and food security for world peace and security.<sup>1</sup> Efforts to mitigate climate change and halt the decline of biodiversity are thus becoming even more urgent, because biodiversity is a precondition for our future food security.

Despite these challenges and threats, a changing world also presents opportunities. These include opportunities for new strategic alliances and, for the Netherlands as lead country and valued partner, to share knowledge and experience at both bilateral and multilateral level, and also to listen to and learn from others. Opportunities to work with other countries on problems that transcend national boundaries. And opportunities for the business community and knowledge institutions to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which the Netherlands has committed itself.

Against this backdrop we, the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) and the Minister for Nature and Nitrogen Policy, are now informing the House of Representatives of LNV's international commitment. In response to the pledges we have made, this commitment, building on the 2016 letter to the House of Representatives<sup>2</sup> and addressing the motion submitted by MP Jan Klink (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 36 180, no. 86), is coherent with existing policy<sup>3</sup> and dovetails with LNV's EU strategy.<sup>4</sup> Issues are involved that call for political choices – choices for which a new government will be responsible. This letter clarifies LNV's international course, within existing European and global agreements.

### **Ambition and commitment**

The Netherlands' ambition is to continue to contribute, as a reliable partner, to sustainable improvement in the global food system's productivity and resilience and to the production of healthy food, while strengthening global biodiversity. One of the ways we are doing this is through the Dutch Diamond approach – using the knowledge and expertise of the business community, government authorities, financial institutions, education and knowledge institutions and civil society

---

<sup>1</sup> Julie Dzerowicz, 'Food Security and Conflict: Harvesting Resilience in the Face of a Global Crisis', NATO Parliamentary Assembly report, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> 'Toekomstbestendige Agro Export' (2016) [Future-proof agricultural exports] (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 33625, no. 227).

<sup>3</sup> Such as the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS) policy document 'Do What We Do Best' (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 36 180, no. 1), the policy memorandum 'The Netherlands and China: a New Balance' (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 35 207, no. 1), the Netherlands' Africa Strategy 2023–2032 (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 29 237, no. 183), and the Letter to the House of Representatives on our commitment to international forest conservation and restoration (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 30 196, no. 708).

<sup>4</sup> The House of Representatives will be informed of the EU strategy in February 2024.

organisations. To this end we are strengthening the dialogue with our international partners, receptive to other countries' knowledge and solutions in meeting their national goals for agriculture and nature. Our ambition is partly driven by the necessity of an agricultural transition in the Netherlands, and the international interconnectedness of the food system.

This letter is structured as follows. Within the framework of existing international and European agreements, we outline three closely connected objectives. These are:

1. Long-term prospects for the agriculture, fisheries and horticulture sectors
2. Global food security and achieving of climate goals
3. Conservation and restoration of biodiversity worldwide.

The following three cross-cutting themes in which the Netherlands wishes to play a prominent international role are part of our commitment:

- (i) knowledge and innovation,
- (ii) responsible business conduct (RBC), and
- (iii) inclusion.

Finally, we will discuss the instruments with which we plan to achieve our ambitions.

### **Objective 1: Long-term prospects for the agriculture, fisheries and horticulture sectors**

#### *The challenge*

Much of the Netherlands' prosperity is generated beyond our national borders.<sup>5</sup> The Dutch agriculture sector also has close international links. Agriculture and associated sectors together contribute 6.7% to the gross domestic product, and are significant in view of their social and economic function and importance for the liveability of rural areas for both farmers and others.

In making the transition to a sustainable food system that stays within the Earth's ecological boundaries, agribusiness's international earning capacity needs to be robust in the long term, so that the sector will continue to invest in necessary future innovations.

#### **Dilemma**

A Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) report titled 'WUR Perspectives on Agriculture, Food and Nature'<sup>6</sup> outlines the following dilemma. With the world population set to grow to 9.7 billion people by 2050, accompanied by considerable food insecurity, the Netherlands must decide on the role it will play. Should we focus on producing and exporting food to neighbouring markets, or on a more prominent role as exporter of propagation materials, technology, innovation and knowledge for food production elsewhere? A stronger commitment to exporting knowledge and technology seems like a logical choice, but what are the consequences for the composition of economic missions, for example? Which

---

<sup>5</sup> Apart from its contribution to our GDP, the export of goods and services provides 2.5 million full-time jobs in the Netherlands, more than 30% of the country's total employment. Source: 'Do What We Do Best'. BHOS policy document, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> <https://edepot.wur.nl/643823>.

businesses will (or will not) be allowed to take part in future missions? And how do we assess and account for the choices we make?

### *LNV's international commitment*

The Dutch agriculture and fisheries sectors face a major transition. Yet in 2050, the Netherlands will still be producing food that contributes to a sustainable food system. LNV is working to strengthen the sectors' international earning and innovation capacity. A solid revenue model entails producers being paid a fair price for their products and a level playing field. This calls for transparent standards, so that consumers know what they are paying for. The Netherlands will therefore continue to work within the World Trade Organization for sustainability targets, as set out, for example, in the government-wide framework negotiating instructions for the WTO Ministerial Conference in February 2024 (Annexe to Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 21 501-02, no. 2735).<sup>7</sup> The Netherlands also works hard in other relevant international forums<sup>8</sup> to enshrine high standards in the fields of climate, biodiversity, animal welfare, animal and plant health, human health,<sup>9</sup> consumer protection and fair trade in food.

Trade agreements can help improve Dutch companies' access to markets in third countries (and vice versa), and the Netherlands therefore works in Brussels for an ambitious trade agenda, including trade agreements. Visits at ministerial and senior civil servant level and an extensive international network contribute towards the earning capacity of the Dutch agriculture sector in other countries. In the highly internationally oriented fisheries sector, negotiations on fishing opportunities and access to waters are more or less permanently ongoing. Greenhouse construction, high-quality propagation materials and robotics are examples of sectors in which international demand presents export opportunities for the Dutch business community. Moreover, from a geopolitical viewpoint, new market opportunities are arising with the changing world order, as referred to above. The national government continues to be the designated party to reach agreement with third countries on animal and plant health in order to gain and maintain access to these markets. In addition, the policy document of the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS) identifies 14 'combination countries' in which Dutch trade, investment and development cooperation activities can be combined to generate major opportunities.

Working closely with the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) and the network of agricultural attachés (LAN), we support Dutch businesses that innovate in ways that promote sustainable agriculture through bilateral partnerships and by identifying opportunities and market openings. To this end, the government encourages partnerships geared to co-creating innovative solutions and exporting and importing technology and knowledge. Specific programmes and public-private initiatives will be addressed at the end of this letter under 'instruments'.

### *Economic security*

International cooperation and export of knowledge and expertise present opportunities for Dutch businesses and knowledge institutions, such as Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR), to contribute to solutions for the problem of global food security. At the same time, we should not

---

<sup>7</sup> Framework negotiating instructions for the Dutch input to the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) | House of Representatives of the States-General.

<sup>8</sup> The FAO in particular.

<sup>9</sup> The significance of the One Health approach should be mentioned here, among other things for reducing antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in both humans and animals. See also the Dutch Global Health Strategy.

be naive. Our knowledge economy and open attitude make the Netherlands vulnerable to states attempting to gain knowledge and technology unlawfully. With this knowledge and technology, states could, for example, create high-risk strategic dependencies, which are undesirable for the Netherlands and which could also threaten our food security in the long term. Preventing undesirable knowledge and technology transfers is therefore one of the government's priorities<sup>10</sup> and is taken on board in considering whether and how an international activity will take shape. The government has various instruments at its disposal to raise awareness of such risks among entrepreneurs. These include contact points for economic security (OLEV) and for knowledge security.<sup>11</sup>

On 20 June 2023, the European Commission and the High Representative published a Joint Communication on a European Economic Security Strategy. This Strategy introduces four types of risk analysis, one of which relates to critical technologies, with the Commission identifying biotechnology among others as high-risk. The House of Representatives was informed of the government's appraisal of these proposals.<sup>12 13</sup>

As part of the government's approach to strategic dependencies, LNV has identified high-risk strategic dependencies that highlight the importance of food security. On 15 December 2023, the Ministers of Economic Affairs and Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation informed the House of Representatives of progress with and the timetable of the government's approach.<sup>14</sup> The government is also working on implementation of the European Critical Entities Resilience (CER) Directive and the NIS2 Directive. These directives contain measures to raise the physical and digital resilience of organisations and businesses in the European Union that provide essential services within certain sectors, including the food industry.<sup>15</sup> On 31 January 2024, the Minister of Justice and Security informed the House of Representatives of the current status of implementation of the two directives.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, we are currently investigating whether and which processes and services within the food value chain should be identified as part of the Netherlands' vital infrastructure, and the House will be informed accordingly in the course of 2024.

The Minister of LNV, in dialogue with the Ministers of Economic Affairs & Climate Policy and Justice & Security, will develop a response to the motion submitted by MP Wim Meulenkamp et al. calling on the Minister of LNV to draft a proposal on bringing Dutch plant breeding within the scope of the Security Assessment (Investments, Mergers and Acquisitions) Act.<sup>17</sup>

Healthy, sustainable farming practices are of crucial importance in ensuring that food is produced in a safe, nutritious and environmentally friendly manner. This calls for cooperation in the field of policy, science and practice in order to safeguard the health of humans, animals, plants and the broader environment (the One Health approach) (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 36 180,

---

<sup>10</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 30 821, no. 178 (annexe: Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands) and no. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 30 821, no. 199 (details of instruments to protect economic security and overview of instruments for economic security), 19 September 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 22 112, no. 3761.

<sup>13</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 22 112, no. 3826.

<sup>14</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 30 821, no. 204.

<sup>15</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 30 821, no. 182.

<sup>16</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 22 112, no. 3868 (Current status of implementation of NIS2 and CER Directives).

<sup>17</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 36 410 XIV, no. 43.

no. 25).<sup>18</sup> Within the framework of the Dutch government-wide Global Health Strategy, farming practices, in particular those related to food production and safety, must be sustainable and healthy.

## **Objective 2 Global food security and achieving the climate goals**

### *The challenge*

The challenge here is primarily for the Netherlands to contribute to eradicating hunger and malnutrition (SDG 2.1. and 2.2.).<sup>19</sup> Climate change also aggravates food insecurity and has a negative impact on biodiversity. At the same time, the food system itself is a major cause of climate change and biodiversity loss, due to land-use change and resulting emissions. The challenge facing us is to safeguard food security with resilient food systems that contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation.

### *LNV's international commitment*

Our commitment to climate action is primarily informed by the government's Global Climate Strategy.<sup>20</sup> The main goal on which the Netherlands focuses is to achieve a climate-neutral economy by 2050, an important part of which is action to prevent emissions due to land-use change for agriculture, such as efforts aimed at reaching the global goals on stopping deforestation, biodiversity loss and soil degradation by 2030, for instance. In December 2022, the letter setting out our step-by-step plan to improve global food security was sent to the House of Representatives.<sup>21</sup> The BHOS policy document 'Do What We Do Best' announced a new approach combining trade, investment and development cooperation activities, with major challenges such as climate goals and digitalisation as its horizontal goals. Action on these themes is also being implemented in line with the Dutch Global Health Strategy. LNV oversees several supplementary approaches involving the application of Dutch expertise in the field of sustainable agriculture and knowledge of nature inclusion. The ministry is now exploring opportunities to contribute to food security through knowledge and innovation in the field of digital technology.

The Netherlands provides the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with multilateral financial and policy support through various programmes and partnerships and through participation in consultations on topics including biodiversity, fisheries, genetic resources, sustainable water and soil management, and sustainable livestock farming. In the coming years, LNV plans to make even better use of FAO's knowledge products and policy recommendations and to improve cooperation with FAO at country level. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is another major international platform for exchanging knowledge on sustainable agriculture.<sup>22</sup> We work on food-related issues with other organisations as well, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).<sup>23</sup>

We also have many bilateral partnerships with third countries. The agricultural attachés at embassies worldwide play a major role in putting these partnerships into practice. For example, Dutch

---

<sup>18</sup> Dutch Global Health Strategy 2023–2030: Working Together for Health Worldwide | Publications | government.nl.

<sup>19</sup> <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-92d743e5784ce5667a66e88f1b1007b8b63a9a95/pdf> (in Dutch).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2022/12/22/global-climate-strategy>.

<sup>21</sup> <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-92d743e5784ce5667a66e88f1b1007b8b63a9a95/pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> See in this regard the OECD recommendations: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/bb16dea4-](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/bb16dea4-en.pdf?expires=1714641265&id=id&accname=ocid49027884&checksum=F46769CF57418F3834D67BAB93EBAB36)

[en.pdf?expires=1714641265&id=id&accname=ocid49027884&checksum=F46769CF57418F3834D67BAB93EBAB36](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/bb16dea4-en.pdf?expires=1714641265&id=id&accname=ocid49027884&checksum=F46769CF57418F3834D67BAB93EBAB36) (oecd-ilibrary.org).

<sup>23</sup> We work in various countries with other international and multilateral organisations.

knowledge and expertise in the field of plant breeding, salinisation, precision farming, digital meteorological information, agri-logistics and storage and processing techniques to limit food wastage all find their way through bilateral programmes and partnerships. We work closely here with the agri-food and horticulture and propagation materials top sectors and with the Netherlands Food Partnership, Groenpact and the Netherlands Water Partnership.

### **Objective 3 Conservation and restoration of biodiversity worldwide**

#### *The challenge*

The loss of biodiversity through land-use change, pollution, invasive exotic species and climate change threatens the stability of ecosystems worldwide and is proceeding much faster than was long thought, with dire consequences for both people and the economy.<sup>24</sup> One million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction. It is essential to contribute to conserving and restoring global biodiversity, and especially species and ecosystems that are under threat.<sup>25</sup> Safeguarding biodiversity is not only an economic necessity, but also a strategic pillar for achieving food security and optimising agricultural yields in the long term. From the perspective of agricultural entrepreneurship, biodiversity is essential to maintaining a stable earning capacity. Biologically diverse ecosystems promote natural pollination and disease control, contributing directly to the productivity and sustainability of farming. In relation to disease control, we will continue to build on the National Action Plan for the Strengthening of the Zoonotic Disease Policy<sup>26</sup> and the National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, including the international component on which the Ministry of LNV is currently collaborating with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

#### *LNV's commitment*

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the UN strategic framework for biodiversity agreed in December 2022, sets a clear long-term aim that informs LNV's efforts on biodiversity. Our aim is to have reversed biodiversity loss by 2030 at the latest, and to live in harmony with nature by 2050. In order to restore biodiversity, a sea change is needed in both our thinking and behaviour, towards sustainable production and consumption in particular. In 2019, the government adopted the goal of halving the Netherlands' ecological footprint by 2050.<sup>27</sup> In the first half of 2024, the steps needed to achieve this will be set out in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.<sup>28</sup> Here, the Netherlands not only focuses on restoring protected nature areas, but envisages a society where both thinking and action are nature-inclusive. This means taking account of nature, and ensuring that nature benefits. The recently published nature-inclusive agenda 2.0<sup>29</sup> is an important first step.

The Netherlands has committed itself to stopping and reversing deforestation and forest degradation worldwide by 2030 at the latest, with a view to protecting biodiversity in forests and contributing to

---

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. sr2\_background\_report\_final.pdf (ipcc.ch).

<sup>25</sup> In particular, agreements reached within the framework of the Convention on Biodiversity.

<sup>26</sup> National Action Plan for the Strengthening of the Zoonotic Disease Policy.

<sup>27</sup> <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-26407-130.html> (in Dutch).

<sup>28</sup> This is in line with existing policy such as the baseline standards for nature programme (*Programma Basiskwaliteit Natuur*), the National Programme for Rural Areas (*Nationaal Programma Landelijk Gebied*) (NPLG), the nature-inclusive agenda (*Agenda Natuurinclusief*) and the Interministerial Policy Review on Biodiversity. Other ministries contribute with the National Environmental Programme, the Circular Economy Implementation Programme, carbon footprint reduction, National Growth Fund programmes and the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/06/17/naar-een-natuurinclusieve-samenleving-in-2050#:~:text=Op%20de%20Natuurtop%20is%20de,%2C%20infrastructuur%2C%20energie%20en%20landbouw.> (in Dutch).

the climate goals. LNV focuses in particular on deforestation-free supply chains for agricultural raw materials through the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership and ambitious EU legislation, for example. The Regulation on Deforestation-free products, which entered into force in June 2023, requires market parties to use and bring onto the European market only deforestation-free products produced legally.<sup>30</sup> To implement this Regulation effectively, and to stop deforestation worldwide, we also need to pursue supplementary policy, which is essential for collaboration with third countries. This applies in particular to support to producer countries, including to smallholders, in meeting the new conditions for market access. At the same time, it is important to strengthen cooperation with other large consumer countries, so that imported deforestation can be reversed there too. In addition, LNV encourages agroforestry practices through bilateral and multilateral partnerships and enables research and innovation in the field of biodiversity and sustainable land use through the partnership on agro-ecology living labs, the European Biodiversity Partnership and, possibly, the partnership Forests and Forestry for a Sustainable Future.

### **Dilemma**

A Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) report titled 'WUR Perspectives on Agriculture, Food and Nature' identifies six dilemmas in which whatever choice is made will partly determine the future of agriculture, food and nature in the Netherlands. One of these dilemmas relates to how we can achieve our future goals for nature and the climate. Do we seek to achieve these goals within the Netherlands' borders (with no trade-offs) or will seeking them at European or world level lead to more effective solutions, in terms of cost-effectiveness and efficiency (with trade-offs)?

Marine biodiversity represents a large part of worldwide biodiversity, while most of the high seas do not fall under national jurisdictions. The recently concluded Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction ('BBNJ') (the high seas biodiversity treaty), is therefore highly significant. LNV will work to achieve coherence between water, climate, food and biodiversity policy. The UN 2023 Water Conference, which was co-hosted by the Netherlands, put the connection between water and all life on our planet on the agenda. On that occasion, the government earmarked €240 million for the national and international knowledge and innovation agenda focusing on the food system transition. Agriculture, water and food are the central themes of this agenda.<sup>31</sup>

Current action on biodiversity is largely multilateral. In the coming years, LNV will expand its activities to include bilateral partnerships with a number of countries, to be selected later. Given our commitment to biodiversity and water, the ministry will need to take a critical look at the type of partnerships it will support. Instead of 'doing no harm' the current norm is to 'do good', that is, to actively contribute to the restoration of biodiversity. The LAN, diplomats and local staff, who work worldwide to achieve policy goals for water, climate, food and biodiversity, are expected to play a major role here. When it comes to conservation and restoration of biodiversity, the Netherlands also has a lot to learn from other countries.

### **Cross-cutting themes**

---

<sup>30</sup> A statutory framework for more sustainable Dutch consumption of products like soya, palm oil, rubber, beef, coffee, cocoa and timber.

<sup>31</sup> Knowledge and Innovation Agenda for Agriculture, Water and Food 2024–2027.

### *Knowledge and innovation*

The Dutch agriculture sector and food processing industry grew to their current size through technological innovation and close cooperation between the business community, civil society, green educational and research institutions like WUR, and government authorities. This form of broad collaboration is known as the Dutch Diamond approach. Important in this connection is the Knowledge and Innovation Agenda coalition revolving around the theme of food, with six tasks putting the Dutch Diamond approach into practice.<sup>32</sup> Nowadays, knowledge and innovation tend to focus mainly on reducing the ecological impact of food production through digitalisation, robotics, precision farming, fermentation and cultured meat, circular water use and use of renewable energy, reduction of methane emissions in the dairy sector, and the sustainable production of alternative sources of high-quality protein. In relation to digitalisation, LNV recently published its action programme, based on its digitalisation strategy, which was published in 2021. The action programme sets out a number of international challenges relating to standardisation, data governance and knowledge sharing.<sup>33</sup>

#### ***Horticulture and propagation materials top sector: world class thanks to research and development***

The horticulture and propagation materials supply chain encompasses everything from greenhouse construction, open-field cultivation, supply of cultivation systems/thermal screen technology and transport to seed propagation and treatment, and from cultivation to trade in vegetables, fruit and flowers. In 2021, the horticulture value chain was worth a total of €27.6 billion in exports.

The horticulture and propagation materials value chain is knowledge-intensive – a major reason for it to be designated as a top sector. Businesses in this value chain spent nearly €1 billion on research & development (R&D) in 2020 – 5% of total R&D expenditure in the Netherlands. Thanks to knowledge and innovation, this top sector is a major employer at national level, and makes a significant contribution to global food security.

### *Responsible Business Conduct (RBC)*

RBC is an important basic principle in promoting a robust natural environment, and in creating the conditions for a sustainable and equitable global food system. The basis underpinning RBC policy – for which the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation is responsible – is the expectation that Dutch businesses operating internationally observe the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Responsible business conduct is also about people: about decent wages and working conditions. Negotiations are currently underway in Brussels on two new proposals for European legislation on responsible business conduct – the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and the Regulation banning products made with forced labour. In addition, a number of other proposals promoting RBC were recently adopted: the Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR), the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the Batteries Regulation. The importance of RBC will continue to increase in the coming years.

---

<sup>32</sup> <https://topsectoragrifood.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/TOAF1910-Kennisagenda-A5-landscape-English.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 26 643 no. 1086 – Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality Action Programme on Digitalisation, 26 October 2023.



The Netherlands is working to ensure coherence between these various directives and regulations, to increase their impact and to limit any unnecessary regulatory burden on businesses. In addition, the due diligence requirements included in the various pieces of legislation are being brought as closely in line as possible with the OECD Guidelines, which call on businesses to show what measures they have taken to address the risk of environmental damage and breaches of human rights.<sup>34</sup> LNV is also working closely with the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) which assesses and compares companies, including those in the food industry, on the basis of their performance and efforts in the field of sustainability and responsible business conduct.<sup>35</sup> International RBC frameworks (OECD Guidelines and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) performance standards) are an integral part of the funding and export credit insurance instruments applied by Invest International and Atradius DSB.<sup>36</sup>

In implementing forthcoming legislation, both the Netherlands and the EU need to focus on active diplomacy and supplementary policy.

The government is therefore committed to entering into dialogue with partner countries, and cooperates in initiatives that support both businesses and producer countries in making a positive impact on both people and the environment.

### *Inclusion*

The global food system is characterised by social and economic<sup>37</sup> inequity. Food is distributed unequally, and in many places difficult to obtain. This was underscored at the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021<sup>38</sup> and at COP15<sup>39</sup> to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Both concluded that a transition to a viable food system and achieving sustainable international earning capacity in the future require more inclusive decision-making and participation.

Inclusion relates to those who have access to food, and to those who have a seat at the table and participate. In real terms, this means that we need to continually ask ourselves whether we are hearing the right companies and sector representatives. Are we hearing women entrepreneurs loudly and clearly? Do young farmers and people living with disabilities have access to the various activities? Do startups have access to government authorities, so that they can take part in international trade and innovation missions, for example? LNV is committed to feminist foreign policy, as the House of Representatives was recently informed.<sup>40</sup> We engage with young people, through the activities of the UN Youth Representative on Biodiversity and Food, for example, which the Ministry funds.

### **Achieving international ambitions**

---

<sup>34</sup> Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation's response to a request relating to a letter on the outcome of the negotiations (overheid.nl) (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 26 485, no. 405).

<sup>35</sup> The Food and Agriculture Benchmark and the Nature Benchmark were both published in October 2023. LNV funded the Seafood Stewardship Index. Another example is the Closing the Corporate Accountability GAP (2023–2026).

<sup>36</sup> Atradius DSB has separate RBC policy and RBC and animal welfare policy statements.

<sup>37</sup> Revenue from value added to food seldom benefits the producers, in particular smallholders in poor countries. See also the BHOS policy document.

<sup>38</sup> Secretary-General's Chair Summary and Statement of Action on the UN Food Systems Summit | United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/making-food-systems-work-people-planet-and-prosperity>.

<sup>39</sup> Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (cbd.int). See CBD articles 8(j), 10(c), 17 and 18(4).

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.government.nl/documents/parliamentary-documents/2022/12/07/letter-to-the-parliament-on-feminist-foreign-policy>.

LNV works to achieve the goals outlined above through its extensive international network, its participation in international forums, and implementation of specific programmes and projects, often in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). International instruments for this purpose chiefly comprise: (1) multilateral cooperation, (2) bilateral cooperation and (3) financial instruments.

### *Multilateral cooperation*

The Netherlands takes an active part in a wide range of multilateral agreements and forums: from the UN Biodiversity Convention (CBD), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Trade Organization, and from the OECD to the G20 and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).<sup>41</sup> LNV is also active in the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), Codex Alimentarius (in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS)) and the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV).

In these bodies, we promote Dutch policy, identify developments at an early stage, and negotiate agreements that benefit the Netherlands and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). We also provide each of these multilateral organisations with financial support.

#### ***The European Union in multilateral forums***

Many of the Netherlands' global aims can only be achieved with action at European level, given the European Union's position as a powerful player on the geopolitical stage. By working together, we can achieve more than we would as individual countries. Moreover, the EU has competence in a number of policy areas, and the European Commission acts on behalf of the member states, for example in negotiations on trade agreements with third countries. The Commission also speaks on behalf of the member states in multilateral forums. Strategic action targeting the Commission, as referred to in LNV's EU strategy, contributes to achieving the Netherlands' goals at global level.

### *Bilateral cooperation*

In the past decades, the LAN has built a strong network connecting government, the business community and civil society actors in strategic partner countries. This contributes to favourable trade relations and strengthens the Netherlands' position as a lead country and reliable global player. The LAN identifies best practices, innovations, market opportunities for businesses and opportunities for government-to-government cooperation. The attachés identify developments and can forge links between stakeholders in the Netherlands and in the countries where they are active. They facilitate visits at political, business and civil service level for Dutch delegations abroad, and are a key contact point when foreign delegations are preparing a visit to the Netherlands. They can also help Dutch businesses find their way abroad. Initiatives for political rapprochement with certain regions often elicit requests for cooperation in the field of agriculture.

Bilateral agricultural working groups and agreements between governments contribute to knowledge sharing and help identify and resolve problems with market access. The LAN is an important link in 'combination tracks' combining the objectives of sustainable trade and development cooperation,

---

<sup>41</sup> This list is not exhaustive. Other forums include the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats.

and works with government authorities, knowledge institutions and NGOs on nature conservation and restoration programmes. At some missions, the agricultural attaché works with other officials such as the attachés for health and innovation and the infrastructure and water management counsellors.

### *Financial instruments*

Working with the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), LNV provides financial support to various initiatives that contribute to achieving our international goals. We will continue to do so. Initiatives often take the form of public-private partnerships or government-to-government cooperation. They are sometimes long-term, like the Dutch-American agtech programme ‘Let’s Grow Together’ in the state of Kentucky. A whole new centre is being jointly developed there, with greenhouses, sustainable farming practices, processing facilities and training and knowledge centres, involving the Kentucky and Dutch governments, private companies and universities. Despite several obstacles, including a relaunch after the bankruptcy of one of the participating American companies, this multiyear partnership programme promises to achieve good results. The LAN and NLWorks play an active role in the programme.

SeedNL is another good example of public-private cooperation. Its aim is to provide smallholders with high-quality seed. The Netherlands is the world leader in this area, and SeedNL helps farmers increase their food security, climate resilience and income. This initiative in which LNV works with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the trade association Plantum and the Dutch Potato Organisation (*Nederlandse Aardappel Organisatie*, NAO) was recently prolonged by four years.

The letter to the House of Representatives of 26 April 2023<sup>42</sup> sets out the Dutch commitment to international biodiversity under foreign trade policy.

A major objective of this policy is to mainstream biodiversity within development cooperation policy, with a focus on climate, food and water, given the connection between these themes and biodiversity loss. In addition, the greening of BHOS policy instruments, which is already under way, will provide a positive incentive for businesses that are contributing to the sustainable transition, including biodiversity.

LNV works closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).<sup>43</sup> Using RVO instruments, we organise economic missions, and the Netherlands participates in strategic trade fairs and exhibitions with country pavilions. These provide opportunities for Dutch businesses to meet partners abroad in an informal setting and to showcase Dutch knowledge and technology. These instruments contribute to achieving the Netherlands’ ambition to become a world leader in innovation in sustainable farming and food production, and to strengthening its position as a reliable partner.

The finance and export credit insurance instruments applied by Invest International and Atradius Dutch State Business respectively are well positioned to contribute to LNV’s international efforts and to the Dutch agriculture sector’s international earning capacity. With €833 million in core capital and its goal to contribute to solutions to global social issues, Invest International also provides

---

<sup>42</sup> Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation policy commitment to international biodiversity, 26 April 2023 (Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 26 407, no. 147).

<sup>43</sup> Such as ‘combination tracks’ in selected ‘combination countries’, private sector development (PSD), Partners for International Business (PIB), demonstration projects, feasibility studies and investment preparation studies (the DHI scheme).

opportunities for Dutch businesses to acquire funding for their sustainable agricultural projects abroad.

### **Joint efforts for the agriculture transition**

In the past few years, we have set course for a sustainable agriculture system. Through the LAN, programmes implemented by RVO, partnerships with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and bilateral cooperation, for example, LNV has increasingly focused on supporting initiatives that both are economically viable and make a substantial contribution to the radical transition that is needed. In order to find effective solutions to global challenges, LNV funds projects and programmes geared to developing climate-smart farming methods and organic farming and to reducing large-scale food wastage through improved agrilogistics, climate-neutral greenhouses and robotics, promoting sustainable green cities and setting up supply chains for vegetable proteins.

For practical examples, go to [www.agroberichtenbuitenland.nl](http://www.agroberichtenbuitenland.nl)

### **In conclusion**

2030, the year by which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must have been achieved, is rapidly approaching. This calls for LNV to set an international course explicitly focusing on sustainable earning capacity, food security, climate and biodiversity. It requires us to be more selective in what we do to set priorities and to work more closely with our partners to achieve our goals. Some crucial choices will need to be made in the months to come, in which decision-making will be a responsibility shared by the new government and stakeholders. Choices are part of a transition. It is high time we made them. We have but one planet.